

Challenges for Organists: Embellishing the Hymns

UVAGO Zoom Workshop, February 26, 2021

The UVAGO is inviting all Utah Valley organists to learn something new this year. February's challenge is to learn new hymn-playing skills—for example, extending a sacrament hymn, playing a last-verse harmonization, or soloing the melody.

SOLOING THE MELODY

Heidi Rodeback

“Someone has said that the difference between an *organ player* and an *organist* is the ability to play the soprano alone on one manual while playing the harmony parts (alto and tenor) with the left hand on another manual. This skill requires time, patience and practice to develop, but—when coupled with the ability to select effective combinations for melody and harmony—the results are striking.” Darwin Wolford, *The Organist's Upper Hand*

A soprano solo can be used in variety of ways: as an organ prelude before a worship service, as an enhanced registration to accompany congregational singing, or as a postlude. Ideally, organists acquire the skill to play in this style at sight directly from the hymn book, but they may also choose to work from any of volumes listed below. Alternatively, organists can write out their own transcriptions using music notation software. For free, downloadable, open-source music notation software, visit musescore.org.

For an advanced course in voicing the melody—including giving it an octave lower, as a tenor solo—read Michael Capon's article, “Varying Textures in Hymn Accompaniment at the Organ,” in the January 2021 issue of *The American Organist*.

The Organist's Upper Hand

Darwin Wolford

Jackman Music Corporation

Book 1 \$8.95

Book 2 \$9.95

Each hymn setting consists of two verses; one is a direct transcription for soprano solo with the harmony parts given to the left hand; the other is a free accompaniment, with both hands playing on the same manual, suitable in prelude or postlude settings or for accompanying unison singing. Includes a table of suggested solo and accompaniment registrations.

L.D.S. Hymns Transcriptions for Organ

Lynn R. Carson

Sage Rest Publications

Book One: For Temple and Ward Organists, \$16.95

Book Two: For Holidays and Special Occasions, \$16.95

Transcriptions taken directly from *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* preserve the hymn tune and phrasing unaltered, but place the soprano on the upper staff, the alto and tenor together on the lower staff, and the bass on the separate third staff.

Hymns for Organ: Solo & Accompaniment Hymns

Elizabeth Berghout, WardOrganist.com

Volume 1: Holidays \$6.99

Volume 2: Sacrament \$6.99

Volume 3: Prayer and Supplication \$8.99

LAST-VERSE HARMONIZATIONS

Jack Stoneman

Why? For the spirit and strength that draw the congregation together:

“Hymn singing has always been an important part of Christian worship. Some of the most spiritual experiences of our musical lives have been occasioned by the unison singing of a congregation accompanied by a free harmonization of the hymn at the organ. There is great strength in unison singing that draws a congregation together.” Douglas Bush and Gerald Dick, *Hymn Harmonizations: 24 Free Organ Accompaniments*

How to break in the congregation? If this technique is new to your congregation, work with the music director in advance. In some cases, you may wish to script an announcement for the priesthood leader’s conducting notes.

“If a congregation is not used to singing with free accompaniments, it is perhaps advisable to rehearse the hymn with the choir prior to the service, and to advise the congregation that they should sing the melody in unison on the particular verse where the free accompaniment is being employed, so that all are prepared for the experience rather than startled by it.” Douglas Bush and Gerald Dick, *ibid.*

Musical, Doctrinal, and Sociopolitical Reasons for Last Verse Harmonizations

Unison & Harmony & Dissonance

“When we welcome and value the gifts, talents, experiences, and perspectives of all of God’s children who are engaged in our common enterprise, we will not only more fully reach our individual potential but will also be more united. Elder Bruce C. Hafen offered a simple analogy to explain how bringing together those with diverse gifts, personalities, and experiences can produce an enhanced and enriched form of unity:

For me, the ideal metaphor is a musical one: with our many voices, we could all sing in unison, in harmony, or in dissonance. Of these three, I prefer harmony, because it enables a variety of voices to blend into a fuller, richer sound than mere unison.”

Kevin J. Worthen, “Persevere in Unity” (January 12, 2021 BYU Devotional)

Unity & Diversity

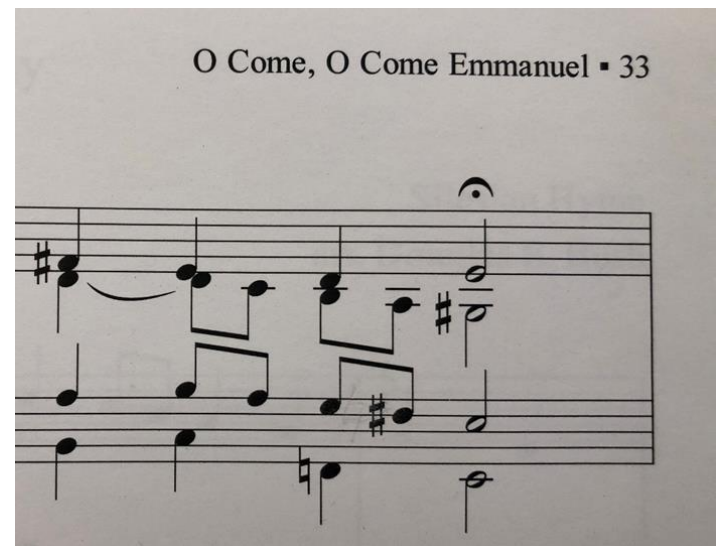
“With our all-inclusive doctrine, we can be an oasis of unity and celebrate diversity. Unity and diversity are not opposites. We can achieve greater unity as we foster an atmosphere of inclusion and respect for diversity.”

Quentin L. Cook, “Heart Knit in Righteousness and Unity” (October 2020 General Conference)

Doug Bush’s F/F#

Paraphrasing Doug: “A little dissonance sometimes is good, if it inspires us to seek resolution.”

Diversity, even sometimes dissonance, can help us seek resolution and harmony. Playing something that is new and different can help congregations see the hymn text in a new light, inspire them to sing out, and help them to *feel* what unity and harmony through diversity really is all about.



My favorite resource for last verse harmonizations:

<https://www.wardorganist.com/>

See also Mike Carson's Hymnbellishments™ for quick and simple ways to reharmonize hymns:

carsonhymns.com

View, listen, print. It's free!

See also David Chamberlin's hymn arrangements:

Hymn Introductions, Last Verses, and More for Special Occasions

Introductions and alternate harmonizations designed as supplements to your hymnal

chamberlinmusic.com

Some other resources:

The Organist's Upper Hand. 2 vols. Darwin Wolford. [Jackman Music](#).

Hymns for Organ: Solo & Accompaniment Hymns. 3 vols (Holiday, Sacrament, Prayer & Supplication).

Elizabeth Egbert Berghout. WardOrganist.com.

200 Last Verses. Noel Rawthshorne. [Kevin Mayhew](#).

400 Last Verses. Noel Rawthshorne. [Kevin Mayhew](#).

200 Last Verses for Manuals. Noel Rawthshorne. [Kevin Mayhew](#).

Free Organ Accompaniments to 100 Well-Known Hymn Tunes. T. Tertius Noble. [Alfred](#).

[Sacrament Hymn Introductions](#), Franklin Eddings (harmonizations of sacrament hymn intros)

Embellishing Hymns

By Mike Carson

"I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the *understanding* also" (1 Corinthians 14:12-15, emphasis added).

Sing the Last Verse!

"You need not feel compelled to sing all the verses of a hymn, unless the message is otherwise incomplete.... Singing the verses printed below the music is encouraged" (HYMNS, 1985, pg. 381). Inspiring gospel precepts can edify us in the verses "printed below the music." These verses are seldom sung and therefore are less well-known and loved, but they present glorious insights on gospel subjects.

To make the point, consider Hymn #116, "Come, Follow Me." We usually end the singing with verse 4:

Verse 4:

Not only shall we emulate
His course while in this earthly state,
But when we're freed from present cares,
If with our Lord we would be heirs.

But verse 5, which is printed below the music, expands and completes the thought, explaining "how":

Verse 5:

We must the onward path pursue
As wider fields expand to view,
And follow Him unceasingly,
Whate'er our lot or sphere may be.

Verse 6 goes even further in explaining "why" it is desired to accept the Savior's invitation to follow Him:

Verse 6:

For thrones, dominions, kingdoms, pow'rs,
And glory great and bliss are ours,
If we, throughout eternity,
Obey His words, "Come follow me."

When the sixth verse is sung, the hymn is bookended with the phrase, "Come, follow me."

Question: What other hymns could edify, enlighten, and uplift congregations, if the verses "printed below the music" were sung?

My answers: -

To further illustrate the need to be aware of doctrine contained in all the verses of the hymns, the following sacrament hymns do not mention the emblems of the sacrament until the verses "printed below the music":

#187, "God Loved Us, So He Sent His Son" (verse 5)

- *This sacrament doth represent / His blood and body for me spent.*

#191, "Behold the Great Redeemer Die" (verse 6)

- *...we humbly now around these sacred symbols bow...*

#195, "How Great the Wisdom and the Love" (verse 5)

- *In mem'ry of the broken flesh / We eat the broken bread, / And witness with the cup, afresh, / Our faith in Christ, our Head.*

By the way, Hymn #173/174, "While of These Emblems We Partake," is often misinterpreted. Read verses 3 and 4 and contemplate this question: "Who will rise triumphant from the tomb?"

Answer: _____

"Sing with the spirit and with the UNDERSTANDING also."

Sacrament Hymns

"Our sacrament hymns are examples of some of the best hymns in the Church" (Thomas K. Hinckley, 1933-2010, former chapter dean).

Standard sacramental hymns are numbers 169 through 197, plus #146, "Gently Raise the Sacred Strain" (see HYMNS, 1985; pg. 425, "Topics": Sacrament). Schedule to sing ALL of the sacrament hymns twice during each year. These special hymns:

- Prepare hearts and minds to partake of the emblems of the Lord
- "...Should refer to the sacrament itself or to the sacrifice of the Savior" (HYMNS, 1985; pg. 380).
- Are devotional in nature, but sometimes can be praising (i.e. #182, "We'll Sing All Hail to Jesus' Name," and #193, "I Stand All Amazed." (Consider #67, "Glory to God on High," for a sacrament hymn; it appropriately fits the text requirements. Change mood marking from *Joyfully* to *Fervently* and adjust the tempo to quarter note=88.)

Embellishing Sacrament Hymns

#178, O Lord of Hosts

Introduction: Play in entirety as written. Organ introductions:

- Announce the tune
- Establish the tempo
- Model the rhythm, key, and mood

Verse 1: As written

Verse 2 & 3: Play pedal point or harmonize soprano/alto duet. (Use Hymnbellishment™ at Mike Carson Hymns: carsonhymns.com.)

Verse 4: Play Sop./Alto parts (right hand) octave lower on Great to represent the "brethren." Play tenor part with left hand on Swell. Play bass with pedals. (Use Hymnbellishment™)

Verse 5: Play the first phrase ("May union, peace, and love abound") in parallel octaves to represent "union." Then play harmony parts beginning with the next phrase ("And perfect harmony") to the end of the hymn to represent "perfect harmony." Registration can be brighter for the last verse to represent "joy." (Use Hymnbellishment™)

#191, “Behold the Great Redeemer Die”

Introduction: Hymnbellishment™ at Mike Carson Hymns (carsonhymns.com) with 8’ and 4’ strings and flutes on and coupled to Great (use Swell to Great)

Verse 1 & 2: Add Principle 8’ on Great (provides body and support)

Verse 3: Add Octave 4’ on Great (provides contrast, builds confidence)

Verse 4: Play Hymnbellishment™ with R.H. octave lower on Great (L.H. on Swell) to represent the “voice” of the dying Lord.

Verse 5: Subdued to represent “A God has died!” Can be played on the Swell, adding the 2’ Flute, or on the Great, removing 4’ Octave.

Verse 6: “He lives—He lives!” Full organ (*Organo Pleno*), not to be confused with “tutti.” Full organ is built on the Principle Chorus, possibly with a chorus coupled from the Swell, with or without 2-2/3 and mixture stops. Don’t be bashful; “play” the text!

NOTE: The emblems of the sacrament are not mentioned until 6th verse!

Special Considerations

“...[W]ith fewer set times for singing in some of our Sunday meetings, we... need to be more thoughtful and intentional in planning and using music” (“Keeping Music at the Heart of Worship,” Jan Pinborough, Church Magazines, LIAHONA, March 2021, 30).

“Music that is prayerfully chosen can touch hearts, leaving spiritual impressions that may last a lifetime” (Pinborough).

“When we keep music in its proper place at the heart of our worship, we can help all find opportunities to feel the Spirit, to learn gospel truths, and to praise the Lord for His goodness” (Pinborough).

President Russell M. Nelson: “Music has power to provide spiritual nourishment. It has healing power. It has the power to facilitate worship, allowing us to contemplate the Atonement and the Restoration of the gospel.... It provides power for us to express prayerful thoughts and bear testimony of sacred truths” (“The Power and Protection of Worthy Music,” Ensign, Dec. 2009, 16.)

Hymn Trivia

Many hymns have up to four verses printed within the music score; we sing and enjoy these verses regularly. BUT, there are:

- Ten hymns with some of their 5 verses printed below the music (i.e. #100 “Nearer, My God to Thee”)
- Seven hymns with 6 verses (i.e. #6 “Redeemer of Israel”)
- Five hymns with 7 verses (i.e. #85 “How Firm a Foundation”)
- One hymn with 8 verses (#145 “Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire”)
- Only three hymns contain all five of their verses within the music score:
 - #1 “The Morning Breaks”
 - #82 “For All the Saints”
 - #214 “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”

There are 11 hymns with verses ending in incomplete sentences, requiring the succeeding verse or verses to be sung: #32, #119, #127, #149, #167, #173/174, #175, #216, #283, #321, #327.