

For Organists  
To Motivate Better Hymn Singing from the Bench  
Simple things you can do NOW!

Mike Carson  
Super Saturday, April 29, 2023

**I. Registration: “Get enough organ on!”**

Congregations sing at the 8’ pitch. They more easily hear the 16’ in the pedal and 4’ and 2’ pitches in manuals.

- **Principal Chorus for Jubilant Hymns:** Principals 8, 4, and 2 on the Great  
For a **fuller** sound, add 8’ and 4’ flutes and strings (excluding celestes). For a **brighter** principal chorus, add a “fraction” stop (mutation) or a Mixture. For a **darker** tone use a chorus reed (i.e. oboe, trumpet 8), combined with the principal chorus. Play with pedals OR with or without Bass Coupler, as applicable. If pedals are not played and/or the Bass Coupler is absent, the Principal 8’ manual stop is essential.
- **Pedal Registrations:** Begin with 8’ and 16’ stops in the pedal. Add the 4’ stop in the pedal if 2’ stops and higher are used on the manuals, OR “Swell to Pedal” and “Great to Pedal” couplers may be used with 16’ stops. A pleasing balance between the manuals and pedals is essential.
- **Principal Chorus for Reverent Hymns:** Principal 8, Principal 4, Flutes 8 and 4 on the Great
- **Modified Principal Chorus:** Replace Principal 8 with Flute 8, OR remove Principal 4.  
Softer setups are rarely required for congregational singing.

**Very Important:** In congregational singing, set the Great and Swell **expression pedals** all the way open before beginning to play the hymn introduction, and then don’t move them. Adjust the volume and/or tonal colors between the verses or before the choruses by adding or retiring stops. (Listen for distortion on electronic organs and adjust volume accordingly before you begin to play.)

**II. “Breathe” with the singers:**

Mark your hymnbook with Complete Lift |, Partial Lift /, and Carry-Over ..... Singers breathe when their bodies demand air. However, congregations that are in tune with the spirit of hymn singing will appreciate the organist’s efforts to convey the meaning of the text.

- **“Complete lift” at the end of the introduction, between verses, and at the ends of sentences or musical phrases in the text.** To “lift” means to rhythmically release all of the fingers and feet in perfect synchronization. Silence is good! Singers hear the silence between musical and textual phrases; it creates the beat.
- **“Partial lift” at phrase endings with commas in the text.** Release the alto and soprano voices, as in “Never leave us, / never leave us” or “Come, follow me, / the Savior said.” |
- **“Carry over” or sustain voice lines between phrases where text dictates.**

**III. Play meaningful hymn introductions. The organ introduction...**

1. announces the hymn tune.
2. establishes the key and tempo.
3. demonstrates the rhythm, mood, and style.
4. suggests the volume with which the hymn is to be sung.

\*\*\*The introduction teaches the singers in just a few seconds how the hymn will be sung—in tempo, rhythm, mood, and volume. The introduction should match the desired volume and tempo of the first verse.\*\*\*

#### IV. Play hymns at a singable tempo:

- Consult metronomic markings for a suggested tempo range.
- Hymns should be sung fast enough to comfortably sing a short phrase in one breath, but slow enough to be spiritually and devotionally powerful.
- Rehearse with the music director in advance to determine tempo and style, etc.
- Choose the hymn tempo that best fits the context of the service. The same hymn used as an opening or closing hymn may require a different tempo and/or mood.

#### V. Other considerations to motivate and inspire more enjoyable hymn singing:

- Organists, lead out; don't just accompany. The organ should provide 50% of the sound and the singers the other 50%.
- “Do not routinely shorten a hymn by singing just the first one or two verses. Singing the verses printed below the music is encouraged” (*LDS Hymns*, 1985, pg. 381).
- “Try to achieve a good balance between familiar favorites and less well-known hymns” (*LDS Hymns*, 1985, pg. 381).
- Choose hymns to a topic. This helps lesser-known hymns have a purpose.
- Choose a variety of large- and small-patterned hymns for the service.
  - **Large-patterned hymns** (two-page hymns, hymns with choruses, or one-page hymns with four or more verses) **lend stability and nobility** to the service. They can build order into the service by occupying the minds and energies of the congregation for longer periods of time.
  - **Small-patterned hymns** (half-page hymns and one-page hymns with three or less verses) **give a feeling of movement** to the service. They also **require less physical exertion** by the congregation.
- Choose a variety of meter patterns within the service. For example, singing every hymn with a compound rhythm (6's, 9's, 12's) could become monotonous.
- “Don't pay attention to your fancy pieces; just make sure everyone sings the hymns!” (Virgil Fox)

#### The following list of materials is provided as a resource for developing proper hymn-playing technics:

*The New Ward Organist*-- A series of eight video lessons to assist the pianist in getting started as an organist in the Church. Visit [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and search “New Ward Organist.” Click the link in any video description to download and print the free packet (in .pdf format). For questions or more information, email [organ@byu.edu](mailto:organ@byu.edu)

*OrganTutor Organ 101* [online tutorial and/or workbook]; Cook, Don; Provo, Utah: Go to: [www.organtutor.byu.edu](http://www.organtutor.byu.edu) for more information.

*Hymns from the LDS Hymnal Marked for the Organ*; Dean, Carol; Provo, Utah: Carol Dean, 2003 (e-mail: Jennifer Morgan at [musicalmom@gmail.com](mailto:musicalmom@gmail.com), or contact **Printology** in American Fork, Utah, They will print and bind this book for pickup or mailing.)

*Hymn Studies for Organists*; Belnap, Parley L.; rev. ed. (available at music stores)

*Easy Organ Hymn Settings*; Cook, Don; Orem, Utah: Jackman Music Corp., 1992 (available at music stores)

*Interpretive Hymn Playing: A Course of Study for Latter-day Saint Organists* (CD); Hatch, Verena; Provo, Utah; 2004. (The CD is available from Laura Pettersson, editor, (801) 373-3541.)