

THE AMERICAN ORGANIST

APRIL 1992



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MIDLAND, TEXAS

M.P. MOLLER INC.

COVER FEATURE

From the Minister

When I arrived in Midland in November of 1985, the 1961 organ in the sanctuary had served the congregation well over the years. However, we were beginning to experience leather problems, and sulfides in the air created electrical problems as well. The original sanctuary design split the organ on either side of a broad, flat chancel. The old instrument often elicited "the organ is too loud" responses from some of our older members. So we planned a major renovation of the worship space, which also provided a wonderful opportunity to deal with the situation regarding the organ. The church was very fortunate to have on its staff, as minister of music, Lester Ackerman, who gave oversight to the design of the instrument. He ensured that it would be a true service instrument with concert capabilities, rather than simply a recital instrument from a certain period.

One of the things especially appreciated by the church was Moller's willingness to recycle portions of the existing organ in our new instrument. Coordination between the architects, the contractor, acoustical consultant, organbuilder, and music director was critical to the uniform appearance and wonderful sound produced upon completion.

Whereas we originally had an organ which was adequate, our new instrument has become an incredible asset to worship leadership.

Visually it provides an inspiring presence and tonally the results are not only pleasing, but spectacular. I miss it!

RUSSELL RITCHEL
Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church
Midland, Texas, 1985-1991
Now senior minister at
First Presbyterian Church
Winston-Salem, N.C.

From the Musician

In the fall of 1987, the session of First Presbyterian Church, Midland, Tex., authorized the formation of the Organ Committee. This committee was assigned the task of diagnosing the condition of the sanctuary organ, determining the cause of the instrument's mechanical problems, and making a recommendation to the session as to what course of action should be taken.

The organ had been in constant use for nearly three decades. It had served nobly, but was experiencing severe mechanical trouble. The four-manual, 49-rank instrument was built by the Moller Co. with a seven-rank antiphonal added later. It was determined that an atmospheric pollutant, common to this area of vast oil and natural gas production, was the principal cause of the organ's deterioration. Because of the importance of the organ to the worship life of this congregation, and the continued support of a vibrant music ministry the committee opted to consider only a complete rebuild or replacement of the organ.

It was during the initial study by the organ committee that the congregation voted to launch a five-year growth/operations plan. Included was a complete renovation of all facilities, including the sanctuary. The worship space was not ideal for a diverse music program. The sanctuary choir sang from the east transept, which also contained the organ console. The organ was chambered on either side of the chancel, with the Swell division nearly 60 feet from the choir. There were bal-



ance problems, no room for the growing choir, little space for instrumentalists, and unfavorable acoustics.

The organ committee invited several companies to examine the sanctuary and to make recommendations. Numerous trips were taken to explore the work of these builders. After careful consideration, it was determined that the new instrument should employ either mechanical or electric-slider action. This was in response to the committee's concern for simplicity of operation, longevity and the greatest musical worth.

Because the chancel area, even after considerable expansion, was found to be unable to accommodate both a 50-voice choir and a sizable tracker, electric-slider action was the only option. The M.P. Moller Co. was therefore contracted to provide a four-manual, 97-rank electric-slider instrument.

The organ has far exceeded our expectations. Opus 11796 is as tonally stunning as it is visually pleasing. A complete principal chorus is found on each of the main divisions; reed choruses are likewise available, as are cornets, properly placed in the tonal disposition. The result is an ensemble which is musically satisfying and cohesive. Considerable pipework was reused from the old instrument, most of which was rescaled, and all revoiced. Organists have commented that it is impossible to tell the new from the old. The two high-pressure reeds are stunning and have proven useful during festive occasions. The Doppelflöte and English Horn on the Solo and the Great Flute Harmonique are often requested by name by the congregation.

The sanctuary renovation and organ project of First Presbyterian Church, Midland, is a great success. This could only have been achieved with the cooperation of many! The Moller Co. has provided an instrument capable of playing all the repertoire and equally at ease with the demands of Sunday morning; Klepper-Marshall-King Associates,

White Plains, N.Y., devised an acoustic in which both music and speech can be heard with little artificial reinforcement; Ray Bailey Architects of Houston designed an environment which is aesthetically pleasing and sensitive to the demands of an active music ministry.

The organ committee, staff, session, and congregation of First Presbyterian are to be commended for providing the tools to minister to the West Texas area capably and with excellence well into the 21st century.

LESTER E. ACKERMAN

From the Builder

In January 1987, we were invited to visit First Presbyterian Church of Midland, Tex., by the newly appointed organist-choirmaster, Lester Ackerman, to inspect the organ situation. We found Mr. Ackerman to be an excellent musician with a vision of what should (and could) be done to improve the music ministry of this church. Midland was an oil boom town during a large part of this century. It is rather isolated but has a very busy airport because most people in West Texas fly in and out of Midland/Odessa to make contact with the rest of the world. President George Bush once lived there and many fortunes have been made in the Permian Basin, one of the richest oil fields on this continent.

The First Presbyterian Church was built in the 1950s and won a number of architectural awards when new. However, it had all of the typical mistakes of the 1950s: the acoustics were dry the organ was installed in side chambers in the chancel, the choir sat buried in a transept approximately 60 feet from the Swell division, and every piece of furniture was fastened down tight with no flexibility for worship. The instrument was a 1958 Moller designed and finished by Ernest White.

The organ had some good sounds but it was basically under-scaled for the room and suffered from unfortunate placement. Because of certain chemicals in the atmosphere and the prevalence of desert dust storms, there was also an above-normal deterioration of leather and electrical contacts. However, it was our opinion that not only the condition of the organ must be addressed but also problems with the acoustics, as well as organ and choir placement.

Fortunately the senior minister at that time, the Rev. Russell Ritchel, also had a very deep commitment to worship and the importance of the ministry of music; he set the tone for the project. John Wetzel and Lester Ackerman cochaired a strong committee, who did their homework in a very organized manner. This group led the congregation into a program that redesigned the worship space, relocated the end wall of the chancel to acquire enough space to place the organ on the long axis, moved the choir to the front center (immediately in front of the organ case in the chancel), tore out the ceiling and replaced it with a hard surface, removed all of the carpet except for aisle runners, and created flexible chancel space that allows for choir/orchestra/drama and other related activities.

A handsome case for the organ was designed by Howard Weaver, planning architect of M.P. Moller, which gave a finishing touch to the project, beautifully blending with the architecture of the room. The stoplist was drawn by this writer and Lester Ackerman (director of music), with input from Ronald Ellis (president of Moller) and Daniel Angerstein (tonal director of Moller). The tonal concept is what we term in the Moller Company "American Classic with a New Focus," embodying broad scales, richness, and brilliance. Daniel Angerstein and I later visited the church and studied the pipes from the old organ. We found that these pipes exhibited very high quality materials and

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craftsmanship, and that the mouths had low cut-ups. The most difficult problem was the small scales. By increasing their scale and moving pipes to different locations from their original positions in the tonal scheme, Daniel Angerstein found ways to save about 80% of the old pipework without artistic compromise.

The new organ of 100 ranks more than doubled the size of the previous instrument, but by rescaling and revoicing much of the old pipework, the church enjoys a comparably larger instrument for the money spent. Because of the chemicals in the air from the oil refining operations in the area, we found the life of the leather to be shorter than in most parts of the country. For this reason the committee decided to replace the electro-pneumatic chests with electro-mechanical slider action, except for the high pressure Solo division and some few unit stops.

The nave is long and narrow which led us to recommend an Antiphonal to assist in the support of congregational singing. The new Antiphonal, as installed, is comprised of three divisions—Great, Swell, and Pedal. A second console is planned for future installation in the balcony which will control the Antiphonal, making it feasible to utilize the balcony for choirs. Through blind pistons, this console would also play the chancel organ.

Installation occurred under the direction of John Ballard, Peter Chappell, and Moller factory personnel. Daniel Angerstein supervised the tonal finishing, much of which he executed personally. We at Moller are very proud of the success of this organ and hope that many will have a chance to experience and enjoy its beauty. We congratulate the organ committee and the church on their diligence, persistence, and commitment. They are responsible not only for a successful organ, but also for leading in the creation of an organ and a worship space which provide exceptionally satisfying weekly worship experiences.

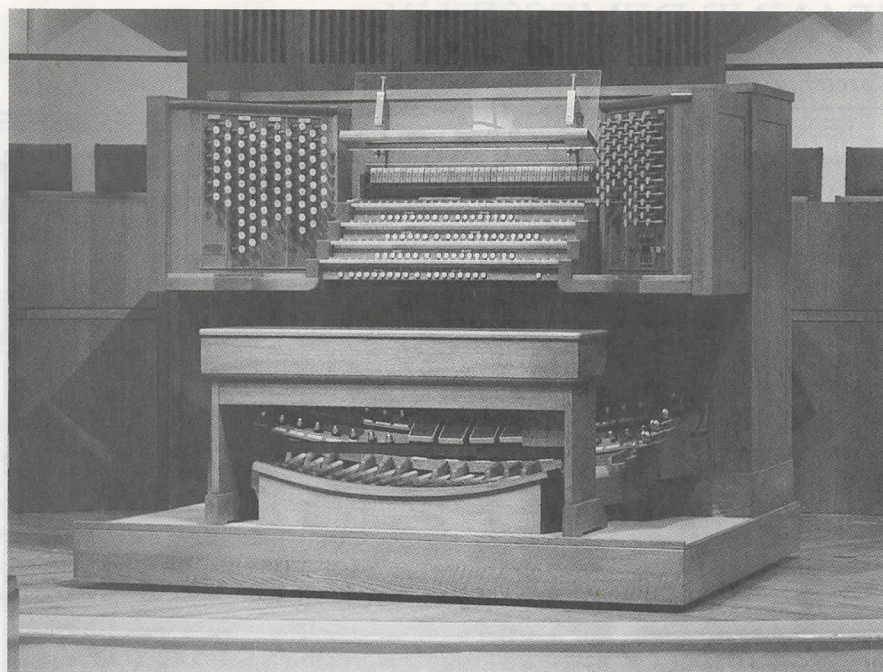
WILLIAM E. GRAY JR.
Associate Director of Design and Sales
M.P. Moller Inc.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MIDLAND, TEXAS M.P. MOLLER INC. HAGERSTOWN, MARYLAND

GREAT (I)

- 16 Principal
- 16 Pommer
- 8 Principal
- 8 Bourdon
- 8 Salicional
- 8 Flute Harmonique
- 4 Octave
- 4 Flute
- 2½ Twelfth
- 2 Super Octave
- 2 Waldflöte
- 1½ Seventeenth
- 4 Fourniture IV
- 4 Cymbel IV
- 4 Mounted Cornet V
- 16 Kontra Trompete
- 8 Trompete
- 4 Klarine
- Chimes

The console is appointed with a full complement of couplers, adjustable combinations (solid state, 32 memories), and reversibles.



SWELL (III)

- 16 Flûte à Cheminée
- 8 Geigen Principal
- 8 Flûte à Cheminée
- 8 Viole de Gambe
- 8 Viole Celeste
- 8 Flûte Conique
- 8 Flûte Celeste (TC)
- 4 Principal
- 4 Flûte à Bec
- 2½ Nazard
- 2 Doublette
- 2 Quarte de Nazard
- 1½ Tierce
- 4 Plein Jeu IV
- 8 Cymbale III
- 16 Basson
- 8 Trompette
- 8 Hautbois
- 8 Voix Humaine
- 4 Clairon
- Tremolo

POSITIV (I)

- 16 Erzähler
- 8 Principal
- 8 Bourdon
- 8 Erzähler
- 8 Erzähler Celeste
- 4 Principal
- 4 Koppelflöte
- 2½ Rohr Nasat
- 2 Octave
- 2 Blockflöte
- 1½ Tierce
- 1½ Larigot
- 1 Siffloite
- 4 Scharff IV
- 16 Douçaine
- 8 Trompette
- 8 Cromorne
- 4 Chalmesau
- Tremolo
- Zimbelstern
- 8 Longhorn

SOLO (IV)

- 8 Doppelflöte
- 8 Gambe
- 8 Voix Celeste
- Cornet V
- 8 Tuba Major
- 8 Clarinet
- 8 English Horn
- 8 Longhorn
- Tremolo
- Chimes

ANTIPHONAL GREAT (II)

- 16 Bourdon
- 8 Principal
- 8 Bourdon
- 4 Octave
- 4 Gedeckt
- 2 Flute
- Sesquialtera II
- Mixture III-IV
- 8 Trompette

ANTIPHONAL SWELL (III)

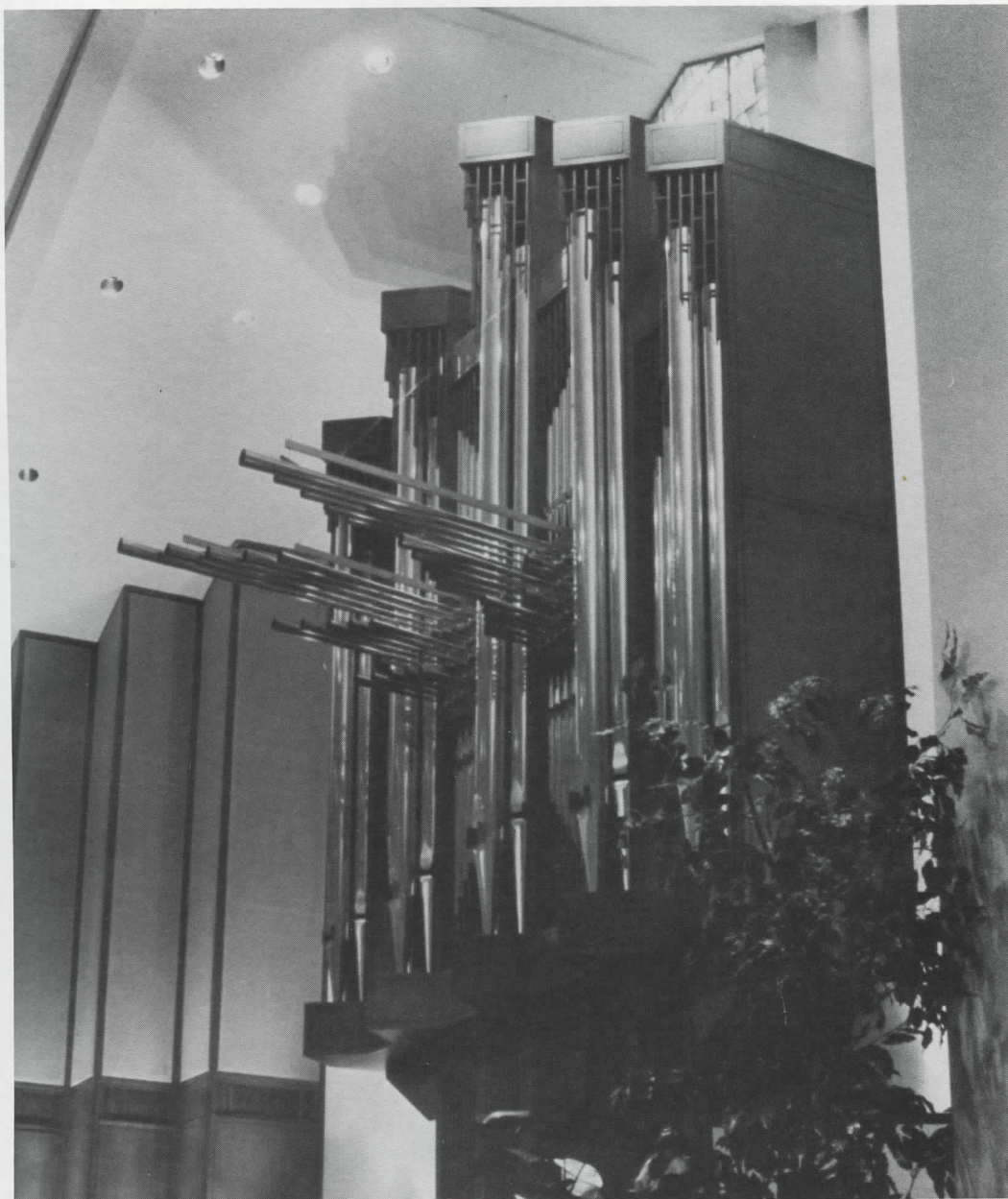
- 8 Spitzprincipal
- 8 Rohrflöte
- 8 Gemshorn
- 8 Gemshorn Celeste
- 4 Principal
- 4 Rohrflöte
- 2 Principal
- 1½ Larigot
- 1 Octave
- 16 Contre Trompette
- 8 Trompette
- 4 Clarion
- Tremolo

PEDAL

- 32 Contre Basse
- 32 Untersatz
- 16 Contre Basse
- 16 Sub Bass
- 16 Principal
- 16 Pommer
- 16 Flûte à Cheminée
- 16 Erzähler
- 8 Octave
- 8 Spitzflöte
- 8 Bass Flute
- 8 Salicional
- 8 Pommer Flute
- 4 Choralbass
- 4 Spitzflöte
- 4 Bourdon
- 4 Flûte Cantique
- 4 Fourniture IV
- 4 Cymbale IV
- 32 Reed Cornet
- 32 Contre Bombarde
- 16 Bombarde
- 16 Kontra Trompette
- 16 Basson
- 8 Trompette
- 8 Trompette
- 4 Clarion
- 4 Cromorne

ANTIPHONAL PEDAL

- 32 Resultant
- 16 Sub Bass
- 16 Bourdon
- 8 Octave
- 8 Bourdon
- 4 Choralbass
- 4 Flute
- Mixture III
- 32 Reed Cornet
- 16 Contre Trompette
- 8 Trompette
- 4 Clairon



The First Presbyterian Church
Midland, TX
Opus 11796
IV/100
Lester Ackerman, Organist

MOLLER

M. P. MOLLER, INC. PIPE ORGANS

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