

## Pipe Organ, Mosaic Make “Wondrous Love”



by **Diana Balazs**

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Nearly 50 years ago, the late John Pritzlaff and his wife, Mary Dell, donated the original organ for the sanctuary of their church, St. Barnabas on the Desert Episcopal in Paradise Valley. The 2,768-pipe organ dedicated in February 1962 was built by Casavant Frères of Quebec, a company that began making the sacred instruments in 1879.

A large tapestry, “Ode to Joy,” was later added to screen the organ, but still allow sound to pass through. However, sunlight exposure over the decades caused the tapestry fabric to deteriorate. And the organ was in need of major repair, as well.

A new organ combined with a mosaic glass art project replaced the old organ and tapestry as part of a newly completed \$4.5 million renovation of the sanctuary.

Scottsdale resident Ann Hott, the church’s director of operations, said the completed project speaks of the need to set aside a special place for worship. She called the renovation “one of the most amazing experiences of my life.”

## Renovation Blends Music and Art

Mary Dell Pritzlaff pledged \$1 million to replace the original organ in memory of her husband, a former state legislator and ambassador to Malta who died in 2005. She said the new organ and artwork blend well and are beautifully done. “It’s a brand-new face. It’s just all a fresh new face,” she said.

The church’s Memorial Acceptance and Fine Arts Committee took on the task of combining music with art. It selected Toronto-based artist Sarah Hall, known for her stained glass and other church projects.

This is Hall’s second commission for St. Barnabas. In 2006, she completed a series of 36 clerestory stained glass windows called “Desert Crossings,” in the church’s Gwen Harris Music Building.

Her new work, “Wondrous Love,” combines the organ with multicolored mosaic glass, metal and wood artwork. The installation incorporates some of the larger organ pipes. It allows sound to pass through and contains thousands of tiles handmade by the Glasmalerei Peters Studios, a family-run art glass studio in Paderborn, Germany.

“This integrating of art and the organ pipes, in terms of our research, has really not been done before. We could not find where organ pipes actually transcend their function as pipes and become part of artwork,” said Scottsdale resident Nancy Harvey, who oversaw the artist search and design. Harvey was stunned when the work was finished. “I was just thrilled. I mean, there was just a sense of reverence, of holiness,” she said.

Peggy Iacobelli of Scottsdale chairs the Memorial Acceptance and Fine Arts Committee. She said every project Hall has done is different. “We originally were attracted to her work because of her ability to have each piece, each area, each project that she works on be unique,” she said.



## Project Evokes Holy Spirit

The Rev. Jim Clark is rector of St. Barnabas. When the committee was in the planning stages of the renovation, it asked Clark for some visionary guidance.

He said the world's major religions are looking at common ways to understand and communicate with God for the betterment of the human race. That includes the theme of spirit.

"I recommended to the committee that they talk in terms of something that would be symbolic of the presence of the Holy Spirit, which is the more Christian way of saying spirit," Clark said.

The committee took that to heart and worked with Hall to convey the theme.

The artwork is suggestive of a dove, but also of the movement of creation, wind and beauty, Clark said. The organ is not only known for its sacred sound and beauty, but also embodies the goodness of God and life, he added. "It helps me be present to God," Clark said.

The St. Barnabas project was exceptional because of the existing sanctuary. Hall had to bring her artistic style but be sensitive to what was already there. She said she is drawn to creating artwork that takes people on a spiritual journey. "Wondrous Love" is no exception.

"For me, I had the idea of the baptism in the water below and then the earth kind of on which we stand. Then it kind of opens up both so that this sort of dove-like shape settles on the earth and this flower-like shape reveals," Hall said.

There are thousands of mosaic tiles, including reclaimed porcelain tiles made by Paradise Valley artists Lee Porzio and Allen Ditson, whose designs were used when the sanctuary was built. They also designed the tapestry, which is in storage.

The old organ was dismantled and recycled. The new larger organ with its 2,929 pipes also was built by Casavant Frères. The eastern end of the sanctuary was expanded to accommodate the organ and to add room for the choir and musicians.

The sanctuary renovation, which began in January, added more space to accommodate wheelchairs, an upgraded cooling and heating system, energy-efficient lighting, double-pane window glass, improved acoustics, and new audio and video systems. The church is completing its capital fundraising campaign for the project.

