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## PART 1

### *Leading Congregational Song*

#### WHAT IS HYMNODY?

An *academician* might define hymnody as “a body of song belonging to a particular religious denomination or sect that is consistent with the theology and teaching of that denomination or sect.” The *church musician* might further describe hymnody in terms of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs that are found in various styles and forms including chant, chorale, Psalter hymn, Victorian hymn, gospel hymn, revival hymn, folksong, praise chorus, and hymns of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. The *worshiper* in the pew might simply define hymnody as the song he or she gets to sing.

Although all of these descriptions are accurate, perhaps it is the worshiper’s response that most succinctly sets forth the unique essence of hymnody. Simply stated, *hymnody is the music of the people*. Since it is music of the people, its poetry and music tends to be fairly simple and uncomplicated.

For some, these characteristics have been used as a rationale for not including informed and artistic hymn playing as part of applied organ study and/or preparation for worship. This has had a disastrous effect on the life of hymnody, communal singing, and the use of the organ in worship. A musical and thoughtless leadership of hymns and liturgy have provided justification for some to abandon both traditional hymnody and the use of the organ in worship.

Max Reger, 1873–1916, a devout Roman Catholic familiar with protestant chorales through his studies in counterpoint and through raising his two children in his wife’s protestant faith, once remarked, “The protestants don’t know what musical treasures they have in their chorales.” Perhaps that is also true of organists and musicians today: we don’t realize what treasures we have in the songs of faith communities of various times and places.

Indeed it would be helpful for us to start thinking of hymnals and collections of congregational song as treasure chests. As with any collection of valuables, the value of the treasures increases proportionately to a community’s experience with the treasures. Hence all organists and leaders of communal singing have a great challenge and responsibility to share the treasures of this body of song with integrity, musical understanding, conviction, and creativity to the communities they are summoned to lead.

#### HYMN TEXTS

The poetry or text of a hymn might be defined as a kind of language intended to broaden, deepen, and describe one’s faith experience. Its function is not necessarily to tell about a significant truth or experience, but to invite and allow one to participate imaginatively in the experience. At times, the poetry is rooted in a dramatic experience or encounter of the poet, while at other times it is borne out of a lifetime of experiences, reflection, and thought.

It is imperative for organists to read the text of a hymn before any attempt is made to lead the singing of it and/or to improvise on it. Just as understanding and appreciation of a musical work is deepened

## PART 2

### *Creative Hymn Playing Using the Hymnal*

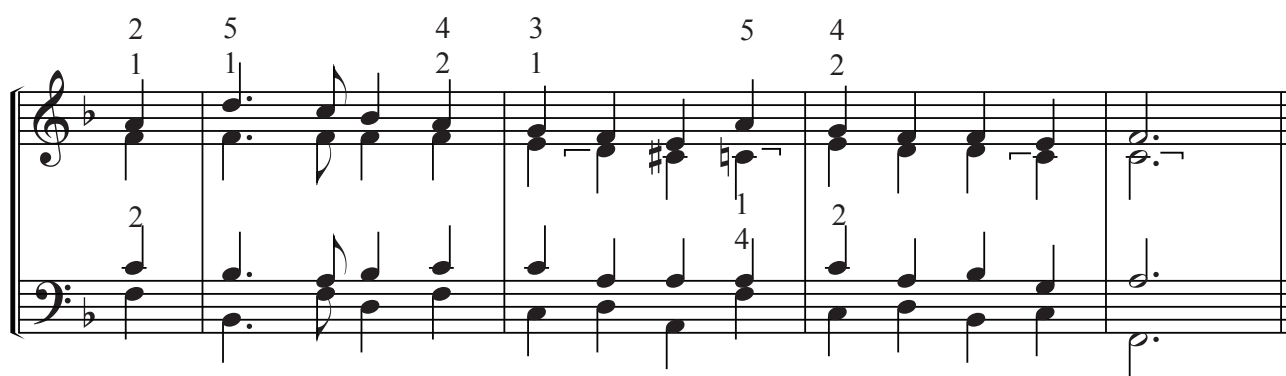
Creative hymn playing begins by playing a hymn accurately and artistically using the material provided in the hymnal or other collection of song used for communal singing.

#### PREPARING THE MATERIAL ON THE PRINTED PAGE

1. Begin by playing the melody with the right hand and the bass with the feet, focusing on the melodic and rhythmic relationship of each to the other.
2. Next add alto and tenor voices to the melody and bass, playing the melody with the right hand, the tenor with the left hand, the bass with the feet, and the alto divided between the right and left hands.
3. To decide which hand is best suited to playing individual notes or groups of notes of the alto voice
  - a. play the melody and the alto voice with the right hand, marking those alto pitches that are difficult to reach, those that hinder execution of a beautifully phrased melodic line, and those that hinder the articulation appropriate to the musical genre and text of the hymn;
  - b. determine if those marked pitches may be played comfortably by the left hand with the tenor voice;
  - c. determine if there are any additional alto notes that lie near those of the tenor voice that may also be played by the left hand.
4. Annotate the score with:
  - a. key fingerings and pedaling, especially at the beginnings of phrases, and at those places that require a new finger position, a specific pedaling, and/or a substitution or crossing over/under by fingers or feet;
  - b. brackets indicating those alto notes that will be played by the left hand.

*Winchester Old, 1592*  
*Attr. George Kirbye, ca. 1560–1634*

The musical score is for the hymn "Winchester Old". It is written in 4/4 time and the key of B-flat major. The score consists of two staves: a treble staff for the right hand and a bass staff for the left hand. The right hand plays the melody, which begins with a quarter note G4, followed by a half note A4, and then a series of eighth notes. The left hand plays a bass line that begins with a quarter note B2, followed by a half note C3, and then a series of eighth notes. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1, 3, and 5. Pedaling is indicated by a lambda symbol (Λ) and the text "[Ped. alt. toes]".



*Note: For some hymns, it may be easier to simply write in those alto pitches that will be played by the left hand on the bass clef with the tenor voice.*

### VARYING THE MATERIAL ON THE PRINTED PAGE

1. Play the SATB voices on manuals only.
2. Play the SA voices on Manual I, the T voice on Manual II using a contrasting color to Manual I, and the B voice in the Pedal. In this scheme, the T voice functions as a counter-melody to the melody.



3. Play the S voice on Manual I using a solo registration, the AT voices on Manual II using an accompaniment registration, and the B voice in the Pedal.

The musical score for exercise 3 consists of three systems of staves. Each system has three staves: a treble staff for the Soprano (S) voice, a grand staff (treble and bass) for the Alto/Tenor (AT) voices, and a bass staff for the Bass (B) voice. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system shows the S voice with a solo registration and the AT voices with an accompaniment registration. The second system shows the S voice with a solo registration and the AT voices with an accompaniment registration. The third system shows the S voice with a solo registration and the AT voices with an accompaniment registration.

4. Create an “increasing texture” setting by beginning with the S voice for the first phrase and adding the remaining A, T, and B voices, one at a time, for each of the successive phrases. A, T, and B voices should be added in the order that makes the most musical sense.

The musical score for exercise 4 consists of two systems of staves. Each system has three staves: a treble staff for the Soprano (S) voice, a grand staff (treble and bass) for the Alto/Tenor (AT) voices, and a bass staff for the Bass (B) voice. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system shows the S voice with a solo registration and the AT voices with an accompaniment registration. The second system shows the S voice with a solo registration and the AT voices with an accompaniment registration. Annotations indicate the entry of the B voice at 8va, the A voice, and the T voice.

## PART 3

### *Beginning Hymn-Based Improvisation*

Stephen Nachmanovitch, in his book, *Free Play: The Power of Improvisation in Life and the Arts*, reminds us that, in reality, all of life is made up of improvisation. He suggests,

When we think improvisation, we tend to think first of improvised music or theatre or dance; but beyond their own delights, such art forms are doors into an experience that constitutes the whole of everyday life. We are all improvisers. The most common form of improvisation is ordinary speech. As we talk and listen, we are drawing on a set of building blocks (vocabulary) and rules for combining them (grammar). These have been given to us by our culture. But the sentences we make with them may never have been said before and may never be said again.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, as we embark upon improvising a piece of music, we are drawing on a set of “building blocks” (melody, harmony, rhythm, counterpoint, musical form, etc.) and principles for combining them. The music we make with them may never have been made before and may never be made again.

Hence, the materials of this resource are presented as “building block experiences” for hymn-based improvisation. All who embark on this adventure are encouraged to think of these experiences as parts of a lifelong process of learning and to re-visit them often!

—Michael Burkhardt



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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Nachmanovitch, *Free Play: The Power of Imagination in Life and the Arts* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1990), 17.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

1. Read the text of the hymn.
2. Analyze the melody noting
  - a. the overall melodic movement: *stepwise, scalar, triadic, angular, etc.*
  - b. the overall rhythmic movement: *regular, irregular, one rhythmic duration, multiple rhythmic durations, etc.*
  - c. its range and tessitura
  - d. individual phrases
  - e. the length of individual phrases
  - f. the shape of individual phrases: *arch, ascending, descending, circling, etc.*
  - g. the formal arrangement of the phrases
  - h. recurring melodic and/or rhythmic patterns of the phrases.
3. Copy the melody on a piece of manuscript paper, limiting one phrase of the melody to each system, thereby allowing the melodic characteristics to be seen easily, unencumbered by the accompanying (ATB) voices of the hymnal.
4. Process the information noted intellectually/theoretically, aurally, and kinesthetically.
5. Limit improvisational options. Set parameters. Deliberately strive for simplicity before moving to the more complex.
  - a. working with melody: *melodic ornamentation, melodic-rhythmic motives, changing the meter*
  - b. working with harmony: *parallel movement, harmonizing cadences, bass lines*
  - c. working with form: *the simple hymn prelude, the extended hymn prelude, ABA, ritornello, ostinato*
  - d. working with imitative forms: *fughetta, canon, fantasia*
6. Experiment, adventure, and practice. Develop one facet of improvisation at a time. Create a plan of attack, experiment, and modify.
7. In performance, keep going. Don't stop! If caught in a "surprise" (mistake or unplanned maneuver) consider repeating it so that the listeners will think it was intended all along!



- The interval of a *fourth* or *fifth* may be filled in with a group of passing tones.
- Rhythms for melodic ornaments may be derived from subdivisions of the meter or superimposed in the meter (i.e., triplets may be superimposed in duple meter and duplets may be superimposed in triple meter, etc.)
- Trills  and mordents  may also be used to decorate a melody.

The following example illustrates how each of the non-harmonic tones and ornaments may be used to decorate *O filii et filiae*:

*O filii et filiae*  
15th Century French Melody

Ornamented Melody

Original Melody



a 3rd

a 2nd

a 2nd

a leap

a 2nd

a unison

a 4th

a 2nd

1. Choose a hymn.
2. Play the hymn melody as written; then play the melody using non-harmonic tones and ornaments to decorate it.



*O filii et filiae: Variation 9*, page 52

*Mit Freuden zart*, page 81

*Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier*, page 78

*Veni Emmanuel*, page 97



### *Working with Melody: Melodic-Rhythmic Motives*

A melodic and/or rhythmic motive can be created from a fragment of the melody and used throughout the melody as another form of ornamentation:

Motivically Ornamented Melody

Original Melody

1. Choose a hymn.
2. Play the hymn melody as written; then create a melodic and/or rhythmic motive for decorating the hymn melody.
3. Play the hymn melody ornamented by the newly created motive.



### Working with Form: ABA Form

This three-part form may be as simple as “Introduction + Hymn + Coda” in which the introduction and the coda are the same or very similar. ABA form may also consist of three presentations of the hymn tune in which the first and last presentations are the same or almost the same, and the second presentation is in a style, texture, tonality, and/or key contrasting to that of the first and third.

1. Choose a hymn.
2. Practice playing the opening phrase of the hymn with a two-measure introduction unrelated to the hymn melody. Then practice playing the final phrase of the hymn with a coda based on the material of the introduction.



First Phrase of Hymntune

Two-measure Introduction  
(not related to the hymntune)

Final Phrase of Hymntune

Three-measure Coda  
(identical to introduction)

3. Practice playing the opening phrase of the hymn with a two-measure introduction related to the hymn melody. Then practice playing the final phrase of the hymn with a coda based on the material of the introduction.

First Phrase of Hymntune

Two-measure Introduction  
(bracketed material based on final phrase of melody)

Final Phrase of Hymntune

Three-measure Coda (identical to introduction)

4. Practice playing the hymn in two contrasting manners (i.e., legato and marcato, SATB and two-part, major and minor, original key and a second key a third higher, etc.).

**A**

**B**

5. Practice playing the hymn in ABA form using the contrasting materials created in #4 for the A and B sections.

### Illustrations



*O filii et filiae: Variations 7–8,*  
pages 49–50

*Antioch,* page 56

*Besançon,* page 60

*Erhalt uns, Herr (Setting 2),*  
page 66

*Herzliebster Jesu,* page 70

*Holy Manna,* page 68

*Il est né,* page 74

*St. Anne (Setting 1),* page 90

### Working with Form: Ritornello Form

In this form, phrases or groups of phrases appear in alternation with a free or hymn-related ritornello (refrain). The ritornello may be the same each time it appears or varied in length, tonality, and/or key.

### Practice



1. Create a four-measure ritornello at the keyboard that is unrelated to the melody of the hymn. Practice playing the ritornello in the tonic key as well as in the dominant key.
2. Divide the hymn into two equal parts. Play the ritornello in the tonic key prior to the first part, the ritornello in the dominant key after the first part, and the ritornello in the tonic key after the second part.

# O filii et filiae

Theme

Man: Rohrflöte 8', Octave 4' *OR* Reed 8', Principal 4', Quinte 2 2/3'Ped: Bourdon 16', Octave 8' *OR* Reed 16', Octave 4'

Michael Burkhardt

Ped.

tenor voice often in parallel movement with soprano c.f. (tenths and sixths)

bass voice, a mirror of the soprano c.f.

Tune: *O FILII ET FILIAE*, French Melody, 15th cent. (PD)

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# O filii et filiae

## Variation 8 (Trio)

Ch: Krummhorn 8', Flute 4'

Sw: Gedackt 8'

Ped: Light 16', 8'

Michael Burkhardt

three-part form: 8 measure introduction + 16 measure hymn + 14 measure coda (2 m. overlap with c.f.)

Sw.

*leggero*

Ped.

4

8

Ch.

tenor c.f.

12

Tune: *O FILII ET FILIAE*, French Melody, 15th cent. (PD)

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## PART 4

*Hymn-Based Improvisation: Repertoire*

## Antioch

Gt: Flute 8', Octave 4', Quinte 2 2/3', Octave 2'  
 Ch: Krummhorn 8', Flute 4'  
 Sw: Gedackt 8', Octavin 2'  
 Ped: Subbass 16', Flute 8'

*Forms and Techniques Illustrated*

**A B A Form:** ritornello | hymn | ritornello

**Ritornello:** mm. 1-7 and mm. 21-26

**Rhythmic Pedal Point:** mm. 1-7 and mm. 21-26

**Fughetta:** mm. 7-12

**Figurative c.f.:** fughetta subject and m. 13

**Ornamented c.f.:** mm. 15-16

**Antiphonal Phrases:** mm. 15-16

Michael Burkhardt

Sw. } *leggiero*

*simile*

4

*tr*

Tune: *ANTIOCH*, English Melody, *arr.* Lowell Mason, 1792-1872, written in the 18th cent. (PD)

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