

ADVANCED HYMN PLAYING
Motivating From the Bench--Inspiring Hymn Playing Techniques
AGO Super Saturday Organ Workshop 2015
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Manuals Only

In addition to learning to play with S-A in the right and only the Tenor voice in the left, also learn to play every hymn with all four parts in hands or the skill won't be there when you need it. For meditative hymns, one verse played manuals only is a nice change.

Solo Tenor Voice (loco or octave above) or Solo Soprano Voice (loco, octave above or octave below)

For Preludes, use any solo/accompaniment registration. For ease in congregational singing, in lieu of a piston change, keep solo line (right hand for soprano solo, left hand for tenor solo) on loudest manual (Great) and move accompaniment hand to Swell. This means you need to have a substantial registration on the Swell, coupled to the Great, which is better anyway if you want to have a supportive singing registration.

For tenor solo, use for only a portion of the verse and only on a hymn with a nice melodic tenor part.

Alto Above

Use for only a portion of a verse, not entire hymn. Hymns whose S-A parts are in 6ths or 3rds work especially well, such as: Hymn #121 Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd.

Passing Tones/Neighbor Tones

Both are used to fill in the space between two other tones—usually alto, tenor or bass.

A Passing Tone is usually filling in between 3rds, especially in the bass part but also works on inner voices.

A Neighbor Tone is used to embellish a single tone, going above or below the note and back again.

Note: *I never use the neighbor tone on the soprano part in a congregational setting. Since all the parts relate to and listen to the soprano melody, I try to keep it uncluttered. However, in a prelude situation, it is a very usable technique for hiding a mistake. If I play the solo melody wrong, I just do a turn around it or correct it as if it had been an appoggiatura. Then I might repeat that in the next phrase so that the listener thinks it was meant to be that way....an embellishment of the melodic line. :)*

Pedal Point

A sustained note, usually in the pedal and can be either the tonic or dominant note (most common).

Note: #26 Joseph Smith's First Prayer, 3rd line, has a repeated bass note for the duration of the line. To tie this note is not a true pedal point, although it can be made to sound like a pedal point by carrying the bass note over from the previous measure. This changes it's character from just a tied bass to a pedal point.

Pedal Point can be used effectively in several Sacramental hymns where there is no bass and tenor, such as the center section of Hymn #178 O Lord of Hosts (also try playing the SA in both hands, an octave apart).

Creative Hymn Introductions

What is the purpose of the Hymn Introduction?.....to introduce the hymn and prepare the congregation to sing.

You set the mood for the hymn with your introduction. This is where inspiring hymn playing begins.

A few ideas:

1. Begin with a unison melody line, single or in octaves. This calls attention to the hymn, helps when you are nervous about your beginning, helps the beginning of meditative hymns.
2. Begin with mirrored 3rds in both hands .
3. Begin with a "horn call."
4. Begin with manuals only, 3 or 4 part texture, adding pedal at end.
5. Terrace: start with soprano, add alto, then add tenor, then add bass in manual and/or pedal. Other forms of terracing involve beginning with Swell-manual only, then adding pedal, then moving right hand to Great to solo soprano, lastly both hands on Great.
6. Pedal Point and passing tones with any of the above.

Articulation

How you *play* the notes, keeping the soprano line *always exactly as it should be* with the correct legato and lifting, along with appropriate *combinations* of tying, legato and lifting in the inner voices will make a big difference. It can bring clarity and spark to a big hymn and enhance the melody line of a meditative hymn.

Soprano/Tenor Switch

This seemingly complicated technique is simply a combination of the soloing out the soprano an octave below with the left hand while playing the tenor and alto in the right, tenor on top. If this technique gives the sound you like for any given verse but you find it awkward or mind boggling, write it out.

Suspensions

The suspension holds on to, or “suspends” a note after the other parts have moved on to the next chord. It is easiest to use in the tenor line when the tenor note is moving in a downward direction at a cadence. It can also be used in the alto part in the same way.

To see an example of a suspension already written in, see Hymn #192 He Died! The Great Redeemer Died, last measure. *Suspensions are more appropriate in a prelude setting than for use with the congregation.*

Free accompaniments

Level 5 suggests the use of published free accompaniments and Level 6 suggests creating your own.

Note: Don't confuse the congregation; enhance the hymn and encourage singing, but don't get so elaborate that you call attention to yourself instead of the hymn and its doctrine. Believe it or not, some altos and basses don't know how to sing the melody and get confused when they can't find their part. Always keep that in mind.

Using an interlude? First, decide **WHY** you need or want one. Whether you are doing a short modulation to a new key or setting up the free harmony, KEEP GOING so as not to confuse anyone.

Creating your own? Use any of the above techniques as a beginning point, coupled with a few slight harmony changes. You're on your way.

Published Free Accompaniments I use often (also useful for preludes and postludes):

Creative Hymn Accompaniments, Vol. 1-2-3 by Gerhard Krapf (Published by Sacred Music Press)
Hymn Accompaniments for Congregational Singing Vol. 1-2 by Daniel Gawthrop (Published by H.W.Gray)
The Organist's Upper Hand Vol 1-2 by Darwin Wolford (Published by Jackman Music)
250 Last Verses by Richard Lloyd (Published by Mayhew Brodt)
Restrained Last Verses (Published by Kevin Mayhew)
Festive Hymn Introductions by Dale Wood (Published by Sacred Music Press)

Whatever enhancement you use, whether it is for preludes or hymn singing, it must sound natural, as if it were meant to be that way. In congregational hymn accompaniment, use enough to encourage and bring enjoyment and inspiration to the hymn singing. Too much eventually ends up calling attention to itself which defeats the purpose of enhancing the singing. It is the same theory as putting too much spice in a dish. I like my chili hot, but there is a limit. If the seasoning gives only the impression of heat and masks the flavor of the dish, it's too much. Encourage and inspire, but don't overload your congregation's ears.

