

EMERGING PREPAREDNESS FOR PIANISTS

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Pianists who have had no training on the organ are often asked to play the organ for church services. It is sometimes assumed that all keyboard instruments are the same and that if you can play the piano, you can also play the organ. Although there are some similarities between the piano and the organ, there are important and distinct differences. Often the service of a pianist is needed to play the organ for church services because a trained organist may not be available.

Service to others is an important part of one's personal commitment. Playing for church worship services is one way to serve others. Pianists should be encouraged to accept this responsibility and use it not only as an opportunity for service, but also for developing their talents.

Stopgap Measures for Pianists

If you (as a pianist) are called to play for church services, there are some things you can do quickly. These are considered *stopgap* measures and pianists should be encouraged to use them only as such. (They should never become the norm.)

1. *Play the hymn as a duet, with two players at one organ.*

One person will play the soprano part with his/her right hand and the alto part with his/her left hand. The other person will play the tenor part with his/her right hand and the bass part with his/her left hand. Play the hymn in a smooth and singing style. Separate the repeated notes and make breaks at the end of phrases to simulate the taking of a breath. Play rhythmically. Pay attention to the words and feel the meaning and inflection of the phrases. Think and perform lines as a choir would sing them.

2. *Play the melody of the hymn in octaves.*

Play in a smooth and singing style. Make breaks or simulate taking a breath at the end of the phrases. Play rhythmically as if you are part of an orchestra or other ensemble. Pay attention to the words and try to feel the meaning and inflection of the phrases.

3. *Play the melody of the hymn with the right hand and the bass with the left hand.*

Omit the alto and tenor parts. Playing all four parts of the hymn on the organ in a smooth and singing style require an adequate organ technique. Playing just the soprano and bass will sound different to you; but you will be able to project the rhythm, tempo, and the singing style much easier and smoother. Don't hesitate to use the soprano-and-bass-only-style. The rhythm and drive are very important to the success of congregational singing. This simplification will allow you to give your attention and effort to rhythm, tempo, and the singing style of the hymn.

4. *Use Tonic and Dominant Pedal Notes.*

Using the pedal without adequate training is problematic and is often intimidating. A simple way to begin might be to place the left foot over the dominant note and the right foot over the tonic note. Then at the various cadences, add the proper tonic or dominant note in the pedal.

5. *Omit the Tenor Voice.*

Another possibility would be to play the soprano and alto notes with the right hand and the bass only with the left hand, omitting the tenor part. Playing three parts in a smooth and flowing manner with the hands only is easier than playing four parts. Again, the important point is the continuity, rhythmic drive, and flow of the hymn.

6. *Omit the Tenor Voice and Use Tonic and Dominant Pedal Notes.*

This is the same as number 5, with the addition of the pedal at cadences. Keep the left foot positioned over the dominant note and the right foot positioned over the tonic note. Play the appropriate note at the cadences.

7. *Hymns Made Easy*

A useful resource for the pianist who is required to play hymns at the organ is *Hymns Made Easy*, available as a free online download at www.lds.org/cm/. It is also available for purchase from Church distribution centers and from www.ldscatalog.com. The benefit of this volume for the beginning organist is found in the simplified accompaniment which allows for smooth, flowing lines.

Basics of Hymn Playing

While stopgap measures are useful in emergency situations it would be most effective for a pianist to acquire some basic organ skills in advance.

Hymns are written for the human voice, not for the organ or the piano. Most hymns will be played with both hands on the Great manual (lower keyboard on a two manual organ). The right hand will usually play the soprano and alto parts, the left hand will play the tenor part and the feet will play the bass part on the pedal. Legato touch is the most standard touch for the playing of hymns. Repeated notes are an important factor to the rhythm of the hymn.

Part Playing

- Think and perform lines as a choir would sing them.
- Be able to play legato and repeated notes at the same time. Do not let them influence each other.
- In hymns of a sustained character, it may be necessary to add ties between two repeated notes.

Phrasing

- Phrasing can be compared to punctuation in written sentences.
- A phrase has direction toward a cadence, which gives a feeling of arrival.
- Play the hymn by feeling and sensing the phrases; insert a rest at the end of phrases.

Fingering and Pedaling

- Devise an efficient fingering and pedaling and mark enough in your hymnbook so that you can play any phrase the same every time.

Text

- Study the text, determine its meaning. Great hymn playing is projecting the spirit and meaning of the text.

Practice Methodically

- Practice each part alone and then use the seven-step method, or the fifteen-step method, or hands alone, then pedal alone, and then together.
- Use various combinations and learn the hymn to perfection.

Registration

- Select a registration that reflects the spirit and mood of the text, and will encourage and support the congregation.