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A Virtual Organ for Trinity's Historic Sanctuary

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The vestry of Trinity Church Wall Street has affirmed Trinity's long-term commitment to its Marshall & Ogletree virtual pipe organ by authorizing the disposition of the parts from its decommissioned Aeolian-Skinner pipe organ. As a further endorsement of Trinity's virtual pipe organ, the vestry also announced that it would begin a fundraising effort to acquire a similar state-of-the-art organ for St. Paul's Chapel, to replace its decommissioned instrument. Both pipe organs were covered with debris and sustained heavy damage when the World Trade Center towers fell on September 11, 2001.

The Rev. Dr. James H. Cooper, Rector of Trinity Church/St. Paul's Chapel said, "Our virtual pipe organ, which started out as a practical, interim solution in the wake of a terrible tragedy, has proven itself to be an instrument capable of filling our sanctuary with awesome and inspiring music. We are hopeful that once again, St. Paul's Chapel too will be host to such joyful noise."

After coming to terms with the dust, ash, and smoke that choked its instrument, Trinity Church made the controversial decision to purchase a virtual pipe organ. To purists, the notion of an instrument of the computer age finding a home in venerable Trinity Church was a radical one. However, expediency required a creative solution, given the gestation period required to install a new pipe organ, as well its tremendous expense. Moreover, the technology had evolved.

Enter Douglas Marshall and David Ogletree, classically trained concert organists whose extensive knowledge and interest in computers and high quality audio included their desire to design and produce a pipeless organ that would approach—and possibly even exceed—the musical quality of the world's greatest pipe organs. When Trinity's Music Director, Owen Burdick, auditioned the Marshall & Ogletree prototype instrument, he knew its majestic sounds were perfect for Trinity Church. That moment marked the beginning of the "Opus 1" organ's serious development, to meet the 21st century needs of a 19th century church facility.

According to Dr. Burdick, "Trinity Church is proud of its role in developing the first major new instrument of our time. A virtual pipe organ could only exist in this new century because of the continuing exponential growth of computer speed and memory. With a full range of tonal quality that is unrivaled, its development is not only historic, but the perfect answer for a church of our design and mission."

Installed in 2003, Trinity's Marshall & Ogletree "Opus 1" instrument is actually two 85-stop organs composed of two consoles, a 2,000 pound tone generation system, two audio systems, and proprietary software operating on the Linux platform. In the more than nearly four years since it was installed, it has played efficiently and well, and has gone through many changes and improvements as Marshall & Ogletree

has further developed its technology. The organ is able reproduce the sound of any rank of pipes that has ever been recorded. It can be voiced to reflect the aural qualities of European and American classical and Romantic organs, and be instantly re-tuned to early historical temperaments that no pipe organ can.

Still, the test of any instrument is in concert performance. Dr. Burdick said, "Our virtual pipe organ was played and judged by experts during the summer of 2006, when we invited six concert organists to give hour-long recitals on the instrument for our International Organ Festival. These six consummate musicians were unanimous in praising the instrument."