

HYMN BOOK PRELUDES

Simple improvisations using the Hymn Book

Simple Tools for creating preludes from the hymns:

1. Solo out the soprano (loco, octave above or below)...the most useful and pleasing; vary your registration.
2. Solo out the tenor (make sure the tenor “melody” is worth hearing).
3. Use passing tones anywhere, but especially in the bass.
4. Play the alto above the soprano line (don't fuss; write it out if you need to).
5. Use a pedal point.....it can work in a whole lot of places.
6. Suspensions at the cadences are always beautiful. Experiment with them.
7. Manuals only—4 parts or 3 parts (women's section), everything an octave above.
8. Change keys—easy modulations, or common tone pivot. Make use of the old hymnal for higher keys.
9. A deceptive cadence combined with repeat of last phrase is easy. Just go to the vi chord, which is only one step up from the V you just left.
10. Use augmentation in many places (to augment/to enlarge: quarter notes become half notes, etc.)
11. Play it slower or faster. Don't be locked into a certain tempo or “sound.” Hymns that are usually fast or loud (or both) can still be reverent if played slower and softer, with feeling.
12. Don't be afraid to alter some harmonies if you feel like it.
13. Mix some like hymns together in one medley: one verse of the first one, 2 verses of the second one, and going back to 1-2 verses of the first one; such as: the two Abide's together (#165-#166); the two 23rd Psalms (#108-#109); 2 prayer pieces (#144-#145), etc. Caution: don't “string things together.” A medley is different. Stringing everything together does not give the listener a chance to breathe, and they feel it.
14. Also mix hymns with Children's Songs in the same way. Pay attention to keys, styles, etc. Listen!
15. Stretch at the high point of the phrases and at the cadences; use rubato; make the text sing; play slower.....milk it, in other words!
16. Make you own introductions and interludes: use a rhythmic or melodic motive and play around with it or do some unison alternating with 4 part harmony, or use a terrace technique.
17. Study published hymn preludes. Study how they are put together to get some ideas.
18. Listen to what you are producing. How does it sound in the hall? If your organ doesn't have a way of recording your playing, learn to listen as if you were someone sitting in the back corner. Do you like what you are hearing?
19. Be sensitive with your registration and dynamic levels. Too little or too much are equally poor. Strident stops can be warmed with trem. or celeste. Close the box. Make them listen. Play slower.
20. Prepare, prepare, prepare.....build your foundation. Then when you are in need, your previous work will serve you well. You never know when an unusual circumstance will arise.