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**HYMNS**

Picture this: it's 10 a.m. on a Sunday morning, and you receive a frantic telephone call from a minister of a local church. It seems he just heard that his organist is ill and won't be able to play for the service at 11 a.m. He knows you play — albeit a more "unholy" type of music — and informs you that you are his only hope for any music at that service. You really don't want to let him down. Adapting hymns to the organ is really not as difficult as it may seem, and applying a traditional theatre organ styling can turn a hymn into an effective prelude or other "listening" music. What *will* you do?

In this first of two parts, we will discuss the "how-to's" of hymn-playing for congregational use.

Assuming that you are reading music (as opposed to playing by ear), you first need to learn bass clef reading. Just as there are slogans to help remember the treble clef lines and spaces, there are slogans for reading the bass clef. For the lines (bottom to top), say "Good Boys Do Fine Always." For the spaces, it's "All Cars

**Eat Gas."**

All hymns are written to be sung, and certain problems may arise in adapting a choral style to keyboard. There are two parts (notes played together) in the treble clef (soprano and alto) and two in the bass clef (tenor and bass). If you are playing piano, just play as written. The only musical problem that you may find is if two of the parts are more than an octave apart. Usually, this is found between the tenor and bass. As an example, let's say the tenor is D above middle C, and the bass is second-line Bb. There are two options: (1) play the D with the right hand along with the soprano and alto, or (2) play the Bb an octave higher. The second option is handy if there is a progression of large intervals such as these.

On organ, there are several options. One is to follow the piano technique, without pedals. Although the sound will not be as full or exciting as with pedals, this is a shortcut way of learning to play hymns quickly. For variety, add a 16' stop, and using both hands on the same manual, play an octave higher. If you are using pedals, duplicate the bass part in the pedal, especially if you are playing on a spinet organ. The more advanced — and most widely used — method is this: Play the soprano and alto voices with the right hand, the tenor with the left hand, and the bass on the pedals. Both hands should be on the same manual.

If you are playing on a full console with at least 25 pedals (2 octaves), you might consider using your right

foot as well as your left to maintain continuity. When your right foot begins to feel less awkward, begin experimenting with using the heel as well as the toe. This technique is very useful when moving in half or whole steps. In intervals of a third or more, alternate feet. If the bass line moves by steps or half steps, use one foot, heel and toe. One other important point is this: It is not necessary to play the bass line exactly where it's written; change octaves if it makes the pedal line more continuous. Remember — hymns were written primarily to be sung. Organists adapt for accompanying or leading the singing.

Remember to play legato. This is vitally important for a smooth organistic style. Tie all repeated notes in the alto, tenor, and bass parts. Soprano (melody) notes, however, should be repeated. Also, be sure to let the music "breathe." Just as a singer must breathe, so should your music. Phrase the music with silence just as sentences are phrased with commas, semi-colons, dashes and periods. The easiest way to phrase is to take a half beat from the last beat of the punctuated measure, and turn it into a rest. In other words, a quarter note becomes an eighth note with an eighth rest; a half note becomes a dotted quarter followed by an eighth rest.

Working on these techniques will help you to be ready for that frantic phone call, or for impromptu hymn sings. In the second part, we'll discuss how to effectively apply theatre-organ styling to hymns. □