

Putting It All Together: Distinctive Church Organ Playing

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*And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a **distinction** in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? . . . What is it then? . . . I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also* (emphasis added). —1 Corinthians 14: 7-8, 15

Organ Prelude:

- A “call to worship”
- “. . . should create an atmosphere of worship that invites the spirit of revelation and testimony into Church meetings” (*Church Music Handbook*, pg. 3).
- Playing hymns helps members review in their minds the teachings of the gospel. “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).
- “Volume, registration, tempo, and selection of music should encourage a thoughtful, gentle mood with careful attention to smooth rhythms . . . and graceful transitions from one hymn to another” (“Operational Memo”; LDS Temple Department; Jan. 4, 2006).
- “Strive to be more punctual to meetings, sit quietly and listen to the prelude music, and experience reverence and revelation” (Elder Jay E. Jensen, “The Nourishing Power of Hymns,” *Ensign*, May 2007).
- “Any hymn setting for organ should always point to the message of the hymn text and not to the organist” (Darwin Wolford).

Two Organ Registrations for Playing Hymn Preludes: Chorus Registration and Solo Registration

- **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, or combined with a soft Flute 4’ stop. Listen as you practice to determine if the registrations and volume are pleasing to the ear and are not intrusive to the spirit of worship.
- **Solo registrations** are used to “solo out” the melody. 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 accompaniment should be somewhat softer than the melody and of a contrasting tone color.

Examples of common registrations for right hand solo melody:

- any Flute 8’ played at pitch or up an octave
- any Principal 8’ played at pitch or down an octave
- Flute 8’ with Flute 4’
- Flute 8’ with Flute 2’
- Flute 8’ with Flute 4’ and Flute 2’
- Flute 8’ and Nazard 2^{2/3}

- Oboe or other solo reed
Occasionally, tremolo could be used on the solo manual.

Note: An excellent book containing a selection of hymns with the melodies already “soloed out” is *The Organist’s Upper Hand* by Darwin Wolford, published by Jackman Music Corp., Orem, Utah. This book also contains a helpful list of various registrations that work satisfactorily for solo/accompaniment combinations.

Opening Hymn:

- Addresses the Lord in prayer, praise, or thanksgiving. “The song of the righteous is a *prayer* unto me . . . (D&C 25:12). (i.e. *Redeemer of Israel; We Meet, Dear Lord; We Thank Thee, O God, For a Prophet*, etc.)
- Gathering song, call to worship (i.e. *Come, Sing to the Lord; Come, We That Love the Lord*, etc.)
- “. . . It may express gratitude for the gospel, joy in being able to gather together, or enthusiasm for the work to be done” (*Hymns*, 1985; pg. 380).

Sacrament Hymn:

- Prepares our hearts and minds to partake of the sacrament.
- “. . . should refer to the sacrament itself or to the sacrifice of the Savior” (*Hymns*, 1985; pg. 380).
- Standard sacramental hymns are numbers 169 through 197, plus #146, *Gently Raise the Sacred Strain*.
- Devotional in nature, but sometimes can be praising (i.e. #182, *We’ll Sing All Hail to Jesus’ Name*).
- Several sacramental hymns have more verses printed below the music. Would singing any of these verses heighten the worship experience?

Closing Hymn:

- Summarizes or carries the message of the meeting “in a capsule.” When correlated to the topic of the meeting or the message of the last speaker, the closing hymn can strengthen our commitments and renew our dedication to the gospel.
- Powerful focus on worship. When addressed to the Lord, the closing hymn of prayer or praise can render a powerful focus on the worship experience (i.e. *We Have Partaken of Thy Love; Hear Thou Our Hymn, O Lord; Father, Cheer Our Souls Tonight*).

See handout by Mike Carson *For Organists: To Inspire Better Hymn Singing* (“Play Meaningful Hymn Introductions”) for discussion.

Postlude:

- Final aid to worship
- Reflects and sustains the spirit of the service
- “. . . [T]he mood may be joyful on occasion but will often be reverent and thoughtful” (*Church Music Handbook*, pg. 3).

- A. To reflect or sustain the spirit of the meeting, play a postlude hymn that was sung in the service.
- B. Play the postlude in a related key to the closing hymn. If the closing hymn is “Come, Come Ye Saints” in G Major, play the same hymn as the postlude in C Major from the men’s section of the LDS hymnal.
- C. When playing hymns as postludes, begin at a phrase other than the beginning, or begin the postlude at the refrain.

“Exit meetings more reverently, allowing the postlude music to extend the spirit of the meeting” (Elder Jay E. Jensen, “The Nourishing Power of Hymns,” *Ensign*, May 2007).

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

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

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

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.)