

The Emery Theatre Wurlitzer

A MASTER PLAN FOR DEVELOPMENT

by E. S. "Tote" Pratt

Inherent in any long-range program for the restoration of a theatre organ removed from its parent home, is the formulation of a master plan for ultimate growth to a more versatile and archetypical example of the organ's potential tonal scheme, within the parameters of the original builders' concept, and sound theatre organ specifications and design.

When the 3/19 Wurlitzer, Style 260 Special, Opus 1680, was removed from Cincinnati's RKO Albee Theatre in 1968, it was virtually un-

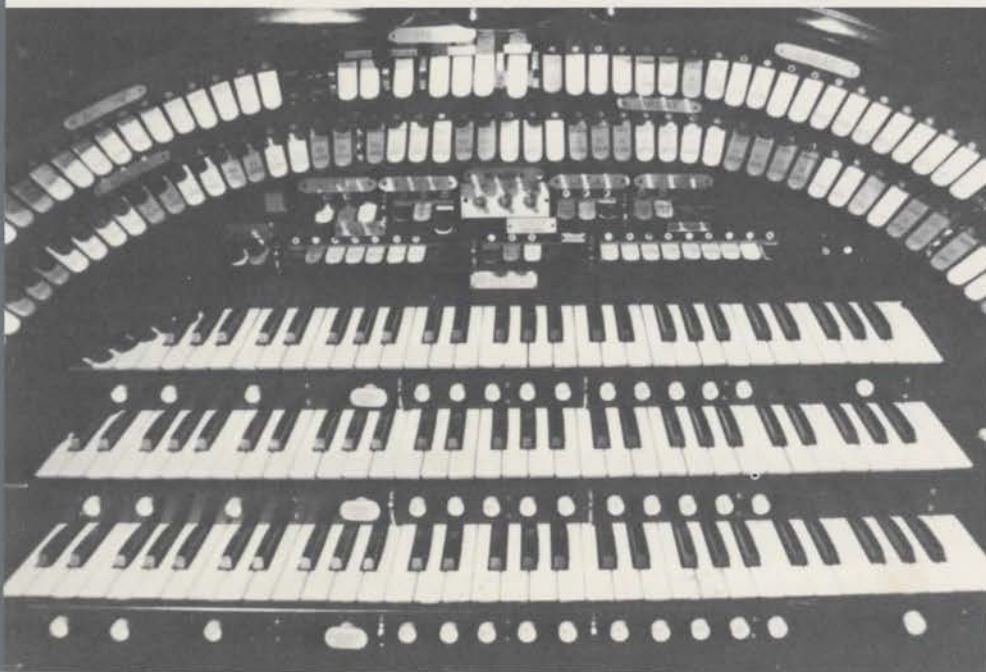
playable. The decision of the Ohio Valley Chapter was to undertake a complete restoration of the organ, including new leather, rubber cloth, cleaning, reshellacking, rechroming of metal parts, covering keyboards with ivory, refinishing of the console in ebony and renovation of all pipework. New magnet coils were installed in the relays, tremos and other critical areas.

After eight years of work, the organ was dedicated in the Emery Theatre by Gaylord Carter in 1977 and

now plays with the reliability of a new instrument. It is used each weekend for movie intermissions plus special shows. Since it is also used by members, it really gets a workout.

The Emery Theatre is probably one of the most acoustically-perfect buildings in which a theatre organ could be installed. The chapter was fortunate to have been able to design and build the chambers to fully realize the building's potential. A separate percussion section was built above and between the main and solo chambers. These chambers cover the entire back of the wide, yet shallow stage with 96 double deck shades. Each main chest, and most offsets are installed with pipe mouths at shade opening height. An unused dressing room backstage has been utilized for the three original 260 relays and switch stacks which now has been increased by two to cover the additions contemplated in the master plan. These are from the 3/11 Wurlitzer, Style H, Opus 1225, from the Kenmore Theatre, Kenmore, New

The Emery Theatre Wurlitzer. A Piano Division and the two-row backboard are new.



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York, and were completely rebuilt by the chapter. At present, three of the added ranks are being played from this relay with preparations for three more to complete the 26 ranks plus piano, in the master plan. The intent is to use original Wurlitzer components wherever possible to insure that the organbuilding art of Wurlitzer can be preserved for future generations. The 15 hp blower is adequate for all foreseeable additions.

The console, a maximum 260 spec., utilized every stop key position possible, with the exception of the area where the shade indicator bars were located, so one of the major problems was a method of expanding the console facilities without jeopardizing the basic well-unified specifications.

To enlarge the resources of the organ, a five-rank Wurlitzer chest was obtained (originally from the Royal Theatre, Bronx, NY, Opus 1420) rebuilt and installed in the solo chamber. In addition, a one-rank Post Horn chest (origin unknown) was installed in this chamber and from which a Schopp custom built Post Horn on 15 inch pressure, on a new untremmed regulator now sounds forth. A gift of a 32-pipe 16-foot metal Violone was received from member Herb Merritt (it was originally in the Liberty Theatre, Covington, KY, Austin organ) and a chest was built to accommodate it. The chapter changed the great mutations (12th, Piccolo, Tierce) from the Flute to the Solo Tibia and built a treble chest for this addition, adding 12 new pipes. The new ranks added to date are an 8' Post Horn (15"), the 16' Violone (6") and an 8' Gamba and Gamba Celeste (both 7"). Future plans call for the addition of a Musette, Gemshorn and Krumet. The Wurlitzer single-row spacing for the VDO and Celeste on the added chest was not far enough apart to accommodate the 4' bottom octaves of the larger-scaled Gamba and Celeste, so new rechanneled top board sections were made to respace these into a double row by organ crew member Art Havlovic.

Since a piano was in the original growth plan, and the console had no room for stop keys, the shade indicator bars were removed and a separate piano division stop section was installed in its place. This meant building an upper bow stop rail unit

to fill this space and drilling and mounting the seven new stop keys, with plated dividers. The new combination action pneumatics were all made by the chapter. The stop keys and Wurlitzer division name plate are engraved with red letters.

To provide for the ultimate specification of 26 ranks, and added solo couplers, the straight stop rail backboard was remade to add a second row above the original. Three new second touch stops were added to the bottom row; an accompaniment second touch, Chrysoglott, and Post Horn 8', a 16' great second touch Post Horn and an additional trem (now 9). The new top row of 13 stops controls the added ranks plus new 16' and 4' solo couplers. All new stop keys on the backboard are installed in standard Wurlitzer order, i.e., loud to soft by pitch and tone family. These were obtained from Hesco, using original Wurlitzer engraving templates.

Since a 260 Wurlitzer backboard is limited in height, the combination action for the top row became a problem. There was no room for pneumatic action behind the backboard or for the 26 primaries, so the pneumatic action idea was discarded. Further, the existing setter boards and piston relays had only a few spares. However, there was room on the right side panel of the console for a 14-unit pneumatic primary to take care of the piano section on the top bow, which we had and installed, and tubed to the piano stop keys on the upper bolster.

The writer designed an auxiliary setter board which is in reality a complete setter unit with slave piston relays and slide setter switches. A 15-foot cable connects this portable unit to the console. It stores behind the console and can be put on top when setting so it is in line with the present Wurlitzer "safety pin" setters. Reisner slide switches, color coded for reed, flue and couplers (red, white and black), are used. Reisner C5B relays provide the slave relay action. The unit is light enough for one person to lift. Hubert Shearin, chapter chairman, and president of Manual Arts Furniture Company, made the panelled box and cover, which is finished in ebony to match the console. Jack Miller, vice president of Reisner, manufactured the setter board and installed the switch-



Solo manual additions include selective percussions with toggle switches.

es. The chapter is grateful to Phil Underwood, Glenn Merriam and Ed Dooley, three creative and dedicated members of the organ crew who wired the unit, mounted the 33 relays, soldered over 1200 wires and rang out the circuits. Bill Ahlert manufactured the 100-wire cable to tie it all together. The setter is now in operation and works perfectly. It takes care of the piano as well as the additions on the backboard.

The solution to the backboard stop key combination action for the new stops was elusive. The writer was familiar with the Wicks double-acting stop key magnet units and these were available. Organ crew member Don Campbell worked out a way of mounting these units on an aluminum plate, attached to the back rail pneumatic board base plate. They are hung upside down so the action is aided by gravity. Don used aluminum connecting rods, which were bent to clear the curved stop rail when lowered into place. Stop key arms were formed and bushed to accept the rods which he machined down to fit the bushing. The ends were threaded for leather nuts and the unit installed. The stop key action is fast, reliable and operates on 12 volts.

A toggle switch on the backboard was installed to couple the percussion shades to the solo shoe so all shades can now be operated at one time with the main and solo shoes. Another switch will couple the upper deck swell shades to the shoes, as desired, to control total volume of the organ. A third toggle switch affects the xylophone so the organist may select either a single stroke or reiterating action.

Power "on" and crescendo indi-

cator lights have been added to the right backboard. These are fed by a 6 V AC transformer keyed by 12 V DC relays so that the lights do not dim with variations in the DC voltage when the organ is played. The AC transformer output goes through an air switch in the console so that when the power to the organ is shut off, the bolster and pedal illumination lights, as well as the indicator lights, will not receive current, and automatically go out.

Eight new pistons have been added, as well as a general cancel, individual manual and pedal cancels, percussions off, tremms off and traps off. Reisner modular bezel units were countersunk into the piston rail. An ivory piston extension, made by Hesco, was cemented to them so that when the piston face board is in place they match the Wurlitzer pistons already in the console. Only the extension pistons are visible through the face plate. These were engraved to indicate their purpose as indicated above.

As in most three-manual Wurlitzers (styles 260, 240, 235, H, etc.) the percussion availability on the solo manual is limited. A method of increasing the flexibility of the solo percussions, introduced in this Ohio Valley Chapter Wurlitzer, was to add the Harp and the Chrysoglott, without adding any stop keys or eliminating any from present specifications. The original design had the Glock and bells on two separate stop keys. To add a Chrysoglott and Harp, two miniature toggle switches were installed above the two stop keys in question and new Wurlitzer stop keys were engraved with the stop key tip markings SEL indicating selector, with Harp-Chrys in italics on one stop key and Glock-Bells on the other. The toggle switches are mounted on black phenolic name plates, one engraved with positions to play Harp or Chrys, with a center position for both, and the other with Glock or Bells. The added relay and switch stack provided the wiring for the switches to accomplish this. The system is now in operation and vastly increases the versatility of the solo manual.

It has long been the writer's contention that tremms should have 20' to 30' of solid windline plus four to eight elbows to provide for wind flexibility and control which also

eliminates "gallop" and "flutter" in the regulators usually associated with short trem wind lines. In this installation all 9 (ultimately 10) tremms are placed on a platform under the chambers in the basement. No weights are used on any regulator. Small weights are incorporated on the tremms themselves, determined by the depth of beat and speed requirements — finite adjustment is provided by opening or closing the slides on the trem tops, the input valve and on the regulator by means of felt washers on the dowels activating the regulator flap valves. The tibias should have at least one flap valve opening on the down stroke to provide a deeper beat while on the main tremolo/regulator, the cone valve and only partially opening the small flap valve. Three additional benefits accrue from this Emery installation system: extremely steady wind when no tremms are on for classic interpretation, a minimum of wind lines cluttering the floor of the chamber (a necessity as added ranks are incorporated) and noisy tremms in the basement under a three-inch thick floor to insure that no trem noise enters the theatre. This has proved out during the four years the organ has been in operation.

The chapter has been informed that thanks to the generosity of Jack and Joan Strader our piano is now a reality. A special long-string upright is being readied by Harry Garrison of Cincinnati's Player Piano Shop. Bob Arndt, of Arndt Organ Supply Company, has manufactured a piano action adapter unit and seven new switches are being wired by Ken Aultz, organ crew member and relay expert. A third contact has been added to each of the seven piano stop keys in the console, which are bussed together to activate a 12 V DC coil — 120 V AC relay to turn the vacuum pump on in the piano when any piano stop key is depressed. In addition, the piano is being equipped with stage expression which will operate through the solo expression pedal relays, and the presently-installed sustain button on the solo shoe has also been wired through to the piano.

Thus, the first major plateau of the Ohio Valley Chapter's master plan dream has become a reality — and they eagerly anticipate more to come. □



(L to R) Glenn Merriam, Ed Dooley and Phil Underwood work on the new slave setter board.



Don Campbell inspects the Wicks action magnet system on the backboard. The toggle switches and indicator lights are also new.

(L to R) Glenn Merriam and Tote Pratt examine the new setter board, placed on top of the console for setting.

