

For Organists

To Inspire Better Hymn Singing: Simple things you can do NOW!

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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.

- Flute Chorus: Flute 8; Flute 4; Flute 2, if it is light (for reverent hymns)
- Modified Flute Chorus: Flute 8, Principal 4, Flute 2 (gives more volume)

Softer setups are rarely required for congregational singing. If pedals are not played, add a substantial 8’ manual stop (except celestes) to the modified flute chorus or use the bass coupler, if your organ has one.

- Principal Chorus: Principal 8, Principal 4, Principal 2 (for jubilant hymns)

For a fuller sound, add more 8’ and 4’ stops (except celestes) in pyramid style to any of the chorus registrations above. For a brighter principal chorus, add a “fraction” stop (mutation) or a mixture. For a darker tone use a chorus reed (i.e. oboe) coupled with the principal chorus.

- Pedal Registrations: For all of the above 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 a 16’ stop. A pleasing balance between the manuals and pedals is essential.

Very Important: Open the Great and Swell expression pedals all the way 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.

“Breathe” with the singers:

- **“Complete lift” at the end of the introduction, between verses, and at the ends of sentences in the text.** To “lift” means to rhythmically release all of the fingers and feet in perfect synchronization. Silence is good! The singers hear the silence between the notes; it creates the rhythm.
- **“Partial lift” at phrase endings with commas in the text.** Simultaneously 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.**

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.

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.

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 tempos and styles, 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.

Other considerations to inspire more enjoyable hymn singing:

- Lead out; don't just accompany. Organ should provide 50% of the sound, congregation 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). Play the entire unfamiliar hymn as the introduction, and do not rush—they're learning it! Choosing lesser-known hymns to a topic helps them have more purpose and meaning.
- 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. Be considerate of the vocal demands required by the singers.
- Choose a variety of meter patterns within the service. For example, singing every hymn with a compound rhythm (6's, 9's, 12's) would 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 here as a resource for developing proper hymn-playing technics:

Hymns from the LDS Hymnal Marked for the Organ; Dean, Carol; Provo, Utah: Carol Dean, 2003

Hymn Studies for Organists; Belnap, Parley L.; rev. ed., Provo, Utah; BYU Creative Works Office, 1998/2004

Easy Organ Hymn Settings; Cook, Don; Orem, Utah: Jackman Music Corp., 1992

Interpretive Hymn Playing: A Course of Study for Latter-day Saint Organists (CD); Hatch, Verena; Provo, Utah; 2004. (The CD is available for \$3.00 from Laura Pettersson, editor, (801) 373-3541. Print on 24 lb. laser paper.)

OrganTutor Organ 101 [complete or workbook only]; Cook, Don; Provo, Utah: BYU Creative Works Office, 1998/2004. (Note: *Organ Essentials* has been retitled *The OrganTutor Workbook*.)

The New LDS Organist (This free course of twelve lessons is designed to help LDS pianists adapt their skills to the organ as soon as possible. Go to www.organ.byu.edu for all the details about the course and for many more useful resources for the LDS organist.)