

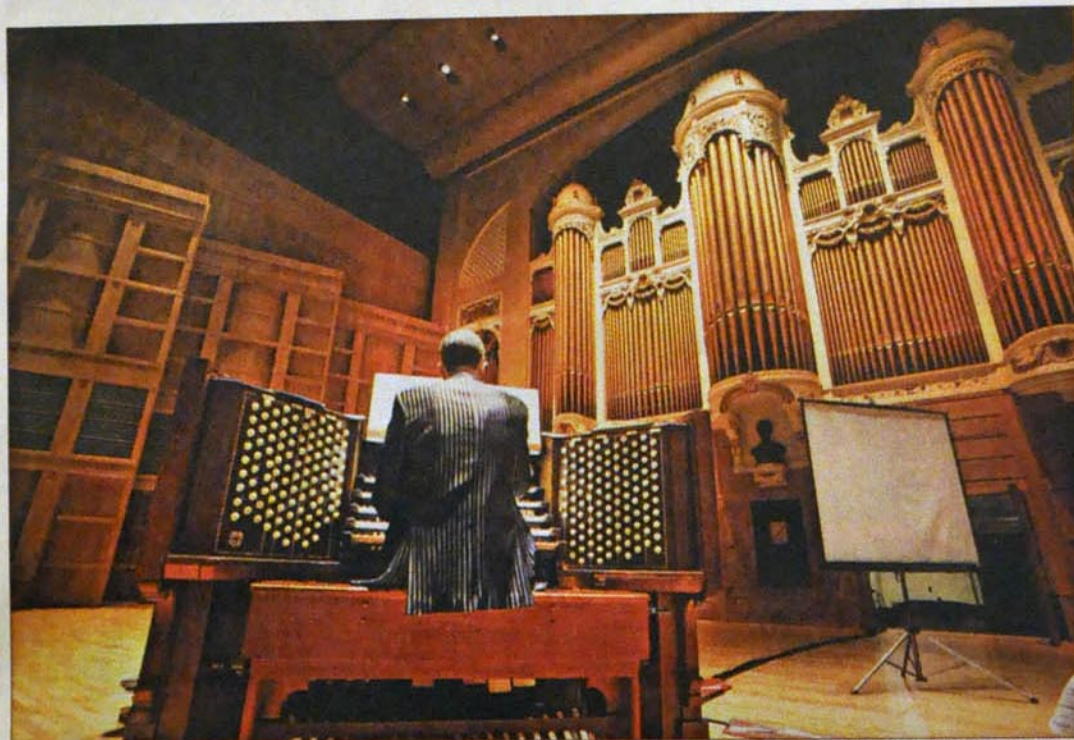
LOCAL & STATE

Portland Press Herald

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City organ
tours pull
out all stops

The Kotschmar organ can mimic flutes, clarinets, trumpets, French horns and other instruments.



Ray Cornils, Portland's municipal organist, plays the Kotschmar Memorial Organ at the Merrill Auditorium during a recent tour. The 97-year-old musical instrument has parts all over the auditorium – below and behind the stage, and even six stories up, in the ceiling.

Photos by Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer

The organ's 'lungs' offer a view of some of its 6,800 pipes

By STEPHANIE BOUCHARD
Staff Writer

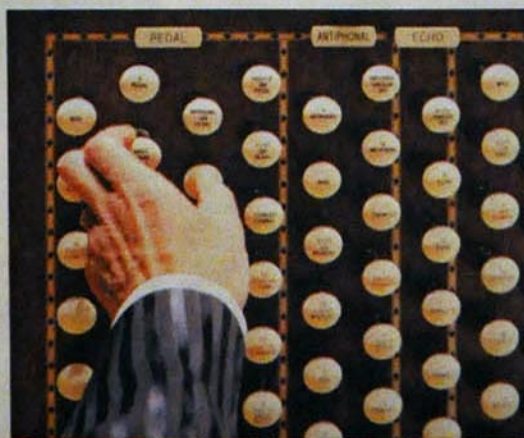
PORTLAND — Picture an organ — the musical instrument, not a kidney — in your head.

If all you see is a square box with some keyboards, you likely would be astounded by an often overlooked gem in Portland.

The Kotschmar Memorial Organ in Merrill Auditorium is a pipe organ that was among the largest of its kind when it was constructed in 1912 by the Austin Organ Co. of Connecticut. The Kotschmar has the square box with the keyboards, of course, but that square box is just the tip of the iceberg.

Merrill's organ has parts all over the auditorium — below and behind the stage, and even six stories up, in the ceiling. It's the ultimate in surround sound, and a pair of upcoming public tours can allow you to experience it.

Ray Cornils, Portland's municipal organist, said the Kotschmar organ is in Merrill because of Cyrus H.K. Curtis, a Philadelphia publisher who grew up in Maine. He donated \$30,000 for the organ. Today, after a number of expan-



Cornils pulls out one of the 229 stop knobs on the organ. It also has 32 foot keys, five foot pedals and an array of toe-stops.

sions, the organ's replacement value is close to \$4 million. It was named in honor of Hermann Kotschmar, who was the organist at Portland's First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church for

almost 50 years, and it was the first organ in the United States to be designated a municipal organ when it was installed in August 1912. It is now the oldest functioning

IF YOU GO

THE FRIENDS OF THE KOTZSCHMAR ORGAN SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

WHEN: All concerts begin at 7:30 p.m., with a pre-concert conversation beginning at 6:30 p.m. Remaining dates are: Today; Felix Hell

Aug. 4: Thomas Heywood

Aug. 18: Ray Cornils

Aug. 25: Barbara Dennerlein

WHERE: Merrill Auditorium, Portland

HOW MUCH: \$15 suggested donation (at the door), free for anyone 21 or younger.

INFORMATION: Go to www.foko.org or 553-4363.

PUBLIC TOURS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

WHEN: Noon on Aug. 20 and Sept. 1

HOW MUCH: Free (donations accepted)

municipal organ in the country. "It's an enormous instrument that moves an incredible amount of energy at all times," said

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Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer

Ray Cornils plays the Kotschmar organ. "It's an enormous instrument that moves an incredible amount of energy at all times, but it also has an ability to move people," he said.

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Cornils, "but it also has an ability to move people."

Not to mention accommodate people. Yes, there are parts of the Kotschmar organ where people can actually walk in.

The nonprofit Friends of the Kotschmar Organ offers several walk-in tours of the organ during the year. Two are coming up — Aug. 20 and Sept. 1 — and even though parts of the organ are not opened to the public because of safety concerns, tour-goers are invited inside the wind chest, a chamber covering about 825 square feet that Cornils calls



MORE ONLINE:

Go to pressherald.com to see a multimedia presentation on the organ, complete with sound.

"the lungs" of the instrument.

The wind chest is above Merrill's stage, behind the facade of pipes along the back wall. Looking up inside the chamber, you can see some of the more than 6,800 pipes in the organ. The number is so great because the organ essentially acts as an orchestra, with the ability to mimic flutes, clarinets, trumpets, French

horns and other instruments.

Outside the wind chest, on Merrill's stage, Cornils is a blur of motion at the organ's console. His hands whip from playing one of the keyboards to pulling one of the 229 stop knobs on the left and right sides of the console. At the same time, his feet are busy at the 32 foot keys, five foot pedals and a dizzying array of toe-stops.

The result can be the most gentle of lullabies or the most celebratory of marches, and the moving sounds the organ produces are what make it so special, Cornils said.

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