# Playing Artistic Preludes from a Hymnal

#### **Introduction:**

"An organist who has the sensitivity to quietly play prelude music from the hymnbook tempers our feelings and causes us to go over in our minds the lyrics, which teach the peaceable things of the kingdom ..." (President Boyd K. Packer).

#### Get Ready...

- 1. Choose hymns of the same topic, such as: "Hymns of the Savior," "Hymns of Comfort," "Hymns of Supplication," or seasonal hymns.
- 2. For convenience, photo copy the hymns and arrange them in a three-ring binder using a three-hole punch or clear protective sheets. Obtain an erasable, fine-point marker to make notes and marks on the plastic sheets.

#### Get Set...

Use hymns in complimentary keys. This approach gives the feeling of a "hymn medley" and makes transitioning from hymn to hymn pleasing to the ear.

Begin with a hymn in two or three sharps. Then play each succeeding hymn, subtracting one sharp from the key signature each time, until reaching the key of C major (no sharps or flats). Play the next hymn in the key of F major (one flat), adding another flat in each hymns' key signature (see diagram below).

The following is an example of a series of hymns chosen to a topic and in the order of the complimentary keys as illustrated above:

#### "Hymns of the Savior"

D Major: Where Can I Turn for Peace? (#129)

G Major: Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee (#141)

C Major: Come, Follow Me (#116)

F Major: How Great the Wisdom and the Love (#195)

B-flat Major: Come unto Jesus (#117)

E-flat Major: There Is a Green Hill Far Away (#194)

A-flat Major: I Stand All Amazed (#193)

Would you like to have a numerical listing of all the LDS hymns grouped by keys? DeeAnn Stone has compiled such a list on her website: *Resources for LDS Organists*. Copy this URL into your Web browser: www.ldsorganists.info/key.htm

<u>C Major</u>	<u>B Flat Major</u>
<u>G Major</u>	<u>E Flat Major</u>
<u>D Major</u>	<u> A Flat Major</u>
A Major	D Flat Major
<u>F Major</u>	Minor Keys

#### Go...

Rather than always playing the hymns in the traditional four-part style, utilize a variety of "voicings," or textures, while using the written harmonization of the hymn.

- 1. For example, begin by playing a solo melody line with the right hand (Monophony).
- 2. Then, with the left hand, add a "duet" accompaniment derived from the best moving lines in the alto, tenor, or bass parts (Polyphony).
- 3. Next, play a "trio" by using the soprano, alto, and tenor lines with both hands on one manual at written pitch or both hands very softly one octave higher (Homophony).
- 4. Finish by playing the four-part voicing on one manual, with or without pedals.

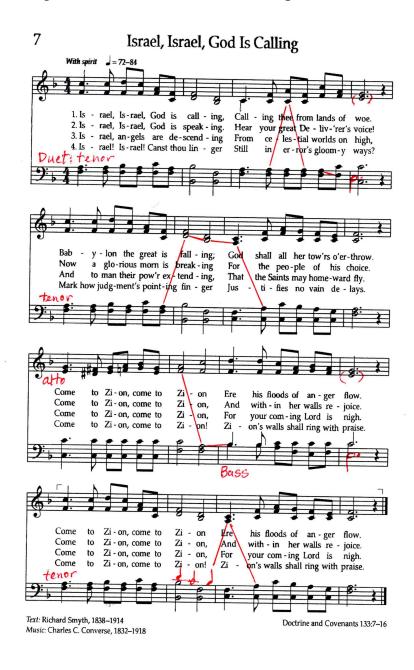
## **Choosing the Duet Part**

When playing the duet voicing, keep in mind that the most pleasing harmonic intervals are unisons, 3rds, and 6ths.

"Your ear is the most useful resource of knowledge. If it sounds pleasing, it is right" (Verena Hatch).

Study voice leading principles in a good theory book or music dictionary to better understand this concept.

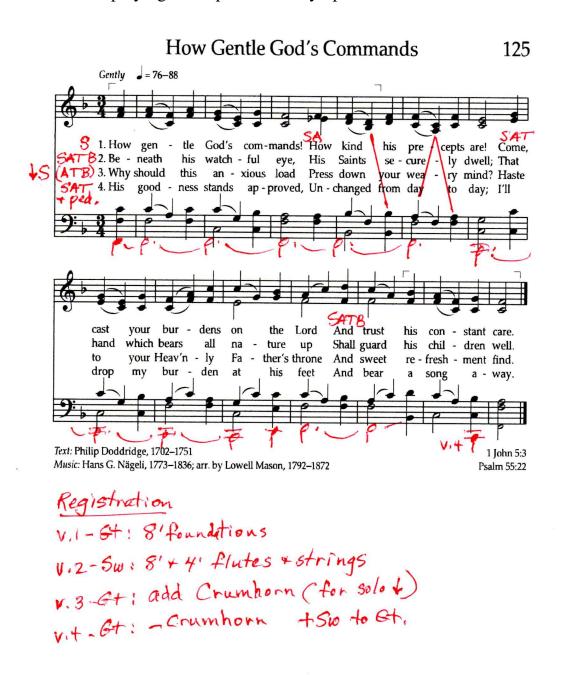
The following hymn is marked to play a pleasing "duet" accompaniment derived from the best moving lines in the alto, tenor, or bass parts.



#### "Write it down" (Mike Carson)!

Indicate on the score the voicings selected for each verse:

- Two-part voicings: SA (soprano/alto), ST (soprano/tenor), SB (soprano/bass). When using the bass line as a duet accompaniment, you may choose to play it an octave higher for better effect.
- Three-part voicings: SAT (soprano/alto/tenor), SAB (soprano/alto/bass), STB (soprano/tenor/bass).
- Four-part voicing: SATB. Beside the "S" put an arrow pointing up or down to indicate playing the soprano melody up or down an octave.



To express the meaning of each verse's text, repeat the hymn several times, using a variety of voicings, textures, and registrations.

## **Chorus Registrations**

Chorus registrations are used when both hands play on the same manual. Select one or two soft 8' stops such as strings, Gemshorn, Dulciana, soft flutes, and celestes, possibly combined with a soft 4' flute stop. Listen as you practice to determine if the registrations and volumes are pleasing to the ear.

The following hymn is an example of varied chorus registrations in the lower, middle, and upper ranges of the keyboard.



#### **Solo Registrations**

Another effective voicing is called "soloing out the melody," achieved by playing the melody on one manual and an accompaniment derived from the alto and tenor lines on the other manual. After the skill of "soloing out" is mastered on the manuals, you may play the bass line simultaneously on the pedals! Solo registrations create opportunities for stunning varieties of tone color (timbre).

"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).

To achieve a pleasing **solo registration**, begin by locating stops soft enough for accompaniments, most likely the same ones used in the chorus registrations above. Try various stop combinations, listening for blend and balance. The melody must be more prominent than the accompaniment, and the accompaniment should be somewhat of a contrasting tone color, containing the quality of "transparency," with "sufficient body to give support," but having a "certain reticence" (Joseph W. Clokey).

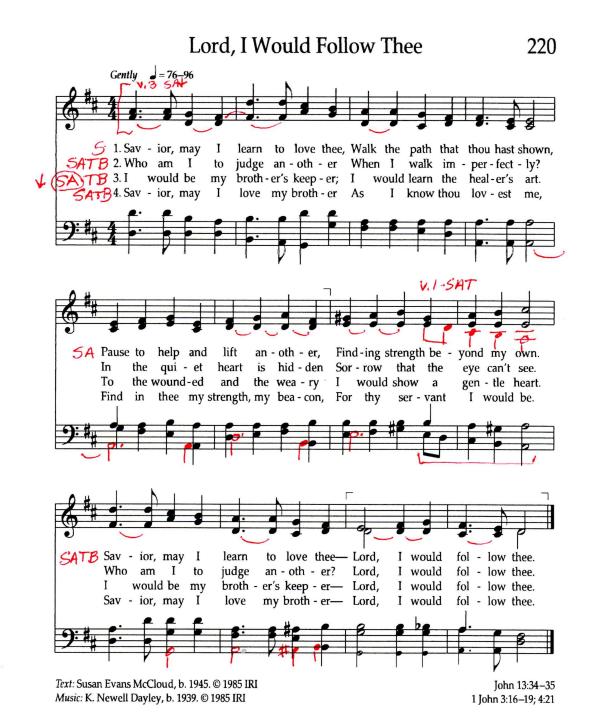
A collection containing a selection of four-part hymns notated with the melodies already "soloed out" is *The Organist's Upper Hand*, in two volumes, arr. by Darwin Wolford, published by Jackman Music Corp. These volumes also contain a helpful list of various registrations that work satisfactorily for solo/accompaniment combinations.

Another excellent resource for "soloing out" four-part hymns is Elizabeth Berghout's *Solo & Accompaniment Hymns*, available in three volumes from <a href="https://www.WardOrganist.com">www.WardOrganist.com</a>.

After consulting these and other resources, write out your own "solo" transcriptions. You're not expected to play this voicing at sight until you are comfortable playing it under pressure!

Keep registration changes simple, one per verse, adding or removing just one stop or pushing a preset button while the fingers are off the keys. Another effective variation is to play the solo melody up or down an octave for two verses without changing stops. Effortless!

Example of a hymn with **soprano and alto duet** soloed out an octave lower. The tenor line becomes an obligato on the accompaniment manual (tie repeated notes).



#### Harmonization from the Hymnal

- Generally remain faithful to the hymn harmonization in the hymnal.
  Improvised suspensions, passing tones, pedal points, and the like, if used too much, can hinder the listener's concentration on the text of the hymn and draw unwanted attention to the organist.
- The listener needs to be able to follow the melody without too much trouble.
- "[Prelude] music should not call undue attention to itself, but should leave the thoughts and feelings of the [worshipers] free for prayer and introspection" ("Operational Memo"; LDS Temple Department; Jan. 4, 2006).

# **Benefits of Using This Interpretive Approach in Playing Devotional Preludes**

- Lends stability, nobility, and unity to the worship service.
- Prepares worshipers spiritually for effective hymn singing.
- Helps worshipers feel comfortable with less-familiar hymns.
- Alerts the worshipers to the topic of the meeting.
- Focuses the listener's attention on the hymn texts, which "if we will listen..., are teaching the gospel; for the hymns...are, in fact, a course in doctrine" (President Boyd K. Packer).

# In Conclusion....Technical Aspects of Devotional Organ Playing (or "Things organists do that drive me crazy!")

- A. "Organists should be sufficiently accomplished in their playing to achieve a spiritual tone" ("Operational Memo"; LDS Temple Department; Jan. 4, 2006).
- B. Learn proper manual and pedal technics: hand division, finger crossing, finger glissando, finger substitution, alternate fingerings, treatments for common tones and repeated notes, legato, attack, release, etc.
- C. Hold notes their full values. Mentally count the beats at phrase endings. This aids the listeners in "thinking" the text in their minds.
- D. "Breathe" (lift fingers and feet) at appropriate phrase endings and between verses. This also aids the listener. You don't need to keep your fingers down all the time. Silence is good.

"Preludes creatively planned, carefully prepared, and skillfully played 'from the hymnbook,' have a major impact on the worship experience and can bring great joy to the organist and worshiper alike" (Mike Carson).