

## Organ Method XIX

This continues without a break from last month's column. (In fact, it begins with a repetition of the last paragraph of that column, for continuity).

After you have completed this process with the passage that you have chosen, move on to the next increment of the piece and do the same thing. While you are working in an intense way on this next passage you should continue playing through the passage that you have already learned. In this way you can build up an entire piece. Note that it is normal for different sections of a piece to be at different tempos during the learning process. If the naturally comfortable tempo for one section is faster at a particular moment in time than the naturally comfortable tempo for another section, then, if you wish to play those sections continuously with one another, you have to choose the slower tempo. (This only applies if the two passages are adjacent in the piece). It is all right for a passage to be unnecessarily slow; it is not all right for a passage to be inappropriately fast.

There is a preliminary exercise—our set of exercises—that you can do to become accustomed to using the hands and feet together, before you start to work in the manner described above on your first piece or passage for hands and feet together:

1) **Choose a short piece or passage for manuals only that you already know** and with which you feel very comfortable. Play through this piece or passage a couple of times so that it is fresh in your mind.

2) **Start this piece again, but as you do so, play one pedal key with one foot, but silently**—no pedal stops on at all. Release this pedal key at the end of the piece. Then do the same thing, but playing a silent pedal note with the other foot.

3) **Start the piece again, and play a silent pedal note at the beginning.** At some point approximately halfway through the piece, switch to a silent pedal note in the other foot. Then do this again with the feet in the other order. The timing of the switch from one foot to the other should be planned in advance. It doesn't matter when you do it, but you should not be worrying about when you should do it while you are playing.

4) Next, **play the piece changing from a note in one foot to a note in the other foot several times during the piece (all still silent).** Again, these changes should be planned in advance, perhaps according to a regular rhythm or pattern: in any case, in such a way that you don't have to think very much about them as they happen.

The purpose of this is to give yourself practice with the physical feeling of playing keys with your feet while playing on the manuals, without the difficulty



Example 1: Trio texture

of actually negotiating a pedal line and without the distraction of the pedal sound. It can be surprising that it can be more challenging to play a piece that you know well with one foot holding down a pedal key than it is to play that piece with both feet resting under the bench.

You can also try this same exercise with a very quiet pedal stop on: ideally something so quiet that it is almost not there, but in any case the quietest stop that you have. (This is often a soft 16' stop all by itself.) This adds the distraction of sound, without requiring you (yet) to pay any particular attention to what you are actually doing with your feet.

The approach to actually practicing hands and feet together outlined above (from last month's column) will work well with any piece, any sort of music. It is of course crucial that you know absolutely for certain what the distribution of notes between the two hands is, before you attempt to practice each hand with pedal. (It is also crucial to know this when you work on learning a manuals-only piece. When a pedal part is involved the overall complexity goes up, and the importance of being certain about all of the component parts is heightened.) The simplest or most straightforward sort of piece with which to begin practicing hands and feet together is a trio: that is, a piece in which each hand plays one line (not chords and not more than one voice within the hand) and in which the pedal line is also one voice. This short piece by Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens (Example 1) is a good example among many.

It can be practiced with the hands on one keyboard or on two. If you play it on two manuals, make sure that you use a registration in which the two hands balance well—that is, that neither drowns the other out, and that they are different enough that the overall effect is interesting. The pedal line can have its own sound altogether, or can, as is often useful especially on smaller organs, have a sound which is created in part by coupling. (Notice that, in this piece, if the pedal part is using stops that are also part of the left hand sound, then on the second beat of the third measure, the pedal is taking over a note that the left hand has been playing. It is important not to let the sound of this confuse you when you put those parts together).

A number of fingerings and pedaling are possible. Two pedalings are shown in Examples 2 and 3. (And you can of



Example 2: Sample pedaling



Example 3: Alternate sample pedaling



Example 4: Bach, *Ich ruf' zu dir*



Example 5: For two manuals and pedal (de Grigny, *Livre d'Orgue*)

course create one of your own.) This short piece is from Lemmens's *École d'Orgue* (1862), which includes many other such useful pieces.

Bach's setting of the chorale *Ich ruf' zu dir* from the *Orgelbüchlein* is a longer and more intricate piece; it is also very suitable for working on combining voices in a trio texture. Example 4 shows the opening of the piece.

The texture remains the same throughout: the eighth-note line in the pedal, evocative perhaps of a continuo line played by a stringed instrument, the largely chord-derived sixteenth-note middle voice, and the slower ornamented chorale melody in the soprano voice. The piece presents interesting musical and technical questions overall, about how to render the groupings suggested by the slurs, what sort of articulation to apply to the pedal line (bowed strings as an inspiration, or pizzicato? or perhaps not a stringed instrument after all), how to create a pedaling for the repeated notes that make up so much of the pedal line, and so on. You will come up

with solutions to these questions as you practice each separate line. You must be very secure with the notes of each line before you work on putting any two lines together. However, you also have to be comfortable enough with your approach to some of these basic interpretive matters—articulations, phrasings, and so on, that you need not worry about them as you are putting complex lines together carefully. However, it is a true and inevitable part of learning music that you will have to be open to changing at least the subtleties of some of these choices as you get to know the piece better and specifically as you hear how the separate parts interact with one another. You don't have to force these changes, but they are likely to come.

As always, there is no reason to require that the whole piece be ready to put together before you start putting any of it together, nor is there any reason to start the process of putting the piece together with the beginning and go to the end. In fact, it is important to remember that you can start putting

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Example 6: Three voices on one manual (Vierne, *Resignation*)



Example 7: Use of two manuals (Bach, *Herr Gott, nun schleuss den Himmel auf*)

together any passages from this (or any other) piece as soon as they are ready, based on your progress in learning the separate parts. The longer the piece, the more of an issue this will become. In this instance, measure 3—in which the motion of the pedal line is the most straightforward of any in the piece—might be the first measure in which you want to try to combine the pedal with one and then the other of the manual parts. Measures 10–12 in which the pedal line is consistently moving by step might be next. This should be shaped by your own experience as you work on the separate lines. This is a piece that must be worked on patiently, as there is a lot going on. (There are as many pedal notes in two measures of *Ich ruf zu dir* as there are in the whole Lemmens piece above). It is probably appropriate to work on combining parts in this piece in units of at the very most two measures. It is absolutely fine, and might well be best for parts of the piece, to work in units as small as the half measure.

In pieces in which the manuals have a texture of more than two voices—either more complex counterpoint or chord-based or other non-contrapuntal textures—the process of putting hands and feet together is exactly the same as what we have been discussing. The difference (not really a difference) is that you must be especially honest with yourself about whether each of the more complex manual parts is comfortably learned before you start putting it together with other parts. Pieces of this sort make up most of the organ repertoire. There are a host of different particular textures possible, some of which are:

- 1) a single voice in one hand and chords in the other hand;
- 2) a single voice in one hand and two or more voice counterpoint in the other hand;
- 3) three contrapuntal voices in the hands, the middle of which migrates between the two hands;
- 4) miscellaneous changing non-contrapuntal texture.

Brief excerpts illustrate different textures. Example 5, from the *Fugue à 5* of de Grigny's *Livre d'Orgue*, is a passage with two voices in each hand and one in the pedal. This is meant to be played on two manuals and pedal, as the manual parts overlap considerably.

Example 6 is a passage from *Résignation* from the *Pièces de fantaisie* by Louis

Vierne. Here the manuals have three voices, meant to be played together on one manual. The middle voice would most comfortably be shared between the hands. Since there is no one correct way to do this—it will naturally work out differently from one player to another—it is especially important to work out your own hand choices and fingering and practice each hand thoroughly before beginning to combine hands and feet.

Example 7 is from *Herr Gott, nun schleuss den Himmel auf* by Bach—from the *Orgelbüchlein*. In this case the left hand has one (quite virtuosic) line, and the right hand has a texture which, like a typical hymn, is simultaneously contrapuntal and chordal.

This is again a piece that must be played on two separate manuals (and pedal) since the swooping tenor voice in the left hand often occupies the same space as the right hand voices/chords.

Hymns that are presented in the traditional manner—four-voice arrangements with the hymn tune in the soprano voice and each of the other voices following that voice rhythmically and supporting it harmonically—provide good material for practicing the art of playing hands and feet together. The process is the same as that described above. For convenience and simplicity in using hymns for this purpose, it is perfectly all right to assume that the tenor voice, printed as the upper line in the lower staff, constitutes the left hand part, and that the soprano and alto voices, printed together in the upper staff constitute the right hand part. The bass line is the pedal part. Playing the three pairs of component parts of many hymns—after going through the individual parts enough to learn them, and without even necessarily putting all the parts together—is good drill for combining hands and feet in general.

(In some hymns there are notes in the alto part that could more conveniently be played in the left hand, but it is not important to work that out in order to use hymns as practice material at this stage. If the fingering of a hymn that you are looking at appears particularly awkward, you can move on to a different one. Of course, for this purpose we are ignoring the notion of “soloing out” the hymn tune, or rearranging the notes of the hymn in any other way.)

The left hand and pedal parts of the version of the OLD HUNDREDTH



Example 8: OLD HUNDREDTH, left hand and pedal parts

that we have looked at before, written out as separate lines, are shown in Example 8.

You might or might not find it useful to write out the lower two voices of a few hymns this way. It is entirely possible to read the same information off the “normal” way of printing out the hymn, however if at first you find that at all confusing or if it seems less obvious to follow the two separate voices that way, you might find it useful to write those voices out explicitly for the first few hymns that you look at.

If you use hymns as practice material for the overall project of learning to



play with hands and feet together, you will also become increasingly comfortable with the process of playing hymns. There is nothing wrong with using hymns or any other music just as practice material. For example, if you wish to go through a hymnal or a selection of any repertoire simply working on the left hand and pedal aspect of the pieces, without progressing to learning the entire pieces, this can be fine practice. You can return to the pieces as a whole another time if you wish. ■

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