

PIANISTS, YOU MUST LEARN THE ORGAN!

Lea Schmidt-Rogers

My passion for the last ten years has been to turn my pianist friends and piano students on to playing the organ. I only began to study the organ seriously at age 35. My piano teachers had discouraged organ study, because it was such a "cold" instrument. To them it lacked the sensitivity of the piano. Organ study would detract from a piano career, they said. When the international piano career never matured and students quit for the summer, I, being short on funds, realized I needed to find additional means of support. I took organ lessons and immediately found an organ job. Pressing economics paved the way for a lifelong addiction.

In the quest to promote organ study, it has been useful to belong to our pianists' organization in San Diego, the Music Teachers Association of California. As a board member six years ago, I suggested that one of our monthly programs could include visiting several pipe organs in town. The MTAC then had its first organ crawl. Piano teachers and students alike enjoyed hearing one of the largest organs in town and also a considerably smaller tracker. MTAC's Bach festival is now held in churches instead of concert halls, giving young organists the opportunity to compete with, and be heard by, young pianists.

Recently, members of the local AGO board reached out to the piano community with a special category in the Scholarship Awards for pianists to study the organ. This

program has been quite successful.

My piano students, who are members of the church where I work, have had access to practicing and performing on our pipe organ. Sometimes half of the piano lesson, or more, is at the organ. In my observations, their piano playing has also excelled. Students have gained a keener awareness of the differentiation in technique between both instruments. Those students who have gotten bored with the usual piano routine can be "picked up" by organ playing. Pistons, crescendo pedals, toe studs, and pedal playing are especially fascinating to young people. My students often play the prelude at my church, and the response by parishioners has been overwhelmingly positive.

Teaching the organ has been a delight and inspiration to me. I even begin first-year piano students on the organ. They love it. We adapt piano pieces to the organ, and there are enough beginning piano hymnbooks with good accompaniments that they are able to perform these also. Even teaching at my studio on an old Hammond "that won't die" has excited some students. This year, one 13-year-old student, who really was not adept at piano playing, wrote an organ composition for a state contest. It was the high point of his musical life to date.

The fine arts committee at our church always emphasizes to guest organists that we have many interested young music students in the audience, in hopes that the artists will gear their programming somewhat to

them. There are always children clambering around the organ after these concerts, asking questions and wishing to try the instrument.

During my preludes and postludes at church, I try to involve young people in turning pages or being "assistants," even if I don't need one. We have taken field trips to the great Spreckels Organ in Balboa Park. We have attended AGO organ crawls. This year, my students will play in an organ marathon and assist at a pancake breakfast to raise money to complete the Reuter pipe organ at our church. There is an excitement present with involvement. They will experience each addition to the instrument personally, because they helped to earn it.

Questions such as how old must a student be to begin organ, or should their legs reach the pedals, should not prevent teachers from introducing students to the organ. Valuable musical lessons, such as using finger technique instead of the entire arm, playing a true legato line, and learning how to balance a solo voice with an accompaniment can be taught long before sufficient height is reached to use the pedals. The pedals can also be a carrot, a great achievement reached.

I have tears in my eyes thinking of the standing ovation given recently to a piano student turned organist who played the *Toccata in D Minor* as a postlude. It was a great day for him, the church, and the organ world.

THOMAS TALLIS: SELECTED ENGLISH ANTHEMS

I was recently interested in trying to find some good choral repertoire for my choir when I stumbled upon the English anthems of Thomas Tallis (c.1505-85).

Tallis was a Catholic composer who lived in England during the time of the Protestant Reformation (1534). Sacred choral composition was profoundly affected by the Reformation in the Church of England. Tallis's sacred choral music is a perfect example of the transformation in choral writing. Before the Reformation, Tallis wrote large polyphonic choral works in Latin. When the Protestant Reformers came to power, they insisted on a much more simplified choral style for sacred music, with texts in English, composed in a manner in which the text could be clearly understood by the people. The demands of the Protestants redirected Tallis toward writing anthems in English. His English anthems are written in a homophonic style, with a syllabic text setting, utilizing varying amounts of imitation for musical interest.

These pieces are excellent repertoire for church choirs. If your choir can sing a hymn in four parts, it can learn one of these pieces with just a little more effort. Tallis wrote twelve English anthems: eight for four voices, three for five voices, and one for six voices.

I have decided to discuss briefly just six of his four-part anthems because they are the easiest to sing and the most readily available. They can be purchased from Oxford University Press. I have listed them in order of difficulty starting with the simplest followed by a seasonal reference, code number, price, and a brief comment.

If Ye Love Me (Pentecost, #352138-5, 50¢). This piece could also be used as a general anthem. It is the simplest of the six and the shortest at only three pages. It belongs in every church choral library.

Verily, Verily, I Say Unto You (Communion, #352236-5, 60¢). Another very useful piece, it is almost entirely in a strict homophonic style. "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."

Purge Me, O Lord (Lent, #3521334-4, \$1.25). Asks God to renew the spirit and affirm the truth. "Purge me, O Lord, from all my sin."

This is My Commandment (General, #352140-7, \$3.25). Expensive for a five-page anthem. Scored for AATB choir. Sopranos can't sing the first alto part because the range is too low. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another ev'n as I have loved you. No man hath greater love than this, to give his life ev'n for his friends." This anthem

could be used very effectively on Palm/Passion Sunday or on Good Friday, sometime after the Passion is read.

Hear the Voice and Prayer (General/Dedication of a Church, #352233-0, \$2). This anthem is also scored for AATB but the first alto part can definitely be sung by the sopranos, except for one low B[♭] at the end. This piece is more difficult than the previous four anthems, also the longest at six pages.

O Lord, Give Thy Holy Spirit (Pentecost, #352271-3, 70¢). Most difficult of the six because it is the most contrapuntal and only briefly homophonic, but still within many choirs' ability.

All of these editions come with a keyboard reduction. The choir could perform these pieces with organ accompaniment using just a light 8' flute. If the choir becomes very secure with the vocal parts, they can move on to singing them a cappella. I also highly recommend a CD of these pieces, *Thomas Tallis: The Complete English Anthems*, which features the Tallis Scholars conducted by Peter Phillips. Gimell CDGIM 007 (Harmonia Mundi).

WAYNE DIETERICH
Education Coordinator
Suffolk County (N.Y.) AGO Chapter