

Music Review

by Walter J. Beaupre, Ph.D.

Rex Koury, COLEMAN HYMNS OF PRAISE: Books 1 and 2, Dave Coleman Music, 1971-1972 (available in music stores or by mail from Coleman Music, P.O. Box 230, Montesano, Washington 98563; price \$2.50 each plus mailing).

This reviewer's impression of most church hymnals is that the printed music therein caters to four part harmonizing by sophisticated choirs, is written in keys suitable for none but boy sopranos and "castrati" if one attempts the melody line, and it devotes prime space to endless verses, some of which fit the music and others which do not. Typical hymn books are of minimal help to pianists and of absolutely no help to the struggling amateur organist. Unless one has learned from a competent teacher how to arrange hymns for organ one is doomed to ignominy and defeat.

For those home organists who haven't learned the tricks of the trade but who long to play some of the lovely traditional hymns, Rex Koury has done yeoman service in the "Coleman Hymns of Praise." All selections are written in C, G, or F, which means a minimum of sharps or flats. Most arrangements

include a helpful 4-bar intro or an appropriate coda. None pose any page turning problems, and all are clearly written with large notes which don't strain the bifocals. The Koury arrangements are easy to play but distinctive — narry a dud in the dozen.

The most creative treatments are of "Praise Ye The Father," "Take My Life and Let It Be," "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," and "O Perfect Love." "O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee" has a simple but most effective introduction and coda. Equally satisfying to play are "We Gather Together To Ask the Lord's Blessing," "When I Survey the Wond'rous Cross," "A Mighty Fortress," "Lead Kindly Light," "Now Thank We All Our God," "Beautiful Savior," and "Sun of My Soul."

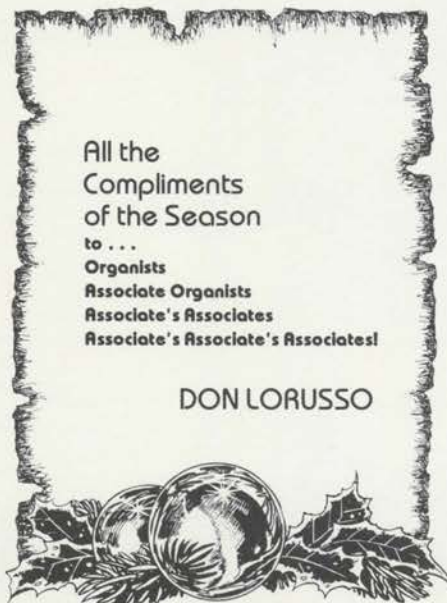
Rex provides fingering aids for better legato touch. Try his first before you invent your own. Pedal lines are simple but definitely add body as well as harmony to each hymn. His registration suggestions were consistently satisfying, and one should pay close attention to his edicts for using — or not using — vibrato or tremolo. Phrasing marks are helpful and should be followed. Other expression indicators are non-existent. Oh yes, Rex Koury makes it crystal clear which manuals to use for which hands, and when. Book 1 is definitely recommended for the novice who can now read music accurately and perhaps even for the advanced theatre organist who loves to play hymns but who never got "church trained."

In Book 2 the "Hymns of Praise" are sometimes more "ecumenical" rather than straight "Bible Belt:" all the way from Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" (alias "Alleluia! Sing to Jesus") to Duke Street ("How Firm A Foundation") to "When the Saints Go Marching In." This should not be interpreted as a snide criticism, only a frank description of what's what. This reviewer's personal favorite in the collection is one

he sang as a child, "This Is My Father's World." What a joy to hear it again! Others are familiar old hymn tunes but with different (to the reviewer, that is!) titles such as "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" and "There's A Wideness in God's Mercy." Also included for good measure are "There's Power in the Blood of the Lamb," "Jesus, The Very Thought of Thee," "Amazing Grace," "The King of Love My Shepherd Is," and "Rejoice Ye Pure in Heart."


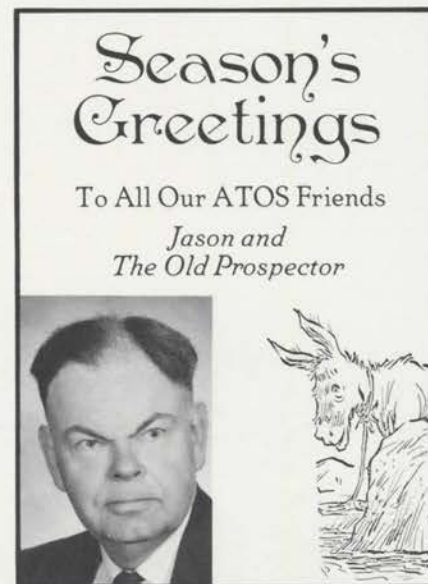
Some of Rex Koury's arrangements are more challenging to play well than those in Book 1. Expect a few more flats and a few more notes per measure. Pedal lines are less complex, which may be a fair trade-off. The quality of arrangements remains high. As in Book 1 each hymn includes at least one stanza of inspirational words. These are very practical sing-along books.

Don't expect to hear any flatted 9ths or jazz sevenths in these hymn arrangements. The harmonies are tastefully traditional even though the arrangements are personalized. One word of caution. These are not books for those who prefer religious music performed primarily with diapasons, principles and mixtures, sans swell shades and tremos. These are more in tune with the romantic tradition of the early 20th century, the same era that responded to vox humanas, tibias and the organ innovations of Robert Hope-Jones. Given these preferences and constraints, Rex Koury has done his work wisely and well. □



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