

San Jose Grace-Liberty Theatre Pipe Organ

Background

In 1940 Grace Baptist Church (GBC) purchased the South Bay Area's largest and most orchestral theatre pipe organ for the church building it was about to build. The organ was a 1921 18 rank three manual Robert Morton. Installed in the *Liberty Theatre* in 1922, it initially entertained audiences daily, from morning till late evening. But by the late 30's it had fallen into disuse as "Talkies" replaced "silent" movies and "Follow-the-Bouncing-Ball" sing-alongs, thus ending the commercial viability of live theatre pipe organ accompaniment.

In its 1941 GBC re-installation, only the organ's grand piano, hydraulic console and piano lifts, and a few swell shades, pipes, and traps were left out. Its basic pipe work was kept original to the Liberty installation with the Brass chamber on the left, and the Solo and Accompaniment chambers on the right.

Today, the Grace - *Liberty Theatre* Pipe Organ (GLTPO) is the only surviving pipe organ from San Jose's silent movie era, and one of only two known early Robert Morton theatre pipe organs still playing in a public venue anywhere. It provides the majesty of a real pipe organ at church services, and with its many orchestral voices, percussion instruments, and traps, it reprises its original role as a mighty theatre pipe organ for special events through out the year.

GBC's ad hoc GLTPO committee oversees the organ's maintenance and preservation. It also partners with the Northern California ATOS, and others, to share it with the San Jose community-at-large through free concerts, open consoles, and silent movie fundraisers. GLTPO committee membership is open to anyone interested in the preservation and use of this historic San Jose community treasure.



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The Console Today



The Liberty Theatre (circa 1942)
Photo: Jack Tillmany

