

Pipe Organ, Mosaic make “Wondrous Love”

By Diana Balazs

Scottsdale Republic, October 16, 2010

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 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. 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 & 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 all just a fresh, brand-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 award winning stained glass windows called “Desert Crossings” in the church’s Gwen Harris Music Building. Her new work, “Wondrous Love”, combines an organ with multicolored mosaic glass, metal and woodworking. The installation incorporates some of the larger organ pipes. It allows sound to pass through and contains 80,000 hand-made glass tiles created at Glasmalerei Peters, a family-run art glass studio in Paderborn, Germany.



“This integration of art and organ pipes, in terms of our research, has really never been done before. We could not find where organ pipes actually transcend their function as pipes and become part of the artwork” said Scottsdale resident Nancy Harvey, who oversaw the artist search and design committee.

Harvey was stunned when the work was finished. “I was just thrilled. There was such a sense of reverence, of holiness,” she said.

Peggy Iacobelli of Scottsdale chairs the Memorial Acceptance and Fine Art Committee. She said every project Hall has done is different. “We were originally attracted to her work because of her ability to have each piece, every 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 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 challenging because of the existing sanctuary. Hall had to bring her own 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.

“I had the idea of Baptism in the water below and above this the earth on which we stand. The composition then unfolds so that the dove-like shape can settle on the earth and a flower-like shape is revealed,” Hall said.

There are 80,000 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 “Ode to Joy” tapestry which is presently in storage.

The old organ was dismantled and recycled. The new larger organ with its 2,929 pipes was also built by Casavant. The eastern end of the sanctuary was expanded to accommodate the organ and 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 glazed windows, improved acoustics and a new audio video system. The church is completing its capital fundraising campaign.