

COVER STORY

Rochester's Wurlitzer Opus 1951

by Lloyd E. Klos

The Rochester Theater Organ Society will observe its 16th anniversary in August. The largest club of its kind in the world today, RTOS is an outgrowth of a small, but dedicated group of enthusiasts in the Rochester, N.Y., area. After having restored Wurlitzer Opus 1951 in the RKO Palace Theatre in 1960, periodic concerts were held at the Palace until 1964, when RTOS was organized.

In early 1965, however, with less than 200 members, stunning news arrived that the Palace would be razed for an apartment-hotel complex (which never materialized).

RTOS, through public sale of stock in "musical nostalgia," plus other money raising ventures, managed to save the Wurlitzer, and it was eventually installed in the Auditorium Theatre in the Masonic Temple Civic Center.

Since 1967, monthly concerts (September through May) have entertained tens of thousands of concertgoers. The organ, now a 4/22, has been enhanced by the addition of a Post Horn and a piano, in addition to better placement of the percussive effects. Judging from visiting organists' remarks, the Auditorium Wurlitzer is one of five best theatre organs on the circuit today.

Since its inception, RTOS has presented 81 organists in 152 concerts. Benefits accruing to the 1584-family members included a circulating library, open console sessions, field trips, master classes, social events and *The Blower*, a newsletter which informs members of all RTOS-sponsored affairs as well as those in neighboring areas possessing theatre organs. The club now maintains a second Wurlitzer, in a smaller auditorium, which is used for events of a more intimate nature. □

ments were conceived, some musicians finally conceived the simplest means to solve the problem. The tones C, C#, D, D#, etc., are all separated from each other by equal steps. Thus, the octave is divided into twelve equal parts, each approximately a half tone. This is called *equal temperament* . . . "

In applying this knowledge to the study of theatre organ music, we find that the music played on today's instruments is indeed based on a series of whole and half steps. For our purposes, a half step progresses from one key to the very next, which can be either a black or white key — F# to G, A to Bb, B to C and F to E, for example. A whole step skips a key (again, white or black), such as: C to D, B to C# and Eb to F, and is equal to two half steps.

The progressive combination of whole and half steps constitutes a scale. The major scale, very widely used in theatre organ music, always contains a half step between the third and fourth notes as well as the seventh and eighth notes.

In the key of C, if we begin on C, there is a whole step between C and D, D and E, then a half step between E and F, followed by a series of three whole steps, F to G, G to A and A to B, with a final half step from B to C, an octave higher than where we began. The C scale would look like this:

C D E F G A B C
W W H W W W H

Try the G and F scales in the same way. Watch out for sharps (up a half tone) and flats (down a half tone), and include only one note of each letter in any scale. In the key of F, you'll find a Bb — not an A#; otherwise there would be two As and no B.

In future columns, we'll see how chords are built from scale tones, find a formula to find any chord needed, discover form in music composition and learn registration as it relates to form. Even those who have been in music for many years still make new discoveries of the intricacies and mathematics of the wonder of music. The next time you sit at the organ, take a look at the piece of music you're about to play and notice the pattern of the notes and chords. The scale, with its whole and half tones, is at the foundation of it all. □

Console of the 4/22 Wurlitzer in the Auditorium Theatre in Rochester, N.Y. The organ is maintained by the Rochester Theater Organ Society and used for monthly concerts, September through May. (Dick Harold Photo)

