

PC and Organ Simulation Program

There are a number of what might be called "virtual organ" programs available on the Web. Some are free, others are for sale. Here is a brief rundown:

- Hauptwerk -- This is probably the most elaborate (and most expensive). It features software samples of every pipe in an organ, and plays these samples directly from RAM. Thus it needs the most powerful hardware of the group. Version 2 of the program can be used for either classical/church organs, or for a theatre organ. Sample organ sets are available from a number of other suppliers. I am planning to use this program, but I also intend to try out some of the others below. Details are at <http://www.crumhorn-labs.com/>.
- MyOrgan -- Like Hauptwerk, MyOrgan also plays samples directly from RAM, but this is a free program. The company claims that it will use the same organ pipe files as Hauptwerk version 1, but that it will run on a smaller and slower computer. Details are at <http://www.kloria.com/software/>
- Toccata -- Another program that uses Hauptwerk version 1 files, and seems to require a less ambitious computer system. Finally released after a long delay, details are at <http://www.vlabs-online.com/>
- Prog Organ -- uses sound fonts in the sound card. Some of the sample mp3 files are rather nice. Details can be found at http://www.pykett.org.uk/prog_organ.htm
- JOrgan -- This is more of a control program than a sound generator. It relies on sound card or external MIDI modules for its sounds. Details are at <http://jorgan.sourceforge.net/>
- MidiTzer -- A theatre organ simulator that uses sound fonts loaded into the sound card. Details are at <http://www.theatreorgans.com/jimhenry/>
- GENPO -- A Linux organ program that uses sound fonts in the sound card. Details are at <http://genpo.sourceforge.net/>

There are some major differences between the programs -- not just in the way they sound, but also how they work and what hardware they require. The following comments are based on AFAIK -- As Far As I Know -- and you should carefully read the descriptions in each program's web pages before making a decision, as some of these are not compatible with others. These are just some of the areas of difference:

1. Reverb. Some of these programs require external reverb devices, some do not.
2. Stops and pistons. Stops and combinations on some of these programs must be selected with a mouse from a screen, others require input via a MIDI signal, and some (such as Hauptwerk) allow both. In other words, some of these require a monitor and mouse at the organ, while on others the computer can be hidden and all operation done from the organ console controls.
3. Swell shoes. Some of these programs use digital swell shoe inputs, while others are analog. For example, ProgOrgan uses only an analog swell shoe volume control. While my MD-2 boards provide analog control, I haven't yet written the software for that part.
4. Some of these programs use non-standard hardware. For example, the ProgOrgan manual contains diagrams for its own interfacing circuitry -- if you go that route, you will be incompatible with the rest of the world. While ProgOrgan will also work with standard MIDI inputs for the keyboards and pedals, it uses a rather unusual message format for stops and pistons which is not compatible with standard MIDI. Some software changes would be needed to allow my MD-1 board to control the stops and pistons, although it is possible to set up the software so it will work with ProgOrgan as well as other systems.