

Eastman honors the memory of

ROSA RIO

Elizabeth Raub (Rosa Rio) was a student at the Eastman School of Music in the early 1920's, where she studied the art of theatre organ playing under John Hammond. Although there is no record of her ever having received a degree from Eastman, it is known that, in 1923, she served on the staff of "The Note-Book", a student-run magazine, and she contributed at least two articles to that magazine, which are preserved in the Eastman Archives.

When Rosa Rio attended Eastman, the School was new and silent movies were in their heyday. That all ended in 1928, when Al Jolson said "You ain't heard nothin' yet!" in The Jazz Singer. Silent-movie organists were suddenly out of business, but thanks to her talent and determination, Rose Rio remained a practicing musician for eight more decades – in a field where women were rarely encountered. She was busily employed in the then-new worlds of radio and TV, worked with such radio legends as Orson Welles, Bob and Ray, and Gertrude Berg, and was dubbed "Queen of the Soaps" for her ability to provide background music for five to seven radio dramas a day. She also had her own NBC radio show, Rosa Rio Rhythms.

Rosa's career had a wonderful late boost beginning in 1996, when she began to appear regularly as organist for silent films presentations at the Tampa Theatre's 1400-pipe Mighty Wurlitzer Theatre Organist. Her last performance there was as recent as August 30, 2009. She is quoted as saying, "I have such gratitude for the wonderful people who have such love for the theatre organ, silent pictures, and Tampa Theatre."

The immense contribution that Rosa Rio made to the world of music during her long and brilliant career was in an area that Eastman took little notice of in the years following the dissolution of the school's program in theatre organ instruction in the 1930s, and it is only recently that a new appreciation of – and enthusiasm for – the art of the theatre organ has blossomed at Eastman and at an increasing number of schools throughout the country.

We suspect that Rosa would be pleased to hear a new generation of our students making wonderful music on the Wurlitzer at Rochester's Auditorium Theater, and to know that this art lives again in the school in which she learned her art. It is in the spirit of this renaissance of love for the theatre organ that Eastman wishes to honor her for her artistry, for her many years of devoted work to bring the sound of organ music to millions, and for her well-deserved stature as the Queen of Theatre Organists.



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