

"LITTLE MORT" TAKES A BOW

by CAROLE ANGLE

It was a cool, clear morning in February 1965, when a pickup truck with a trailer and a sedan traveled east over Donner Pass in the Sierra Nevada mountains. To the casual observer there was nothing unusual, but, well wrapped in the back of the pickup, was a brand new transistor electronic organ, and a very special organ indeed! It was a Schober "kit organ," assembled and destined for the Methodist Church in Lovelock, Nevada. The labor for assembling the Schober was then to be traded for a Robert Morton theatre pipe organ.

This all began a year before, when USAF Major H.A. Sommer and his family were returning from a Colorado vacation. As usual he was practicing his hobby of nosing into the whereabouts of various theatre pipe organs while enroute (the family thought he was probing for "historical artifacts"). Noting the large theatre in Lovelock while passing through, a stop was immediately declared necessary. After



Loading at Lovelock. The blower rests on the pickup truck while the console shimmers in the sunlight after being "sprung" from church. (For a closeup of the blower see the October issue, p. 15.)

talking to the local barber, electrician, lawyer, county judge and sheriff, it was established that, yes, some time back there had been an organ in the theatre and that it was presently being used in the Methodist Church, also that the church would like to replace it with something less demanding and tempermental. Time did not permit contacting officials on that trip so arrangements were made by correspondence for a meeting with the church organ committee. The condition of the organ was ascertained at the meeting as "rough but restorable" by Dave Schutt and the Major. However, all the percussive goodies, except the unplayable xylophone, were gone. The church committee, upon hearing about the trouble-free Schober electronic, agreed that they would purchase

the kits and that, in payment for the assembling, the Major would have the privilege of removing and owning the Morton.

The Morton, a model 49B "Fotoplayer," was installed in the Lovelock theatre in the original configuration. The player and effects were removed upon installation in the church. The xylophone was disconnected permanently shortly after the church installation due to a short which caused it to sound during a funeral. It had been installed in the theatre in August 1925 and retired to the church in 1942. The name of the theatre organist could not be recalled by any of the locals. However, it's possible that he left town quite suddenly. During refurbishing of the pedalboard a 22 caliber cartridge (expended) and the bow from an old-fashioned pair of eyeglasses were discovered and, as neither object seemed to belong to the



Major Sommer replied to the BOMBARDE's request for a family photo with the above, stating he didn't have a family picture but perhaps this snapshot of his "loading crew" would suffice. It's so typical of hired organ movers, we couldn't resist running it.

church, it is anyone's guess as to what happened to the original organist. There were still some wild times in the West around 1925!

1925! That was a good year for the Robert Morton Company. Although beset by internal strife and the continual threat of financial disaster, the firm had more orders than it could fill. Business had never been better. Let's examine its "epitome of pit organs" more closely.



The Morton 49 console is one of the most graceful of small pipe organ control centers once the upright piano-style cabinet that house the roll player is removed.

The "Morton 49" is one of the finest sounding small instruments ever to grace a small movie house. It is actually a link between organ and Fotoplayer but has a distinct advantage in being a Fotoplayer rather than a conventional 4-rank Morton organ. Why? Because this 3-rank Fotoplayer was equipped with a Tibia while the 4-rank Morton came with a Concert Flute as did most of the other brands of 4-ranker.

And what a Tibia! It's of medium scale, unleathered, and usually made of sugar pine. The tone is just as sweet and sexy as that of any Tibia. The 4' String (49 pipes, start at Tenor C) is a "fat" one, not unlike a String Diapason. The 49-pipe Vox, while very small in scale, offers that very necessary reed support to the Tibia, which has a range from one octave below the end of the manual to two octaves above. The Tibia is unified 16-8-4-2 on the upper manual but has no mutations. The Tibia appears at 16-8-4 on the pedals while the String and Vox appear only at 4' because they lack the 8' bass octaves.

(Continued on next page)

A 30-bar, small scale xylophone and a single C chime were the original pitched percussion complement.

The Morton 49 was designed for installation in an orchestra pit. Therefore, the silhouette was low to keep below stage level. The detached console was usually placed between two oak swell boxes circa 5' in height. The 16' octave of Tibia pipes was attached horizontally to the back of the Tibia swell box, unenclosed. The Vox, String and most of the generous supply of "toy counter" effects were crammed into one swell box while the great range of the Tibia filled the other. A 3-rank organ with pipework divided into two "chambers" is indeed a rarity; This series of Mortons may be the only models so divided. The finish of console and swell boxes was natural oak, well sanded and varnished. The front of each swell box was decorated with an artistic grillework which concealed the small but adequate swell shutters. It was equipped for automatic operation from rolls and had double tracker bars so an operator cueing a film could find the right spot on one roll while another was playing—thus assuring continuous music. It was quite a lot of organ as originally conceived and installed and is still tonally far superior to most brands in the pit organ class.

As has been mentioned, the instrument was hardly in what might be called "mint condition" on that morning in February 1965 when the little caravan of vehicles retraced its path Westward over the Donner Pass with the Morton safely aboard, bound for the Sommer home in North Highlands, California.

Since then the instrument has been restored slowly to original condition utilizing the 2-chamber, separate console configuration it was obtained in. The console was refinished from its original oak to antique white and gold. Dave Schutt contributed a Glockenspiel and a chime action; Carol Harris, an octave of Chimes, and Clyde Derby, the complete actions for a Wurli toy counter. The Glock was completely rebuilt and four missing bars made and added: The chime action was cut down for the octave of chimes and the toy counter rebuilt with the necessary effects installed. These latter items, of course, had the usual "orange shellac" motif.

After moving into a new home, which was selected with the organ installation in mind, the conversion of the garage into a music room began in earnest. A 220-volt line was laid underground to the blower pad, main garage door sealed, ceiling reinforced, light fixtures wired, floor tile installed, wall and ceiling insulation stapled in, sheetrock attached to the ceiling and a wood grain sheetrock nailed to the walls. Then came painting and cleanup, and the organ installation started.

The pipes are enclosed in two original 3-1/2 by 5-1/2 foot oak swell boxes mounted

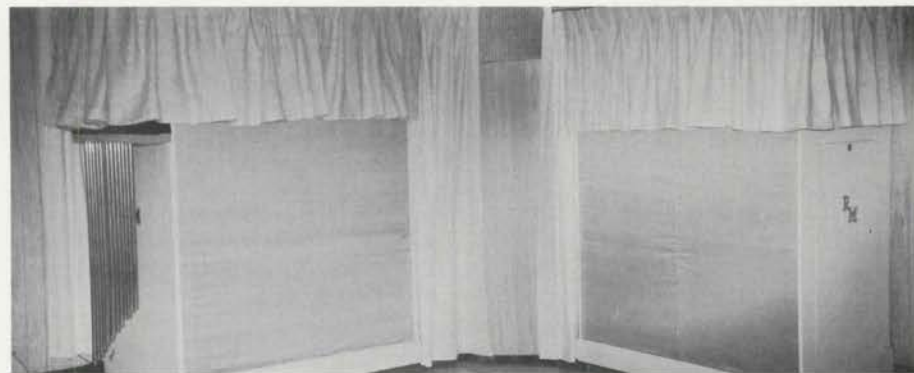


Draperies pulled back to show the traps and sound effects installed unenclosed above the Vox-String box.

on casters. One contains the pipes of the Strings and Voxes, Glock and Xylo, with the toy counter mounted on top, unenclosed. The other swell box contains the Tibias with the bass drum, maracas, tom-tom and chimes mounted on top. The pedal pipes are free-standing between the two



The original 49-note String and Vox ranks and the original Xylophone (right). The added Glockenspiel is at upper right.



This is the view over one's shoulder from the console. Draperies conceal the toy counter effects installed above the Tibia swell box (left) and the Vox-String swell box (right). The Tibia-Bourbon octave is unenclosed between the two boxes, straight ahead.

swell boxes. Both boxes have swell shades mounted on the front side. The pressure and vacuum wind lines enter the room through a vent hole in the side of the room, a total span of eight feet from regulator to chests. The vacuum line "tees" into each chamber and also to the console. The swell shades, xylophone and the integral relays within the console operate on vacuum—as did the original roll player mechanism common to all Fotoplayer. One and one-half inch plastic water pipe is used for the vacuum line. Two toe stud rails were built and installed for additional effects and artificial echo was added. The echo effect is made possible through the use of a Schober transistor "Reverbatape" unit. There is a microphone in each chamber feeding into a mixer, the Reverbatape unit, an amplifier and, finally, a speaker enclosed in a baffle. The Reverbatape has a console selection knob of 1 through 9 positions which control the

amount of reverb. The setting depends upon music tempo. A very realistic auditorium effect is achieved. A replica of a Howard seat was made of pipe fittings welded together and covered with fiber glass. The cushion is made of royal blue velvet over sponge rubber and has a gold fringe edge.

The console is located in an alcove off the main room and is surrounded by royal blue velvet drapes. Overhead and to the rear are twin spotlights and a revolving color light for those who desire to play in "living color."

The Major is indebted to a number of Sacramento area organ enthusiasts for their help. Dave Schutt, in addition to aiding in the original negotiations, helped in moving, gave advice, parts, help in modifications and tuned it twice, which is one reason why it sounds so good. Norm Rassmussen and his son, Bill, helped with the moving and stood by for any assist-

"Little Mort," continued



"Doghouse out back" houses the blower, regulator and trem. (Retouched slightly for clarity.)

ance they could render. Ray Anderson built a new harness for the Glock, got it adjusted and did 90% of the wiring besides other things. And from afar, E.A. Bassett, Waterbury, Conn., furnished wiring diagrams and guidance from his very similiar installation.

There was very little static from the dis-taff side on this installation. The Major, retired from the USAF (after 25 years of it) last fall and, noting that "togetherness" is one of the pitfalls of retirement, suggested that the "better half" get a job. That, she did. Then, *he* did. The reward when they come home now from a hard day at the office is that both play and enjoy "little Mort"—who hasn't had it so good since before "talkies" shut him off.



AND BABY MAKES THREE! Mary and her Major enjoy their little Morton, a fine example of the famous "Model 49."

"LITTLE MORT" STOP LIST

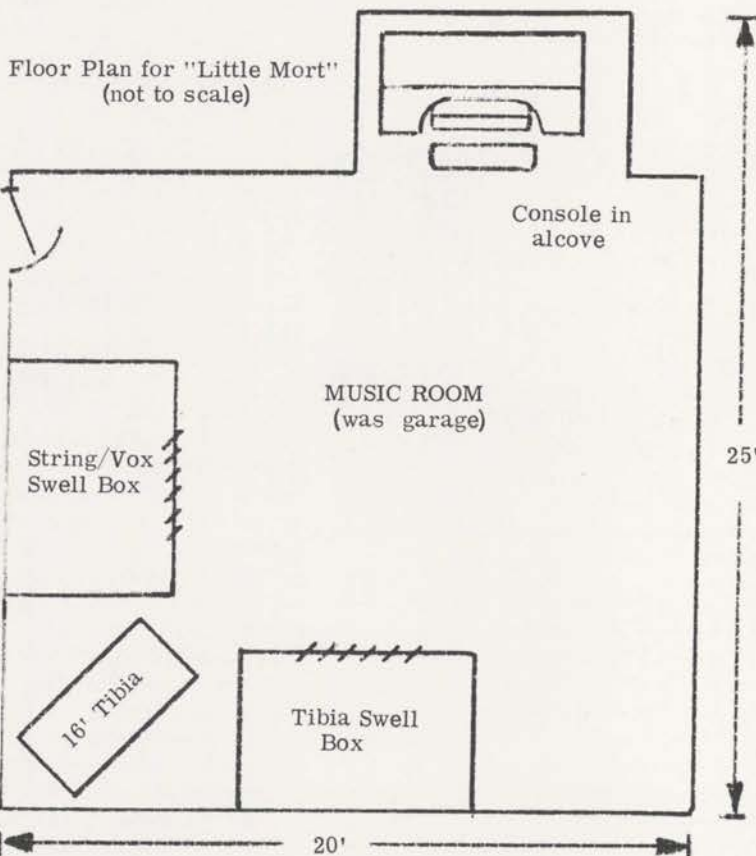
Robert Morton Pipe Organ (theatre pit type), Style 49B, Serial #1005009 3-ranks.

Presently installed in residence of H.A. Sommer, N. Highlands, Calif.

Blower: Kinetic, #L-852, Type 8 HVM, 600 CFM @ 10 lbs. Wind pressure 50 CFM @ 30 in. Vacuum

Direct Current supplied by Selenium rectifier.

PEDAL		Chinese Block	Chimes
Tibia	16'	Tambourine	Orch. Bells (re-it)
Bass Flute (Tibia)	8'	Castanets	Tremulant: Tibia, Vox,
String	4'	Bird Chirp	String (1)
Flute (Tibia)	4'	Maracas	Expression: Balanced
Bass Drum		Horse Clops	pedals:
Kettle Drum		Triangle	Left-Tibia
Snare Drum Tap		Tom-Tom	Right-Vox/String
Snare Drum Roll		SOLO	Crescendo
Tom-Tom		Contra Flute (Tibia)	Auditorium acoustic effect:
Cymbal		String (Middle C)	Schober Reverbatape
		Vox Humana (Middle C)	
ACCOMPANIMENT		Tibia	TOE STUDS (12)
Contra Flute (Tibia)	16'	Violin (Tenor C)	Door Bell
Tibia	8'	Vox Humana (Tenor C)	Machine Gun
Violin (Tenor C)	8'	Orch. Flute (Tibia)	Siren
Vox Humana (Tenor C)	8'	Violina	Boat Whistle
Violina	4'	Vox Humana	Fire Gong
Flute (Tibia)	4'	Piccolo (Tibia)	Klaxon Horn
Sleigh Bells		Xylophone	Six remaining reserved for
Cymbal		Glockenspiel	future effects installation



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