

## CREMONA, WHAT?

Organ master travels from Detroit to entertain on one-of-a-kind instrument

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Photos: Dave Calendine presents special programs about the historic Cremona Photo Player at the Virginia City (Mont.) opera house. The Cremona is one of only two in the world – the other is in Australia – still used for public shows. (Dave M. Shumway, RMC)

VIRGINIA CITY, MONT. -- Dave Calendine's day job involves handling operations in Detroit for the 5,132-seat Fox Theatre, the 4,300-seat Masonic Theatre, and the 19,710-seat Joe Louis Arena. For nine years he has also played for the Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular, featuring the world-famous Rockettes.

But, when summer arrives, you'll find Dave in the 236-seat historic Virginia City Opera House. What brings him from big city Michigan to small town Montana?

The Cremona, he'll tell you.

No, that's not a cereal, one of the most frequent guesses he gets from those who have never heard the name.

The Cremona is a Photo Player, he'll explain. And then, smiling, he'll tell you that he has the rare opportunity to play – very rare since only two of the unique instruments designed for the heyday of silent movies still operate in theatres in the world – an instrument that had a functional life of less than three decades, or roughly the duration of silent film before “talkies.”

“The Cremona is extraordinary because when it was made, it was considered the Roll Royce of the field,” he said. “They were quality instruments, lined with bird's eye maple with the interior chest and striker action made from mahogany. The attention to detail was incredible.”

Also incredible is what the instrument can do. An air-driven organ, the Cremona is a complicated mix of horns, strings and percussion, allowing the player to become a one-man band. There is a comprehensive array of traps and effects, which are controlled by push buttons and piano pedals. Built by the Marquette Piano Company of Chicago, the special effects made silent movies anything but quiet.

“There is one in a theatre in Australia and then there is this one,” Calendine said. Private collectors may own others, but only two are known to be operated in public venues.

Calendine, an Ohio native, started his musical career with the player piano at the age of 3. By age 5, he was playing some of the music without the aid of the player mechanism.

By age 9, he was playing at his church, where he also started to teach himself the organ at age 15. When, at age 16, Dave first heard the magnificent sound of the theatre organ, he was instantly hooked and determined to play the theatre organ at whatever the cost. His wish came true when, one night after a movie, the management of the Akron Civic Theatre let him play. Shortly after that, he was hired as a house organist at the 2,678-seat movie palace. The youngest person to ever hold the position, he entertained audiences there for over three years.

After leaving the Akron Civic Theatre, he played at several restaurants featuring theatre pipe organs, such as the Organ Grinder (Toronto, Canada), and Shady Nook (Cincinnati, Ohio). During his career, Dave has played most major theatre pipe organs throughout the United States and Canada.

In 2000, he went on his first overseas solo concert tour through Germany and Switzerland, playing to packed houses.

Dave's enthusiasm for the theatre and theatre pipe organ involved serving on the board of directors of the Motor City Theatre Organ Society, which owns and operates the Redford Theatre in Detroit and as president of the Flint Theatre Organ Club, an auxiliary support group for the Flint Institute of Music. He currently is on the board of directors and serves as corporate secretary of the Detroit Theatre Organ Society, which owns and operates the Senate Theatre and the large Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ installed there. He is active with the Musical Box Society, International.

For “regular employment,” he said, he is the technical director and stage manager of the City Theatre in Detroit. He works in the operations department of Olympia Entertainment, one of the nation’s premier presenters of sports and live entertainment, operating several venues in Detroit, including the Fox Theatre, Masonic Theatre, City Theatre, Cobo Arena, Joe Louis Arena and Comerica Park.

The public can enjoy special programs on the history of the Cremona Photo Player, Thursdays and Fridays at 1 p.m., followed by silent movies featuring Dave playing the Cremona during Laurel & Hardy, and Buster Keaton feature films.

The Cremona presentation is part of the program at the opera house, now operated by Rocky Mountain College, which is celebrating its first year managing the Illustrious Virginia City Players. The marriage of Montana’s oldest professional acting company with the state’s oldest institution of higher education highlights the 60th anniversary of the repertory theatre.

The Montana Heritage Commission is proud to have selected Rocky Mountain College as the official managing operator of the historic Virginia City Opera House, announced Tenlee Atchinson, commission program director.

“History lives in Virginia City. Sharing Montana history and offering diverse educational experiences for visitors is important. Partnering with Rocky Mountain College is a great opportunity for us to grow our educational programs,” she said.

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