

Organ Method VIII

This month's excerpt continues the discussion of heel playing, with many exercises. It then deals briefly with double pedal and with pedal substitution. This wraps up the chapter on pedal playing as such. The next part of the method is about manual playing—aspects of keyboard technique specific to organ, and ways of getting comfortable at the organ keyboard for players who come from a piano or harpsichord background. Later on I will deal with putting hands and feet together, and with overall organ practice techniques and habits.

Here are several other exercises along similar lines. Each one gives you the chance to try out the heels with a different note pattern. For the moment, the principle that the toes take the raised keys and the heels take the natural keys remains (Examples 1 and 2).

In the six short exercises above, I have provided pedalings that allow each foot to play notes that are in the region of the pedal keyboard where that foot automatically falls as you sit on the bench. However, these very same note patterns can also be played by the opposite feet, as follows (Examples 3 and 4).

Each of the gestures in these exercises—playing a natural note with the heel after having played a sharp or a flat with the toe, then again playing a sharp or flat (the same one or a different one) with the toe, turning the foot—feels different and of course requires different planning, depending on which foot is involved. It is not necessarily true that a gesture is easier or more natural if it is carried out by the foot that is “proper” to the side of the keyboard where the notes are found. As you play these exercises notice whether you find the note patterns easier with one foot or with the other. Also notice which exercises, with which pedaling, can most easily be played legato. In some cases it may seem nearly impossible to keep a full legato through the turns of the foot. However, after you have practiced the exercise enough with detached articulation, and your feet have become adept at following the shape of the notes, the execution of the same exercise with full legato may begin to seem possible. This will vary from one player to another. (Note: do not try to connect notes with a strong legato in these exercises if doing so is awkward or creates tension in the feet, legs, or ankles.)

Posture

Everything about your posture will affect how you carry out these exercises: that is, which parts of the toe and heel region of each foot you actually bring in contact with the keys. You must pay attention to this and work it out consciously for yourself. It is different for each player. In general, as with the “toes only” exercises, the more that you prefer to hold your knees close to each other, the



Example 1



Example 2



Example 3



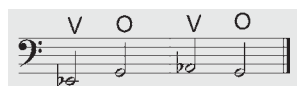
Example 4



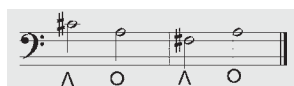
Example 5



Example 6



Example 7



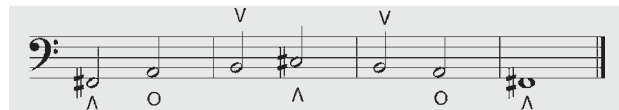
Example 8



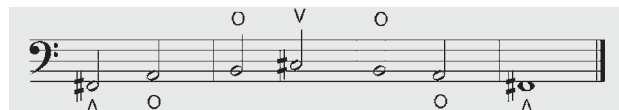
Example 9



Example 10



Example 11



Example 12



Example 13



Example 14



Example 15



Example 16

more you will find it comfortable to play from the inside of the foot; the more that you prefer to let your knees move away from the center and follow the feet towards the notes, the more you will find it comfortable to play with the outside of the foot. However, this varies greatly with individual posture and physique. Only you, the player, can figure out what works best for you.

The following exercises ask the foot to span slightly longer distances between the toe and the heel—still with the toes playing the sharps and flats, and the

heels playing the naturals (Examples 5 and 6). Again you can try these note patterns with the feet reversed, as in the following (Examples 7 and 8), and so on.

This might seem like a bit of a stretch. It will certainly be necessary to turn the body a lot to reach the opposite sides of the keyboard with the heels. Each of these exercises should be done slowly, paying maximum attention to foot position, especially during any turns.

The next step is to use the heel on other nearby natural notes. This feels different from playing a natural with the heel when the toe has just been on a sharp or flat. The angles at which the feet need to be held are different. The following exercises begin to address this sort of playing (Examples 9 and 10).

These should be played slowly and, at first, non-legato. As you become comfortable with the shapes of the gestures you can try connecting the notes. You may find some of the pedalings in these exercises uncomfortable. Again, this is something that varies with the posture and physique of the player. If you do, then move away from that exercise for now. It may (or may not) feel more comfortable later. You should make up short exercises of your own in which you play

simple chains of notes with alternating toe and heel, or with irregular patterns of toe and heel.

Toe and heel together

Here is an example of a short phrase in which toes and heels can be used in an irregular pattern geared to the shape of the particular melody (Examples 11, 12, 13, and 14). I give it, however, with four different pedalings. Which one do you like best? Can you devise another that you like better?

After you have become comfortable with the basic gesture of playing successive notes with the toe and heel, you can begin to look at pedal passages from the repertoire in which a combination of toe and heel pedaling can be used. (Note that it is rare for a passage to be played with heels only. Any passage that is best played without the application of alternating toe and heel is normally played with toes alone, not heels alone. Also, the heels rarely play raised keys, so any passage that is not all-naturals will be played either by toes alone or by a combination of toe and heel.)

Here are two examples of such passages, with possible pedalings. The first is from Franck's *Choral No. 3 in E*, beginning at m. 138 (Example 15). The second is from the chorale setting *Alles ist an*

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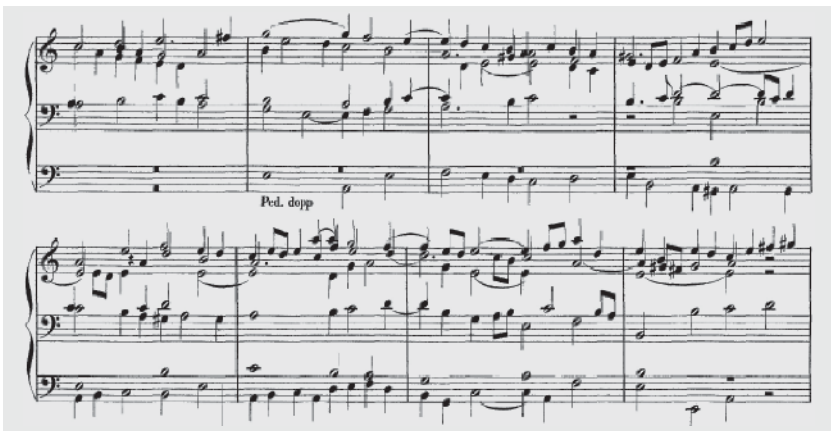
Example 17



Example 18



Example 19



Example 20



Example 21

Gottes Segen, op. 67, no. 2, by Max Reger, beginning at m. 2 (Example 16). The pedalings that I have provided for each of the complete passages are just suggestions: each is one way that an organist might configure the pedaling, but not the only plausible way, and also not necessarily the best way for any given player. Try each of these passages slowly and carefully with the pedalings that I have given. Then try to find other pedalings for at least part of each passage that would also work—perhaps that feel better to you. For the purpose of this exercise, assume that you want to use pedalings that would in theory allow you to play legato: that is, do not use the same part of the same foot for two successive notes in such a way as to require a break between those notes.

Can you find other pedalings that you like as well as or better than those that I have given? In the Franck, I have had each foot remain on its “proper” side of the pedal keyboard—the left foot plays tenor C and lower notes, the right foot plays tenor C and lower notes. In the Reger, I have written in more crossing of the middle of the keyboard, especially involving the right foot’s reaching for some of the lower notes. Could you pedal either passage differently by crossing the middle line of the keyboard either more or less than I have done? Are there pairs of successive natural notes that I have assigned to the heel and the toe of the same foot for which you would find it more comfortable to reverse that heel and toe (for example, the A and the C in the seventh measure of the Franck)?

Here are a few more pedal passages that can or should be played by a mix of heel and toe. They are from Mendelssohn *Sonata* #3, first movement (Example 17); Vieme *Symphony* #3, first movement (Example 18); and Elgar *Organ Sonata*, op. 28, first movement (Example 19). In

each case, work out a few different possible pedalings, and practice them slowly and carefully.

In general, organ music written after about 1800 is likely to make more use of the heel than that written before then. (Some of the reasons for this are discussed in the last section of this book.) The music of the composers excerpted here and their contemporaries will provide you with a treasure trove of passages with which to practice the use of the heels.

Double pedal and substitution

There are two special pedal playing techniques that should be mentioned here: double pedal and pedal substitution.

A small number of pieces in the organ repertoire have pedal parts in which for some of the time or all of the time two notes are to be played at once by the feet—or two ongoing independent contrapuntal lines in the pedals. Here is an example from a Bach chorale setting—*Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir*, BWV 686 (Example 20).

Once the second—higher—pedal line comes in here in the fourth measure of this excerpt, each of the two pedal lines has to be played in its entirety by one foot. This is the norm for a double-pedal part. For anyone who has learned to look at pedal parts on a one-foot-at-a-time basis, as we have done here, this actually presents no conceptual challenge, and no more physical challenge than a similarly intricate single pedal part would.

In order to practice a double-pedal part, first work out a pedaling for each separate pedal line: the upper line in the right foot, of course, and the lower line in the left foot. The pedaling will of necessity be a mix of same-toe pedaling—which is intrinsically non-legato—and heel/toe pedaling. Once the pedaling has been worked out separately for each foot, each foot should be practiced separately. This is exactly the same process as practicing each foot separately when the two feet will end up being combined into one pedal line.

Next, you should practice putting the two feet together, but with the notes staggered, so that you are not yet trying to play two notes at the same time, but are tracing the outline of the two-voice pedal part as it will be. This step in the process is unmeasured: you are following the physical shape of the pedal parts, but not their rhythm or the way that they will actually fit together. For the sixth measure of this Bach example, the practice line would look like Example 21.

This should be practiced slowly and reasonably steadily, without worrying about any particular rhythm. I have not indicated a specific pedaling here because that will be up to the particular player, and makes no difference in principle for the working out of this approach. After the patterns of the two feet have become comfortable interspersed with each other in this way, they can be brought into the proper rhythmic



alignment and the passage can be practiced as written.

Substitution in pedal playing is either 1) changing feet on one key silently: that is, bringing the right foot onto a note that is being held by the left foot and then removing the left foot from that note, without releasing the note, or the same with the roles of the feet reversed; or 2) moving the heel of one foot onto a note being held by the toe of that foot, or vice versa, again while holding the note—not releasing and repeating it.

Substitution is a natural outgrowth, technically, of the act of repeating a note using the other foot, as practiced in Exercise V of the March 2013 column. The change is, in a sense, just one of articulation: instead of putting a space between the “two” notes, you make them, in effect, legato—playing the second one before the first one has been released. Planning is required whenever you play two notes that are close together: which foot should be closer to the instrument and which closer to the bench? Should the new foot take over the key behind the old foot, or in front of it? Above or below? Try Exercise V this way, not repeating any of the notes that are the same as one another, slipping the foot that would have played the second note onto the key and then—but only then—silently removing the first foot and sending it on its way to its next note. This should feel like a natural outgrowth of the work that you have already done. ■

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