Schober Organ Notes No. 67

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OVERTURE

Disclaimer: We accept no responsibility for any unfavorable consequences resulting from following our advice.

In this issue Charles E. Witherell's self portrait continues and Captain David Casteel's starts. Both will continue in issue 68 and some of the details of the planned three manual Schober, which the captain provided, will hopefully also find space. Pete Stark is hoping to find some time to restart our message board when his teaching duties are curtailed during summer vacation.

JOSEPH J. BLAZAK

In 1969-70, Joseph started to build a 4 manual organ. In his notes he said: "The organ is actually 8 manual organs and 4 pedal organs plus traps and percussions, but contained in 4 manuals. Each keyboard is two separate divisions" This organ, built with Schober kits, must have been a prizewinner. Dozens of speakers and loads of amplifiers. At least 160-200 stops plus Dynabeat, 3 Reverbatapes, etc. He kept improving the organ, as I see from his correspondence with Schober and seems to have put his heart and soul into the creation of it. In 1996 Joseph's organ was sold at an estate auction to Randy Vaneck who is disposing of it. He kindly sent me all of Joseph's papers as I was quite interested in this wonderful organ. Now the organ is partially disassembled but available for parts for anyone who will PICK IT UP. (See Schober Related Ads).

SELF PORTRAIT of Charles E. Witherell

(Part II)

Building the Schober Recital Organ

When I learned about Schober organs through an advertisement in a music (or science) magazine in the mid 1960s, I sent for an information packet and demonstration LP record (which we still have), and received a fascinating letter from Jim Ramsey in February 1967. We purchased the kits for the Recital organ piecemeal over the period of a couple of years. Meanwhile, to make things even more challenging, I bought from Schober a full set of construction drawings for the Recital console. I made this from 4 ft by 8 ft sheets of 3/4-inch walnut-veneered plywood and other construction materials I obtained from a lumberyard in northern New Jersey, near where we lived at the time. So, while building the Schober kits I constructed the console and bench sub-assemblies in the basement and assembled, glued, and clamped it all together in our living room. The only console item we purchased from Schober was the 32-note AGO pedal board. We bought a fairly complete set of accessories, including the TR-2 transistor power amplifier, a Reverbatape unit, the Auto Tuner, the CRM-1 combination action, the Library of Stops kits, and the various demonstration recordings and all related books

offered by Schober. The organ was completed (console and most kits) in May of 1968 and after much tinkering and troubleshooting (keys were inadvertently wired in reverse order, for example), it played! The usual glitches were corrected in time. To provide access for troubleshooting, I chose to defer installing the combination action unit until the incidence of minor operating problems subsided. In retrospect, this was good thinking. The technical support provided by Schober in those early days in helping me to correct the various problems was excellent. They took the time and had the patience to thoroughly understand each problem and to write detailed personal letters back promptly, a level of support that is rarely found in the business world, either before or since.

We have been very pleased with the sound of the Schober Recital organ, and have managed to keep it playing these 33 years. Of course, there have been prolonged periods of a few months during these years when some difficulty kept it from playing, and when my work or other commitments kept me from giving the organ the attention it needed to keep it in top shape. In the course of our organ-playing careers (both my wife and I have served as church organists over the years), we have had the opportunity to play a fairly large number of other electronic, as well as pipe, organs. For the expenditure and effort involved in building and maintaining the Schober, none of the other electronic instruments have had the appeal, versatility and range of voices, and capability that the Schober has.

Recent Pipe Organ Acquisition and Installation

To bring our history of organ ownership up to date, I should briefly add that about a year ago, as a 50th Wedding Anniversary present for ourselves, we found, bought, moved and installed ourselves in our home, a two-manual, three-rank, Moeller pipe organ (Opus 6362, 1935). In fact, this organ is very similar to the one in the church in New Jersey where my wife and I met, although with fewer ranks of pipes. The formidable technical and logistical challenges that this venture presented far overshadowed any problems we ever had with the Schober. As an example, every wire and multi-conductor cable in that electro-pneumatic system had been cut (chopped!) in order to remove it from where it had been for 65 years. So, each connection had to be painstakingly traced without schematics, drawings, or conductor labeling of any kind back from the console to the pipe chest magnets. Console and wind chest wiring in the organ as we obtained it consisted largely of short severed unidentified stubs. Wire color-coding had apparently not yet been invented in 1935, with the result that all wires were of a dirty gray double-wound cotton covering (outlawed by every electric code today because of fire hazard). This particular organ, despite these drawbacks, did have an excellent top-of-the-line Meidinger blower and a modern state-of-the-art silicon rectifier to provide an ample and reliable source of 12 volt D.C. to operate the various pipe chests and stop tab solenoids and key contacts. After many months of virtually constant work, the organ is now playing very well, and is worth all the effort we put into it to install and restore it. With only 22 stops (unified from only a few hundred pipes) its range is, of course, limited; but the sound of real pipes is truly fantastic and fills our entire house with an awesome sound that is both felt as well as heard. Truly, as has been said, a pipe organ is "the king of instruments." Nevertheless, as thrilled as we are with the Moeller pipe organ, we will never part with the Schober Recital organ. Each organ has its place and we still play the Schober. We have not attempted to play them both at the same time, as they are situated in different locations of the house fairly remote from one another.

Schober Organ Sound Quality

In attempting to relate our experiences with the Schober organ, a few of the more significant ones come to mind and, for the sake of practicality, my comments, conclusions, and opinions will be largely confined to these. One is that the quality of sound is only as good as the quality (and, incidentally, the cost) of its speaker system. The value of the Schober organ lies in its tone-generating capabilities. The tone can be lost or severely degraded in attempting to

reproduce it through a Mickey Mouse speaker system. Today's state-of-the-art digital and analog electronic organs (Allen, Rodgers, etc.) are excellent examples of what must be done by way of speaker technology to obtain the best sound the tone generating system has to offer. The same holds true for the Schober organs. I have learned this the hard way.

When we completed the Schober Recital organ in 1968, I had a couple of Electrovoice 3-way speaker systems/enclosures that we had been using for playing recorded music, and which seemed adequate. We had been using this arrangement for playing the Schober organ for many years. However, in recent years, considering the improvements in speaker technology that have been made, we upgraded our speaker system for taped and CD recorded music to a set of Bose enclosures. Through a switching arrangement, I provided the option of playing either recorded (or FM radio) music or the Schober organ through the Bose system. There was a noticeable improvement in the fidelity of the organ sound and overall depth. For example, there was a distinct difference in tonal quality between stops which had been lost in the old speaker system.

However, the new arrangement with simply feeding the Schober output from the TR-2 amplifier into the Bose speakers was not totally satisfactory. There was a disappointing limit to the sound volume possible with this arrangement. The speakers would tend to buzz and the sound would break up at about half the volume we would have liked on some louder passages. Adjustments to the several potentiometers in the Schober didn't help. I knew the problem did not lie in the new speakers as there was ample volume available when playing recorded or FM music. The limit had to lie within the Schober TR-2 amplifier.

With this in mind, I replaced the power transistors and electrolytic capacitors along with other key components in the TR-2 amplifier, as well as in the PRCS-2 Schober power supply. It did not provide any noticeable improvement in attainable volume. As an experiment, I substituted a new 250 watt Radio Shack PA amplifier I had been using in a church with a new Roland XP-30 keyboard and this did provide very good volume response. Similarly, a Fender (Model BXR-300C) 300 watt speaker/amplifier used for guitar work (and its output paired to either the Bose system or one of the original Electrovoice 3-way speakers) provided satisfactory sound output.

At the same time, frequency response seemed improved along with the tonal range and better stop-to-stop discrimination in playing the Schober. My impression is that this more recent technology and higher-powered amplification provides an all-around better sound from the Schober organ than any previous arrangement we have used. This merely affirms what Schober had, in their literature, been saying right along. Accordingly, in hindsight, our well-intentioned attempts to make-do with existing sound equipment may not have been the best or wisest choice (despite the fact that we did use Schober's TR-2 power amplifier, with its admittedly 1960s technology).

Pedalboard Spring Breakage

An early problem that plagued the operation of the organ, and one that has never really been completely resolved (although drastically improved) has been the breakage of pedal springs. The original V-shaped thin leaf springs situated at the toe end (front) had extremely short life. We are talking weeks, and even days, here. I attributed this to metal fatigue augmented by the humid climate of the metropolitan New York area where we lived at the time. I decided that coil springs would be preferable. This decision coincided with Schober's conclusion explained in their Information Bulletin BN-039 of November 26, 1969 by R. Avedon. The carbon steel coil springs obtained from Schober had somewhat better life, but they still broke frequently. My suspicion about the contribution to short spring life from the humid climate prompted me to replace these carbon steel springs with those of stainless steel. Some calculations and experimentation provided a spring constant value which, together with the size limitations inherent in the pedalboard location, led me to a fairly narrow choice of stainless steel springs from an industrial parts catalog. I obtained a full set and fastened these to the front end of each

pedal using the screw eyes used with the carbon steel springs. This "fix" was superior to the previous steel coil springs, and far superior to the earlier flat leaf springs. But, even these springs did not give infinite life, as one would hope for. Metal fatigue persists, stainless steel or not, although they do provide a much greater spring life, especially in the arid climate of where we now live, which I believe helps.*

Of incidental interest, that I plan to pursue as time permits, is the fact that the pedalboard of the 65-year-old Moller pipe organ we have is apparently fitted with very robust springs (apparently of a leaf-type) but located at the back end of the pedal bars, and show no signs of problems with breakage - at least so far. At that end of the pedal, cantilevered stresses in the springs would be higher but spring motion (extension with each movement) would be less than for springs located at the other end. Perhaps the Schober pedalboard could be retrofitted with this arrangement and relieve the pedal spring breakage problem once and for all. One of these days I will get serious about looking into it.

(Continued Next issue: "Poor Electrical Contacts)

*See ON66 for spring specifications.

SELF PORTRAIT of Captain David Casteel

(Part I)

I am not really an expert on organs, by any means. Even as a small boy, I always preferred classical music to whatever genre was currently popular--music-wise, the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s just did not exist for me--and a very large portion of that style of music involved the organ. I have also always been interested in the mechanics of things--not as a mechanic, but more as a tinkerer and puzzler--again, pipe organs are a mechanical marvel of sorts, so I found them fascinating. You might say I have a large amount of knowledge at the level of a dilettante, kind of shallow.

When I was about 12 years old I decided I wanted to learn to play a musical instrument. My first choice was the flute, because I have always loved the pure, sweet sounds it makes. My mother advised me to forget it--my dad would never agree to let me learn a sissy instrument like the flute (that's not what she said, but it is what she meant, and I knew it). My dad was a wonderful man, but his son was not going to be a sissy (he was, anyway) and, especially, would not do obviously sissy things. So I decided on the piano, which was at least an acceptable choice all around. I took lessons for about a year and a half from a neighborhood lady and learned to play well enough to entertain myself and my mother (mothers are easily pleased by what their children do, you know, and this is not necessarily an indication of any degree of excellence). I didn't like to practice so when it appeared I had reached a plateau of ability we stopped the lessons. We did not have a lot of money and couldn't afford to spend it if there would be no real improvement realized.

I had bought my own piano with money I saved using U.S. Savings Stamps and the bonds bought with them, by the way. This was in the late 1940s and I think my first piano cost only $50--it was a big, heavy upright made of solid cherry wood, which needed refinishing and had a beautiful tone. It got moved once but when I left to enter the Air Force in 1960 it stayed in the house in Detroit and was sold with the house a few years later when my parents moved (back) to Arizona. I am a native Arizonan, by the way--when I was born my dad was working on the crew building Bartlett Dam northeast of Phoenix on the Verde River--he was a concrete worker. I was premature and they did not have time to get from the dam site to the nearest hospital in Scottsdale, about 50 miles away, so I was born in the small dispensary there at the dam. I tell people that I was by a dam site ("damn sight") born in a dam ("damn") hospital! I attended and

graduated from Samuel C. Mumford High School in Detroit, Michigan in 1955. This is the school made famous in the "Beverly Hills Cop" movies with Eddie Murphy. In my graduating class of 487 students there were at least 3 who have made a name for themselves nationally: George Zweig, one of the 3 co-founders of the "quark" theory of matter; Ruth (Meckler) Laredo, the concert pianist and Ivan Boesky, of junk-bond fame.

I attended Wayne State University there in Detroit for 4.5 years and graduated with a B.S. in Chemical Engineering, immediately being commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Air Force and went on active duty at a little radar site on the coast of Oregon--Mount Hebo Air Force Station. However, while at WSU, I trained myself to have sort of an "organ" keyboard touch by playing on a pump organ in the Wesley Foundation on campus. I was hooked! I had to have an organ of my own someday. I even worked to rebuild one while stationed at Mount Hebo, but it was base property and was only used for special worship occasions. I had enough interest, though, to notice the Schober ads in the various music magazines (I subscribed to 2) in the early 1960s and gradually became convinced that I could do it and WOULD do it. To this end, I told all my friends that I intended to do it, thereby forcing me to eventually take action.

In 1964, I was reassigned to a radar site in Labrador, Canada, and stopped by the Schober factory and showroom as I was traveling to that assignment. I made my commitment to buying and building a Recital Organ at that time, subject to confirmation that I would be able to receive shipment of the console (no kit for it then) at my duty station in Labrador. We did have heavy shipping available 6 months of the year at Cartwright, Labrador, so I went ahead with my plans, paid the money, and began receiving the kits for the organ. For about 6 months I used much of my spare time (I worked a lot, too) building the electronics kits, etc.

One of the keyboards, which came by regular Parcel Post, was damaged so I received instructions to return it to Pratt Read for repair--in the meantime, I installed the good keyboard in the console, which had arrived in good order and played the organ with only one keyboard for a while. I had the repaired keyboard sent to my parents in Arizona as I was about to be rotated to a new assignment at Vandenberg AFB on the California coast. The supply officer found he could declare my organ as "recreational equipment" (since I had spent so much leisure time building it) and the Air Force did ship it from Labrador to California for me. At Vandenberg, I installed the repaired keyboard and had an intact organ for the first time. What a joy that was! From then on, the organ accompanied me on all subsequent service moves, going from Vandenberg AFB to an apartment in Torrance, California, while I earned my M.S. in Industrial Engineering at USC, then on to Teheran, Iran, where I spend 18 months as a Radar Advisor to the Imperial Iranian Air Force (while the Shah was in power). During this time Paul Havenstein, a young organist who was also stationed there, played my Recital Organ at Rudaki Hall (the Royal Opera House). Later he collaborated with me in producing the suggested stop list we sent to Schober (at Schober's request) for their 3 manual organ that they planned to field in the mid 1970's*. After Iran, back to Shaw AFB, South Carolina (near Sumter). I spent 4 years at Shaw AFB, during which time I failed the promotion to Major too many times and was discharged. I resigned my Regular commission and enlisted as a "Buck" Sergeant (E-4) at Scott AFB, Illinois for the purpose of maintaining eligibility for my USAF pension. My Recital Model accompanied me to Belleville, Illinois, at that time, then about 2 years later was shipped with me to Ramstein AB, Germany, where I spend the last 3 years of my career. I had changed specialties for my enlisted service--COBOL computer programmer, now. After final discharge as a Tech Sergeant (E-6), I retired the next day as a Captain (O-3) and eventually found my way to Dallas, Texas, where I hired in at Texas Instruments, Incorporated as a mainframe systems troubleshooter (using my COBOL skills). I have recently completed 20 years at TI as a COBOL programmer and expect to serve them for several more before retiring again. ("Part II" continued next issue)

*More about the Schober 3 manual in the next issue of ON

ADS

Disclaimer: Any deals, making of payments, receipt of payments or verifications are strictly your responsibility.

Schober Related Ads

Schober Parts Organ Available

Parts from a 4 manual mostly Schober organ (a treasure trove) are available FOR PICK-UP in Grand Rapids MI. (See article). Contact: Randy Vaneck, 4665 Grand River Drive NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49525, Tel.: 616-364-7408, Email: rvaneck@hotmail.com

Schober Recital For Sale

Schober Recital Model with combination action, LLS-10 Speaker, and 3 brand new Devtronix tone generators assembled but never installed. One new Devtronix Reverberation unit (installed). (1) +15 Volt DC Power Supply (never installed). Mass-Rowe tubular chimes 21 note with keyboard installed on organ. Asking $2000 for everything. You must provide pickup transportation. Reply to: Peter Westra (in Newton, NJ), Tel.: 973-383-9458, Email: woodenshoes70@hotmail.com

Schober Recital Available

Ray Hoag writes: "I have a Schober Recital organ that has been sitting in the corner of my basement for over 20 years waiting for me "to have time to restore it". It was in fair condition when I purchased it, but has not been plugged in for a long time. It's all there though (I think). I also have what appears to be a complete set of tech. manuals on this organ, with schematics. We are now selling our large home and moving into retirement. I have no idea as to price, but do not want to just throw it away. A minimal price or " to a good home" works for me, as long as whoever wants it can come and get it. It would be F.O.B. our home. Contact: Ray Hoag, Chelmsford, MA, Tel.: 978 256 2792, Email: rhoag@mitre.org

Circuit Board Wanted

Our member Doug Steeves is looking for a 11234A (Recital Swell) board. If you can help him contact him at: 11 Heather Drive, Moncton, N.B. E1E 1C6 CANADA, Tel.:506-382-7463, Email: steevda@nbnet.nb.ca

Circuit Board Wanted

Our member George Reim needs a 11235 (Theatre stop filter) circuit board for his Schober. If you can help him contact him at: Email: orgalier@juno.com, or if you don't have e-mail, contact me: Alexander Kruedener, the "head honcho" of the Schober Orphans.

Schober LSS-10A Speakers Available

I have a pair of LSS-10A speakers (located in Newtown, Connecticut) that I would like to find a good home for. They were built from the kit to the Schober specifications and are made of unfinished plywood. They have been in storage for years and should still be in good functional condition. Contact: John Glaberson, Tel.: 203-270-1857, E-mail: glaberson@ieee.org

That's it, Folks...

... for another issue. Any comments? Please write to the "Head Honcho", Alexander Kruedener, 161 East 89 Street, Apt. 4E, New York, NY 10128, (212) 831-0662, Kruedener@juno.com