

## **Press Release**

For Immediate distribution

July 3, 2009

Contact: Debbie Avakian (503) 780-9156

### **Nathan Avakian, local teen organist, wins national title**

**Portland, OR:** Earlier today, the American Theatre Organ Society held its National Young Organist Competition in Cleveland, Ohio. A panel of judges had previously selected the top three finalists from recordings submitted by hopefuls for the Cleveland competition. The finalists included Daniel McCollum of Sumpterville, Florida, Mary Ann Wootton of Lancashire, England and Nathan Avakian, an incoming senior at Beaverton's Arts and Communication Magnet Academy ("ACMA").

Most recognize the theater organ as the instrument used to accompany silent pictures. Locals will remember the theater organ from Portland's Organ Grinder pizzeria. It is a complicated instrument requiring great skill in the use of multiple keyboards and foot pedals to simulate the music of a full orchestra.

Nathan first became fascinated with the theater organ frequenting the Organ Grinder with his family at the age of four. Playing entirely by ear, Nathan became proficient at the organ at an early age. Since then, Nathan has learned to read music and now arranges and composes his own music.

Nathan has played concerts for audiences at Seattle's Kenyon Hall, Bellingham's Mt. Baker Theater, Gig Harbor's Wurlitzer Manor and locally at Portland's Hollywood Theater, Sherman Clay and MacNeur Studio. He has also performed at Salem's historic Elsinore Theater where he will again perform later this year.

In Cleveland, the finalists competed before a new panel of judges by playing three pieces of their choice, totaling no more than fifteen minutes. Nathan started with the whimsical "Comedy Tonight", from Stephen Sondheim's "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum". Showing diversity, he next presented the classical score Carrilon. An accomplished tap dancer and singer as well, Nathan concluded with a medley from the award winning Broadway favorite 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, by Dubin and Warren. The judges deliberated immediately after the performances and came back awarding Nathan the national title.

In addition to his organ playing, Nathan has starred in musical theater productions with the Krayon Kids Musical Theatre Company, Oregon Children's Theater and ACMA. He has also taken tap, ballet and jazz dance at Westside Dance Academy in Tigard since the age of four. Nathan is a National Honor Society member and served as the

Beaverton School District's architectural committee student representative, helping to design the new performing arts center currently under construction at ACMA.

Nathan's goal is to showcase the versatility of the theater organ by playing a wide variety of eras and styles, especially music that appeals to today's generation.

Nathan studies with Donna Parker of Aloha and is also coached by Jonas Nordwall of Portland.