

Were you one of the approximately 125 AMICA members who joined MBSI members to attend the combined AMICA / MBSI Convention in San Francisco / San Mateo, California? If you weren't, this summary is for you. Separately, we have two other Convention reports. The first is the 10-page summary, submitted by President Joel Cluskey with information provided from Officers and Board Members. Second is Secretary Bob Gonzalez' report of the Board meeting.

This summary fills gaps, provides a "review", and allows those who couldn't attend to feel like they were there.

AMICA and MBSI are working to collaborate in conventions and certain other activities that allow a quorum and critical mass of people to financially help subsidize the expenses in producing post-banquet bands, entertainment, hotel rates, bus costs, and other functions where superior quality is needed. Both organizations benefit, and costs can be properly allocated. With rising costs and slow, declining membership, this is important for near and long-term viability.

By all accounts, this convention was a huge success. Let's start with the entertainment, which was some of the best I ever recall in attending about 50 years of conventions! We had three consecutive nights of amazing live musical, period entertainment, after the Wednesday evening reception, Saturday evening Pumper Contest, and Sunday evening banquet. The advance billing to these performers was only the word "entertainment" in the schedules and agendas.

Adam Swanson, one of the country's finest award-winning ragtime and period-music concert pianists and historians performed a concert at the Wednesday evening reception. AMICA member and restorer Bruce Newman recently restored a wonderful upright player piano and brought it to the convention. It served multiple purposes, and Adam Swanson was right at home tickling the ivories to the delight of all, even taking requests. Swanson performs at various festivals, concerts meetings, and does a virtual Sunday evening concert available on Facebook and YouTube at 6 pm MDT. He is a headliner wherever he performs, and this was remarkable surprise for this group.

On Saturday evening following the Pumper Contest, Matt Tolentino, musician, accordionist, bandleader, and period music historian and singer performed on the accordion. His specialty is pre-swing era music with a focus on American popular songs from 1895 to 1935. Could he stump us on some of the obscure two-step titles of the period? Not this group! Someone almost always had the answer and shot an obscure request right back! Matt knew and could play most of them! Matt's appearance was a surprise to most, and especially privileged since he is always in demand.

With both Adam and Matt, they play mostly by ear, have a large repertoire committed to memory, and are tops in their field! What a joy and privilege it was to have them.

AMICA Convention Summary

Story and Photos by Glenn Thomas



Adam Swanson performing a ragtime piano concert on the Bruce Newman restored piano on the evening of the reception



Matt Tolentino performing a selection of delightful mostly 1895-1935 tunes on a 1935-era accordion



The original Playland-at-the-Beach Wurlitzer 165 organ plays in a 5-minute rotation at the carousel. Can you hear it in its glass-sealed chamber?



The marvelous Ruth 36 organ playing Wurlitzer 165 rolls sealed in a glass-enclosed chamber can barely be heard at the Santa Cruz Boardwalk Looff carousel



The Frederick Hodges band was our convention entertainment. Besides Mr. Hodges on piano was Virginia Tichenor, Don Neely, Matt Tolentino, and Marty Eggers

Finally, our Sunday evening post-banquet entertainment was the Frederick Hodges 6-piece band. Among the highly regarded musicians, some with their own bands, playing with Mr. Hodges were Virginia Tichenor, Don Neely, Matt Tolentino, and Marty Eggers. Frederick Hodges is an incredibly talented pianist specializing in jazzy stylings of the 1920's, 1930's, and beyond. He has played many festivals, done world tours, and sought after for stage and screen. Add his great bandmates to this group and the musical result was as good as it gets!

Our hotel was The Marriott in San Mateo, a 15-minute trip to the San Francisco airport and a 30-minute trip to downtown San Francisco. On Thursday, September 1, most guests participated in the one-hour bus trip to the redwoods in the mountains above Santa Cruz. There, we took a steam train ride in vintage, open cars further into the mountains. Then, another train ride took us down to the Santa Cruz Boardwalk, with the vintage four-abreast Looff Carousel, with its original ring-machine and three band organs: a Ruth 36 converted to Wurlitzer 165 rolls; The Wurlitzer style 165 band organ originally from the San Francisco Playland-at-the-Beach, and a recently added Wurlitzer 146.

I'm familiar with the first two organs, having seen and heard them several times over the years, but this visit didn't live up to my prior experience. Each is now sequestered in its own nearly soundproof chamber adjacent to the carousel. With care and standing adjacent to each, one can make out the sound, playing adequately, but after about one tune, the playing organ shuts off and rotates to one of the others. Kudos to the management for the operation, display, and care of these machines, but it's a shame they aren't shown better for appreciation and enjoyment.

Friday, September 2, all on the tour had a pipe organ concert at a San Francisco church, substituting for a theatre organ that wasn't ready for us. Following the concert, we chose between the former federal prison on Alcatraz Island, Two restored Victorian homes in San Francisco, or a cruise on San Francisco Bay and a visit to Musee Mecanique at Pier 39 on Fisherman's Wharf. The later is what's left of the famous Cliff House collection of mechanical music, arcade games, automatons, and other vintage memorabilia.



(Left) Contest host Julian Dyer and AMICA President Joel Clusky present the "Golden Footsie Trophy" to pumper contest winner Jared DiBartolomeo.
(Right) Contestant Deven Pierce puts his expression into the roll "Hot Stuff" on the Howard piano from Bruce Newman

Everyone enjoyed the Sunday evening banquet and entertainment

All these tours were enjoyed and appreciated. I had seen Musee many times, originally in its early assemblage in what was left of the original Cliff House, and time has been surprisingly good to these machines. Most seem to play, work, or entertain with the drop of one or two quarters, and while some are rather worn and beaten, they are out for display and perhaps entice a new generation of tourists to want to find out more!

Saturday's workshops were varied, interesting, and well-attended. Sunday's Mart had lots of interesting booths although perhaps smaller than those of past years. Accordingly, the booths were in a smaller, partitioned room that made browsing somewhat difficult.

Julian Dyer hosted Saturday evening's traditional Pumper Contest, sponsored by AMICA, and it had the benefit of Bruce Newman's recently restored and well-traveled (for this event) upright player piano. The contestants were up to the task showing what can be done with a non-reproducing 88n piano roll. Here are the contestants, with winner, and the rolls they played:

- Joyce Brite – Old Time Rag
- Gary Rasmussen – The Impossible Dream
- Bob Howard – Granada
- Devon Pierce – Hot Stuff
- Jared DiBartolomeo – Jim Jams - WINNER
- John Ulrich – Hindustan (Boogie Woogie version)
- Toshihide Atsumi – Bridge Over Troubled Waters

Those who stayed for Monday's all-day collection tours enjoyed the Sandy Swirsky / Lyle Merithew collection, the Bob and Judy Caletti collection, and the Marc and Marguerite Kaufman collection



The Santa Cruz Boardwalk Looff carousel
(Photo: Rob Thomas)



Sandy Swirsky / Lyle Merithew collection tour
(Photo: Lowell Boehland)



Victorian home tour (Photo: Rob Thomas)