



# ORGAN-IZING POPULAR MUSIC

by  
**AL HERMANNs**

## PLAYING BY EAR

The ability to play by ear comes in many varieties and degrees from 0% — the inability to distinguish the upward or downward motion of a melody, to 100% — perfect pitch and total recall. It would seem that most musicians have between 30% and 70% ability to recreate what they hear. For church and classical musicians, the ability to play by ear is always helpful but not necessary. For composers, arrangers and conductors it is essential.

For organists in the field of popular music, it could be considered a necessity because popular songs were not intended to be played on the organ! The composers usually had in mind performances by dance bands, pianists, or vocalists with piano or orchestral accompaniment. Therefore, the organist who performs popular music must be able to play by ear and/or study keyboard harmony and arranging techniques in order to play popular songs in a musical manner.

Many people who study music the traditional way — reading notes — might be able to play by ear but not realize it because they never tried. Three of the easiest songs to play by ear are "Silent Night," "You Are My Sunshine" and "Happy Birthday." Each of these songs begins on the 5th of the scale of the key in which you want to play them.

Before attempting to play any of these songs by ear, you should be able to hum, sing or whistle the melody from beginning to end. If you don't really know how it should sound, you won't be able to play it. If, after 15 minutes you come up with nothing — forget it. Most people need music; that is why we have such a big music-publishing industry.

However, reproducing a melody on a keyboard is a small part of playing by

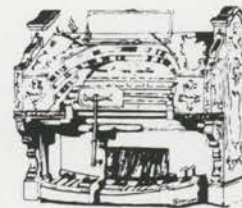
ear. A good ear player hears the whole sound: melody, harmony, bass line, rhythm, time values, phrasing, registration, etc. A musical person with some experience can review a musical selection mentally and determine how it should sound on the organ. This includes registration, introduction, fills on long notes, chord substitutions, key changes if any, and final ending.

All this has nothing to do with perfect pitch. Those who are born with this gift can do everything more quickly and easily. The rest of us can develop relative pitch by listening to and humming scales and chords (one note at a time). When you can recognize the sound of all the common intervals upward and downward, you can look at a piece of music and realize how it will sound before playing it. This process should then work in reverse: when you hear music (actually or mentally) you should realize how it would look on paper. If you will practice humming individual intervals over a period of months, you will improve any ability to play by ear you may already have.

**IT HAS BEEN PROVEN THAT YOU MUST MAKE THE SOUND WITH YOUR VOICE FOR IT TO REGISTER IN YOUR MEMORY.** The next step is to play major, minor, 7th, 9th, augmented and diminished chords over and over until you can recognize them whenever you hear them.

Most people who play by ear do not realize they have a special gift and don't understand why everyone can't do it. There are books on ear training for singers.

I hope this has been helpful to all who read it. If any of you have questions or more information on the subject, I would like to hear from you.



## 1991 ATOS

### Scholarship Program

Available to students ages 13 thru 22 (as of July 1, 1992) Undergraduate Level  
**CATEGORY "A"**

Students working toward college organ performance degree.

#### **CATEGORY "B"**

Music students studying with professional theatre organ teachers.

**We have ten \$500 scholarships available for qualified students.**

(Initial scholarship, received in 1991, may be continued if the student shows exceptional progress — at the discretion of the committee.) Moneys granted in this scholarship may be applied toward an approved theatre organ workshop. Applications must be submitted by May 1, 1992, and following review of the committee members, recipients will be awarded their scholarships by June 1, 1992. Rules and regulations have been sent to chapter presidents and may also be obtained from chairman: **Dorothy VanSteenkiste** - 9270 Reeck Road, Allen Park, Michigan 48101. Phone 313/383-0133.

## 1991

### Young Theatre Organist Competition

THE AMERICAN  
THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY

Ages: 13 thru 21 (as of July 1, 1991)

#### **THREE DIVISIONS:**

Junior . . . . . 13-15  
Intermediate . . . . . 16-18  
Senior . . . . . 19-21

A chapter may submit one entry in each category. Deadline for submitting entries is April 1, 1992. A chapter may sponsor a qualified candidate from another area.

Rules and regulations have been sent to all chapter presidents and may also be obtained by contacting chairman:

**Dorothy VanSteenkiste**  
9270 Reeck Road  
Allen Park, Michigan 48101  
313/383-0133

Contact your schools, music studios and teachers. Make your theatre organ available to these students early so that they will be ready for competition. Will your chapter have a winner in 1992? Encourage your young people to try . . .



**"Merry Christmas and Happy New Year"**