

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).

D	>>>>	G	>>>>	C	>>>>	F	>>>>	Bb	>>>>	Eb	>>>>	Ab
2 #		1 #		none		1 flat		2 flats		3 flats		4 flats

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



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.

7 Israel, Israel, God Is Calling

With spirit ♩ = 72-84

1. Is - rael, Is-rael, God is call - ing, Call - ing thee from lands of woe.
2. Is - rael, Is-rael, God is speak - ing. Hear your great De - liv - 'er's voice!
3. Is - rael, an - gels are de - scend - ing From ce - les - tial worlds on high,
4. Is - rael! Is-rael! Canst thou lin - ger Still in er - ror's gloom - y ways?

Duet: tenor

Bab - y - lon the great is fall - ing; God shall all her tow'rs o'er-throw.
Now a glo - rious morn is break - ing For the peo - ple of his choice.
And to man their pow'r ex - tend - ing, That the Saints may home - ward fly.
Mark how judg - ment's point - ing fin - ger Jus - ti - fies no vain de - lays.

tenor

Come to Zi - on, come to Zi - on Ere his floods of an - ger flow.
Come to Zi - on, come to Zi - on, And with - in her walls re - joice.
Come to Zi - on, come to Zi - on, For your com - ing Lord is nigh.
Come to Zi - on, come to Zi - on! Zi - on's walls shall ring with praise.

alto

Come to Zi - on, come to Zi - on Ere his floods of an - ger flow.
Come to Zi - on, come to Zi - on, And with - in her walls re - joice.
Come to Zi - on, come to Zi - on, For your com - ing Lord is nigh.
Come to Zi - on, come to Zi - on! Zi - on's walls shall ring with praise.

Bass

tenor

“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.

How Gentle God's Commands

125

Gently ♩ = 76-88

1. How gen - tle God's com-mands! How kind his pre - cepts are! Come,
 2. Be - neath his watch - ful eye, His Saints se - cure - ly dwell; That
 3. Why should this an - xious load Press down your wea - ry mind? Haste
 4. His good - ness stands ap - proved, Un - changed from day to day; I'll

cast your bur - dens on the Lord And trust his con - stant care.
 hand which bears all na - ture up Shall guard his chil - dren well.
 to your Heav'n - ly Fa - ther's throne And sweet re - fresh - ment find.
 drop my bur - den at his feet And bear a song a - way.

Text: Philip Doddridge, 1702-1751
 Music: Hans G. Nägeli, 1773-1836; arr. by Lowell Mason, 1792-1872

1 John 5:3
 Psalm 55:22

Registration

v.1 - Gt: 8' Foundations

v.2 - Sw: 8' + 4' Flutes + strings

v.3 - Gt: add Cornhorn (for solo ↓)

v.4 - Gt: - Cornhorn + Sw to Gt.

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.

Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee 315

Reverently ♩ = 72-88 (Women)

Verse 3 ↑

1. Je - sus, the ver - y thought of thee With sweet-ness fills my breast;
 2. Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame, Nor can the mem - 'ry find
 3. O hope of ev - 'ry con - trite heart, O joy of all the meek,
 4. Je - sus, our on - ly joy be thou, As thou our prize wilt be;

Verse 1 ↓
 Verse 2 →

But sweet - er far thy face to see And in thy pres - ence rest.
 A sweet - er sound than thy blest name, O Sav - ior of man - kind!
 To those who fall, how kind thou art! How good to those who seek!
 Je - sus, be thou our glo - ry now, And thru e - ter - ni - ty.

Text: Attr. to Bernard of Clairvaux, ca. 1091-1153;
 trans. by Edward Caswall, 1814-1878
 Music: John B. Dykes, 1823-1876

Psalm 104:34
 Enos 1:27

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 www.WardOrganist.com.

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).

Lord, I Would Follow Thee

220

Gently ♩ = 76-96

V. 3 SAT

S 1. Sav - ior, may I learn to love thee, Walk the path that thou hast shown,
SATB 2. Who am I to judge an - oth - er When I walk im - per - fect - ly?
SA 3. I would be my broth - er's keep - er; I would learn the heal - er's art.
SATB 4. Sav - ior, may I love my broth - er As I know thou lov - est me,

V. 1 - SAT

SA Pause to help and lift an - oth - er, Find - ing strength be - yond my own.
 In the qui - et heart is hid - den Sor - row that the eye can't see.
 To the wound - ed and the wea - ry I would show a gen - tle heart.
 Find in thee my strength, my bea - con, For thy ser - vant I would be.

SATB Sav - ior, may I learn to love thee— Lord, I would fol - low thee.
 Who am I to judge an - oth - er? Lord, I would fol - low thee.
 I would be my broth - er's keep - er— Lord, I would fol - low thee.
 Sav - ior, may I love my broth - er— Lord, I would fol - low thee.

Text: Susan Evans McCloud, b. 1945. © 1985 IRI
 Music: K. Newell Dayley, b. 1939. © 1985 IRI

John 13:34-35
 1 John 3:16-19; 4:21

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 [worshippers] 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 worshippers spiritually for effective hymn singing.
- Helps worshippers feel comfortable with less-familiar hymns.
- Alerts the worshippers 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 techniques: 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).