St Mary's Organ

All about how to use the organ at St Mary's with the OrganAssist software

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Introduction

As part of the refurbishment in 2020, the link between the console and the pipes was replaced with a digital system. There are now some MIDI connectors on the front of the console which allow the organ to be connected to various other digital music equipment.

We have been exploring the options and have discovered a piece of software called OrganAssist which is specifically designed to control MIDI-enabled pipe organs. This allows us to record human performances from the organ onto the laptop, and to play them back identically.

We hope to build up a library of hymns over time, so they can be played in services when there is no organist available.

Set up

This page explains how to set up the organ to work with the laptop, each time you want to use it.

1. Turn on the laptop, and log onto the *Organ* account - no password needed.
2. Ensure the *WIDI Bud Pro* dongle is connected to a USB port on the side of the laptop and is slowly flashing blue
   WIDI.BUD_.Pro_.07.png
3. The “other end” of the wireless link stays permanently connected to the organ so there is no need to touch the MIDI sockets on the organ console. We are no longer using the USB cable.
4. There are two toggle switches next to the MIDI sockets on the organ. Ensure the left hand one (*Stops On*) is **DOWN** and the right hand one (*Great Omni Receive*) is **UP**. These should not be changed.
5. Turn on the organ blower. Ensure all stops are **off** and the swell pedal is fully **closed**. The flashing light on the WIDI Bud Pro should stay on without flashing once it is connected to the organ.
6. Open OrganAssist and acknowledge the message about turning the stops off by clicking **OK**.
   icon-small.png
7. Test the link by clicking one of of the stops on the screen to engage it, then clicking on one of the manuals to play a note. You should hear a note. Conversely, play some notes on the physical manual and you should see the corresponding keys flash green on the screen.
   organscreen.png

Playback

This page explains how to play back recordings.

Firstly, ensure you have a working connection as on the Set up page

> Do not click on anything else while a recording is playing back. It may halt the playback!

The good way

This is the recommended way of finding recordings to play back.

1. At the top of the OrganAssist screen, click *Library*
2. A new Library window will open. You will see a list of recordings currently in the library, along with full information.
3. Click one to select it, and then click the green *Play* button at the bottom of the screen.

playback-good.png

The quick way

There is also a shortcut way to play a single recording.

1. At the bottom of the OrganAssist screen, there is a drop-down scroll box. Click this and scroll through to find the recording by its title alone.
2. Click one to select it, and then click the green *Play* button at the bottom of the screen.

playback-quick.png

Recording

How to make recordings on the organ

Capturing a recording

This page is about capturing a human performance for later playback

1. Firstly ensure you have a working connection as described on the set up page
2. At the bottom of the OrganAssist screen, click the red *Record* button
3. Play the organ as usual. All of your key presses, stop changes and swell expression pedal changes will be recorded.
4. Click the *Stop* button when you've finished. You can stop after just one piece, or after a whole service. OrganAssist will detect periods of silence between pieces, and automatically pause itself, and cut up your recording into segments. So you can record a whole service and you won't get an hour-long recording of mostly silence.

Archiving a recording

Once you have captured one or more recordings, it is essential to archive them.

1. When you make a new recording, an recording will appear in the Library, with a numerical “title” derived from the date and time. This can now be played back exactly as it was performed.
2. If you recorded a whole service, OrganAssist will split it up and create several recordings in the Library
3. Set the correct title for your recording by double-clicking in the empty spaces under the *Filename*, *Title* and *Composer* headings and entering some text. *Filename* and *Title* should be the same. If your recording is a hymn, prefix its title with its number. For example, *120 Thine be the glory*.
4. Allocate your recording to a folder by clicking in the empty space under the *Folder* heading and selecting a folder. There are standard folders like NEH for *New English Hymnal*, most anthems are arranged by composer's surname, but there are also individual named folders for each person who may want to experiment. If you need to add more folders, ask Jonathan to add them.
5. Delete unwanted recordings by right-clicking and choosing *Delete Track*.

playback-good.png

Backing up

It's a good idea to back up after adding a recording.

The laptop is set up to automatically back up whenever it has an internet connection. Unfortunately there is no internet connection at church, so the best way is to use your phone as a mobile hotspot and temporarily connect the laptop to your phone.

The backup software is called ownCloud and should notice that you're online in a minute, and back up the changes to the OrganAssist files. You should see one or more popup messages like this one. When they've stopped, it's probably finished the backup and you can disconnect your phone.

owncloud.png

Troubleshooting

The most likely cause of any problem is the laptop being unable to communicate with the organ.

1. First, check everything is as described in the **set up** section. Turn everything off and start again.
2. If this still doesn’t work, at the top of the OrganAssist screen, click on *Tools* and then click *PC MIDI Setup* to check the settings.
3. Ensure *WIDI Bud Pro* is selected as both the Organ In and Organ Out device and click OK.
4. If you're still stuck, contact Jonathan

Importing music

This page explains how to import digital "sheet music" for automatic playback.

This is an advanced topic with lots of room for deviations, so this is more like a guide.

Obtaining sheet music

The first step will be to obtain your source music. I recommend searching on MuseScore for suitable scores. It is also possible to import general MIDI files (with a *.mid file extension) but these are often harder to work with. There is a huge collection of choral music in MIDI format at the CPDL.

Preparing the score

Traditional organ music for playing by humans is generally on two or three staves. Sometimes there are annotations to tell the organist whether a particular part should be played on a particular division, and sometimes it is left to the organist's discretion.

When controlling the organ via OrganAssist, the two manuals and pedal board count as three separate instruments, and the score must be arranged as such. You will need a treble and bass clef for the Swell division, a treble and bass clef for the Great division, and a bass clef for the Pedal division. You can omit the Swell division if there is no part required for it, or if you will be playing the Swell with a coupler.

I recommend doing all the arrangement in MuseScore, which is free notation software. Finally, export your score in MIDI format.

Import into OrganAssist

You can import your crafted MIDI file into OrganAssist through the Library screen. From the File menu, choose *Import General MIDI File*.

Browse and find your MIDI file. If your score was arranged in MuseScore, be sure to tick the MuseScore box.

import-browse.png

You will be prompted to match each staff from your score to one of the divisions. Then you can click OK and your score will be imported into the Library.

import-map.png

Be sure to set a meaningful folder, title, composer, etc.

Setting the registration

The last thing you need to do is set the stops. Currently, if you played back your newly imported recording, it would play the keys but make no sound!

Setting the registration is done by finding the score, right-clicking it, and clicking Edit. You will see a graphical representation of the notes across the screen, colour-coded for their division. In the top half of the screen, you can right-click and add stop changes at various points. You can drag them around.

You can also change the volume in the top half. Setting the volume on the Swell division will tell OrganAssist to operate the swell box. Setting the volume on the Great and Pedal divisions will have no effect.

registration.png

When you're finished, just close the editor and changes will automatically be saved.