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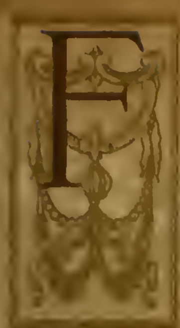
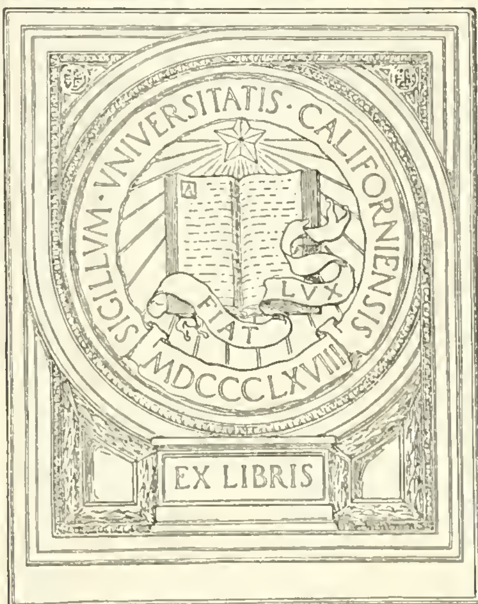


FIRST LESSONS in EXTEMPORIZING on the Organ

by H. C. MACDOUGALL

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



Fourth Issue

FIRST LESSONS
IN
EXTEMPORIZING
on the
ORGAN

By

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Organist and Choirmaster
of Wellesley College

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PREFACE

Experience teaches every church organist that the ability to extemporize even in modest fashion is not only a very convenient thing, but also, very often indeed, a positive necessity.

Natural aptitude and intelligent practice are the foundations of good extemporizing, as indeed they are of good organ playing. Natural aptitude alone will not enable one either to play the organ well or to extemporize on it acceptably; one must practice extemporizing regularly, day by day, over and over again, just as one practices the pieces in one's organ repertoire. A seventeenth-century writer (Francis Quarles) puts it somewhat inelegantly, but squarely, when he writes: "I see no virtues where I smell no sweat." To invent and play, on the spur of the moment and without specific preparation, an unwritten piece of music, long or short as the case may demand, conforming reasonably to the principles of musical composition, is to extemporize.

Since improvisation is something that forms a part of the business of every organist, the present little book is extended as a helping hand. No attempt is made to teach more than can be taught, to do more than give the player a fair start, nor to induct him into the mysteries of the whole-tone scale, the Wagnerian endless melody, or the modern dissonant style. The musical illustrations have been written to give the average organist with a fair amount of harmonic knowledge and rather more than a fair amount of musical intelligence, an idea of what is expected of him. These are "first lessons."

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FIRST LESSONS IN EXTEMPORIZING

SECTION I

Fundamental Principles

1. Do not stop the flow of the music for reflection; one must keep going.

2. Keep to the meter with which the start is made; do not, for example, interpolate a measure of 4/4 into a 3/4 movement, or a 3/4 into a 4/4 movement.

3. Nothing is to be written, save possibly one's theme, and it is much better to accustom one's self to memorising the theme.

Note. Further on a method of practicing certain particular points in improvising through writing will be suggested; but these methods must not be confused with extemporizing itself.

Tests as to Natural Aptitude

4. (a) Observing pars. 1 and 2, play any well-known melody (Robin Adair, Old Folks at Home, The Long, Long Trail, etc.) in several keys. Do this with variety in the figuration of the accompaniment. For example:

1 or or

(b) Do this with a listener or listeners, and note whether the extemporizing is done as easily as if alone.

Note. The result of trying the tests suggested in par. 4 may be discouraging, but the conclusion that natural aptitude is entirely lacking ought not to be drawn unless the melodies cannot be remembered; or, if remembered, cannot be played "by ear"; or, if remembered and played by ear, can be played in one key only. The particular melodies named in par. 4 may not happen to be known to the player, but the test is valid for any melody that is familiar to him.

(c) This test ought to extend over a considerable period of time, for a week or two, with daily experiments, and may well employ anything known to the player—national airs, folk-tunes, vaudeville tunes—in short, anything good, bad or indifferent.

5. In all practice have at the keyboard a list of the major and minor keys, also a table of the more common time- (or meter-) signatures. For example: C major; C minor; C sharp minor; D flat major; D major; D minor; D sharp minor; E flat major; E flat minor; E major; E minor; F major; F minor; F sharp major; F sharp minor; G major; G minor; G sharp minor; A flat major; A major; A minor; B flat major; B flat minor; B major; B minor. Time-signatures: 2/2, 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 6/8.

Make this in convenient form (columns), and check off each key and time-signature as you use it, taking the whole list, not necessarily in the order given, as time goes on. The extemporizer must be at home in all the principal keys, at least.

SECTION II

Harmony and Musical Form

6. The definition of extemporizing given in the preface speaks of a "reasonable conformation to the principles of musical composition." Since improvisation is often, in the organist's case, a necessity, it is obviously unfair to subject his extemporizing to the same tests that are applied to written work. On the other hand, he cannot claim total exemption from these tests. Granting equal spontaneity and beauty of invention in two improvisations, the one which is most correct according to the principles of musical composition must be adjudged the better. So the player should continually strive for harmonic and formal accuracy. It is not rare to find organists who have a natural harmonic sense, and these players will improvise, so far as regards the harmony, with few solecisms; but, generally speaking, very little beyond the merest beginnings of extemporizing is possible for one who is ignorant of harmony, counterpoint and musical form.

Four-measure Form

7. All improvisations are or ought to be based on some plan or "form." The first of these to be taken up is the four-measure form.

This form usually begins with the tonic chord and ends with the tonic chord in the last measure accented, preceded by the dominant or subdominant chord unaccented.

Allegro

f

2

Andante

p

3

Illustrations 2 and 3 are ordinary four-measure phrases, but in different styles and tempi.

Moderato

p

4

Allegro

5

p

Illustrations 4 and 5 employ the plagal cadence (tonic chord preceded by subdominant for the last two chords), while Nos. 2 and 3 use the authentic cadence (dominant chord followed by tonic chord).

Change-Endings—Getting Away from the Theme

8. Just as in writing English a word or thought leads naturally to another word or supplementary thought until a paragraph is written, so in music the theme is merely a point of departure, suggesting other terminations or endings; these in their turn leading to other bits of music, and so on. But in his early practice in extemporizing the player finds it difficult to leave the subject, especially if it be a well-known theme. To overcome this difficulty, as well as to stimulate invention, take familiar hymn-tunes and give each phrase an ending different from the printed one.* For example:

Eventide W. H. Monk

6

f

dim.

*It surely is hardly necessary to say that when suggestions as to alterations in well-known hymn-tunes are made here or elsewhere they are made for instructive purposes only, and not with the thought of improving on the original tune.

9. After assiduous practice in the manner of No. 6, make a change-ending for the first phrase of many hymn-tunes, taking the new ending as a point of wide departure.

Petra R. Redhead

7

etc.

NOTE. A good hymnal ought to be at hand for practice-material. The newer American hymnals, the Oxford Hymnal, Hymns Ancient and Modern, or the English Hymnal, will be found useful.

10. The four-measure form is so natural to all musicians, and so imbedded in our musical consciousness, that the player will have little difficulty in "feeling" it, that is, in knowing exactly when it is time for the cadence. In case this is not the experience of the player, he should count aloud as he plays; suppose the meter is 3/4, count thus: 1 two three, 2 two three, 3 two three, 4 two three. The Arabic numerals mark the number of the measure and the first beat, while the "two three" stand for the 2d and 3d beats. This counting aloud may well be kept up until the four measures are "felt" without the counting. The player will note that as he says "4" he must be playing the tonic chord. If his phrase had begun on the third beat the counting would go "three, 1 two three, 2 two three, 3 two three, 4 two."

Two-measure and Eight-measure Phrases

11. Many of the old syllabic tunes, with four beats in a measure, have phrases two measures long; but if the rhythm is considered to be duple—which is usually the case—the meter-signature becomes 2/4 or 2/2 and the phrases are four measures long.

Eight measures is a long distance for the mind to carry over the musical thought, but eight-measure phrases are by no means rare.

St Chrysostom J. Barnby

8

p

etc.

The longer phrase is made out of the shorter one by "side-stepping" the cadence, delaying it until the 7th-8th measures.

Suggestions as to Practice

12. The work up to this point has been fundamental, and therefore of the greatest importance. Hard, steady practice is absolutely necessary to get results. A comparatively small degree of natural aptitude for improvising, and much hard practice, will take one farther than a greater degree of natural aptitude and little practice. Bear in mind especially pars. 1 and 2.

Discouragement arising from poor harmony, and inability to get away from certain stereotyped melodic or harmonic sequences—these are inevitable parts of the "game," and must not be allowed to lower the player's *morale*.

The Eight-measure Phrase (Four plus Four)

13. After the four-measure phrase with the complete stop (authentic or plagal cadence) at the end is extemporized with some readiness, the extension of the four measures to eight may be attempted. There are at least two ways of doing this; (1) to end the first four measures with a half-cadence, or (2) by a modulation to a related key, in each case repeating the original four measures, bringing them to a complete stop. It is also effective to make the eight measures different throughout.

Illustration 9 shows a half-cadence in measure 4.

Illustration 10 shows a half-cadence at measure 4.

Illustration 11 shows a modulation to the key of the dominant in the third measure.

12

Allegro

f

Illustration 12 has the half-cadence, but measures 5 to 8 are not repeated from measures 1 to 4.

In working out these various plans, think out carefully what is to be attempted, mentally rehearsing the melody and harmony before beginning. The player must make up his mind, once he begins, to go on manfully without stopping and without losing the rhythm. His slogan must be, KEEP MOVING.

Taking Account of Stock

14. It will be encouraging at this point to see what one can do in stringing together various airs playable by ear, never using the same sequence of keys more than twice. For example:

Introduction in 4 measures, ending on the dominant chord of F major.
"Bluebells of Scotland" in F.
Modulate to d minor, ending the modulation on the dominant chord.
"O, Charlie is my Darlin' " in D minor.
Modulation to B flat major, ending the modulation on the dominant chord of B flat major.
"Annie Laurie" in B flat major.
Brief Coda of two measures.

Repeat the extemporization in this order and with these key-changes:
Introduction in B flat major.
"Annie Laurie," in that key.
Modulation to G minor.
"O, Charlie is my Darlin' " in G minor.
Modulation to E flat major.
"Bluebells of Scotland" in E flat major.
Coda of two measures in E flat major.

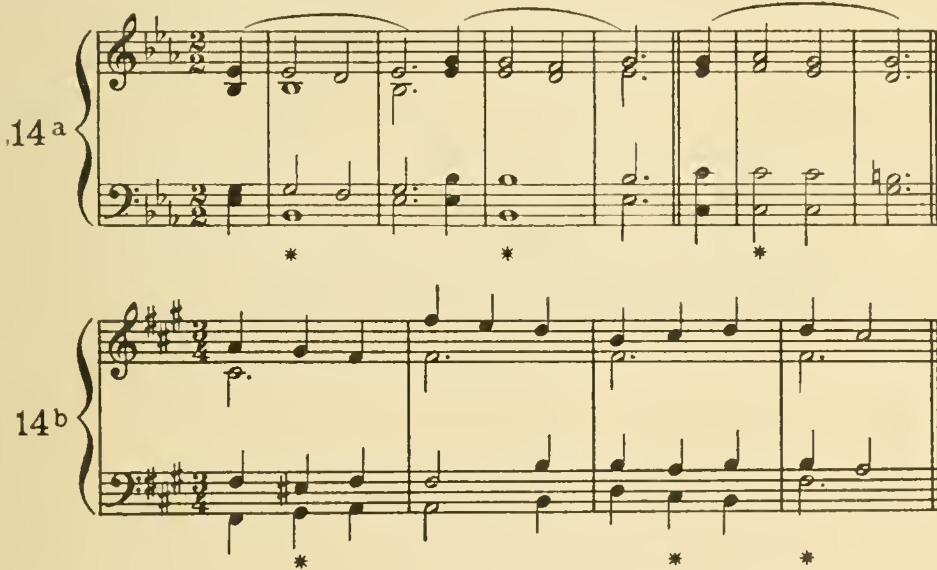
By this time the general command of the keyboard ought to be distinctly greater.

The Six-four Chord, Second Inversion

15. If the player has the benefit of professional criticism or that of a candid friend, he will have heard a good deal about the second inversion of the triad and its iniquitous use in improvisations. The chord with its fifth in the bass (second inversion) has a fatal fascination for the extemporizer and is usually the second chord he plays; in fact, it seems to the critical hearer that that particular chord is the only

one the unfortunate *improvisateur* has in his mind! Let him avoid it in improvisation as he would the pestilence, until he can use it properly; of course, it is legitimate when it is the tonic six-four, the third chord from the end of a phrase and accented. For example:

Two other uses of the second inversion of chords on the second, fourth and first degrees of the scale are safe; (a) when the six-four is followed by a chord on the same bass note, the latter being the root of a chord, and (b) the six-four whose bass is the middle of three bass notes moving scale-wise. For example:



Contrary Motion between Highest and Lowest Parts

16. In the excitement of "keeping it going" the extemporizer will fall into many errors—positive and bad errors, to say nothing of infelicities; but he must remember that application and work will do wonders. A simple rule will help to avoid the grosser mistakes, and this is, *Avoid parallel motion between the highest and lowest parts.* Many times, of course, these parts may progress by thirds or sixths to the advantage of the music, but the contrary motion suggested will take care of consecutives (parallel fifths and octaves). This idea of contrary motion between extreme parts is a great help, too, when improvising a melodious upper part to accompany the air in the bass. (See par. 26.)

A Twenty-eight Measure Piece (Song-Form)

17. By this time, let us say in two months from the time of beginning the study, the player will be able to "feel" his eight-measure phrase (4 plus 4). He is

then—provided we have not overestimated his progress—in a position to combine two eight-measure phrases into what is usually called the Song-Form, adding four measures to mark the close of the piece (Coda). The 28-measure piece has this form: 8 measures (4 plus 4), plus 8 measures (4 plus 4) in a related key, the first 8 measures *da capo*, and 4 measures added as Coda. The whole piece may be made up on change-endings, or on original matter; or the change-ending style and original matter may be alternated.

15

Andante

p

mf

Coda

D.C. con repetizione e poi al Coda

rit.

16

Allegretto

mf

rit.

Coda

D.C.

p

rit.

Allegretto

17

f

Cantabile

p

Coda *senza rit.*

D.C. *p*

No. 17 has both sections in the eight-measure phrase that is practically continuous. (See par. 11.)

Briskly

18

f

p

simile

p

p

p

D.C.

f

No. 18 has short phrases in the folk-song fashion.

See also Illustrations 19-21.

Recapitulation

18. Practice regularly. Keep going. Do not lose the rhythm. Plan your improvisation.

SECTION III

Choosing the Theme—Extending the Form

Themes from Hymn-tunes

19. Since the hymn-tune is a form of music with which the organist has much business, and since it is something with which his audience is pretty sure to be familiar, well-known hymn-tunes furnish excellent material for improvisation. One essential of an effective improvisation is that the theme shall be familiar to the audience. Having heard a masterly and most exciting extemporization from Guilmant on "Jerusalem the golden," the writer remembers his keen disappointment on hearing him extemporize on an unfamiliar plain-song melody; the second improvisation was, no doubt, as good as the first, but it was not enjoyed. How can the audience enjoy the extemporizer's art if it does not recognize his theme?

Hymn-tunes differ much in their value for the purpose. The first phrase may be used to advantage, since it is usually quickly recognized, but one needs more than one subject to work with if one is to go on for more than a few measures. In the majority of hymn-tunes the phrases following the first phrase are very much like it in rhythm, and it is to differences in rhythm more than to differences in harmony or in melody that we have to look for suggestions.

Scan the tune, however, and select those phrases or parts of phrases that have some mark of distinction about them. Play over 50 tunes, dissecting them for contrasted phrases; having found the phrases, make little pieces of 28 measures. (See par. 17.) Use the first selected phrase for the theme of section one, and the second selected phrase for the second section; or, if it can't be made to go that way, take a phrase from another tune, or take an entirely original phrase.

The following illustration is derived from the hymn-tunes *St. Gertrude* and *Ellers*.

19

f 1 2 *p* 1 2 *D.C.* Coda *rit.*

No. 20 has one phrase from *St. Athanasius*, by E. J. Hopkins; the other phrase is original.

20

mf 1

Coda

D.C.

pp

In No. 21 the first section is from *Neander* (J. Neander), the second from *St. Athanasius* (Hopkins).

21

f

Coda

D.C.

20. The centre of gravity in extemporization must be melody or rhythm, rather than harmony. Listen to an organist "showing off" a stop. Does he invent a melody? Nine times out of ten, no; he simply crawls along on chords without melody or rhythm. The effort must always be made to think in terms of rhythm and melody. Melody precedes in the thought, harmony follows. Rhythm brightens up the whole, even if it be not the vitalizing principle of the whole.

Suggestions for Practice

21. Select a regular time for practice, and do not depend on "feeling like it" as an incentive. It is true that one is more disposed towards all sorts of musical

work at one time than at some possible other time, but it is fatal to progress to give in to those feelings.

After fifty tunes have been examined, divide them into classes; the first class including those tunes that have two excellent themes, the second class those that have only one theme, and the third class those tunes. grouped by twos, that may be used as first and second themes.

Play the improvisation on the tunes selected at least three times; after three times the mind works about as it did before and the piece becomes stereotyped. Do as many twenty-eight measure pieces as can be done in the time set apart. On the next day review the more promising of these, taking as many new ones as time will allow. As study proceeds it will be more readily ascertained what subjects promise well, and it will be possible to throw out those that are seen to be comparatively worthless.

The twenty-eight measure pieces do not amount to very much as music, although they are by no means to be despised. Their form is one of the standard forms, and it is only on account of their narrow range that we are inclined to look down upon them. How can one do well in the larger forms if one cannot master the small ones?

Harmonic Technique

22. Before this time, even, the player will have discovered how far his knowledge of harmony is a help to him in his improvisations. If he find that he is deficient in harmony, then let him review his harmony and advance in it, too. If he can go on with Counterpoint, so much the better. Harmonizing melodies, and putting the melodies into tenor and into bass as well—these are the ways to make the study of harmony practical. Counterpoint is essential if, later, the player wishes to make fugatos on hymn-tune subjects. (See Section VIII.)

If the player wishes to study his harmony in such a way as to advance his extemporization work directly, he may do his writing under (as nearly as possible) the extemporizing conditions; that is (1) he must make no erasures; (2) he must not try the work over on the organ before it is completed; (3) the writing must be steady in point of progress, that is, not done by fits and starts. Of course, it is absurd to think of writing as done in *tempo*, but it can be done with some steadiness. After finishing the writing it must be played, the criticism written, and the time taken in writing set down. It is thus possible to combine a certain discipline in writing with practice on the keyboard in extemporization. (See par. 3, Note, and Section VIII, 1.)

SECTION IV

Other Forms

23. After one has mastered the simple twenty-eight measure form, one has the key to a good many other forms, such as the March, Waltz, and many pieces of the type. The problem is simply one of making up one's mind just what combinations of eight-measure phrases will probably suit the theme one has taken, or that has been given, and then proceed to work it out.

For example, a March. Sullivan's tune *St. Gertrude* suggests a March. Following the ordinary custom, a trumpet fanfare of four measures will serve as introduction;

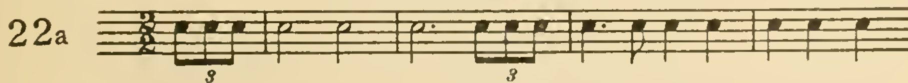
this may be followed by an eight-measure phrase to serve as A; next, another eight-measure phrase to serve as B; then the *da capo* of A. Now will come a second section constructed precisely like the first but, on the whole, in a related key; the trumpet fanfare and the twenty-four measures following the fanfare will be repeated, and with a Coda of perhaps four measures the piece will end. A sample "scenario" of the March might be written thus:

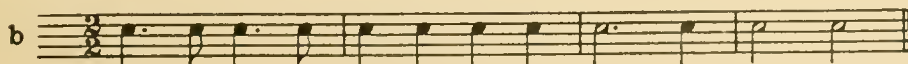
Fanfare in G major, ending on dominant of G	4 measures
(A) 8 meas. in G major	8 "
(B) 8 meas. in D major (related key)	8 "
(A) 8 meas. like first (A), or somewhat varied	8 "
TRIO:	
(C) 8 meas. in D major (related to G major)	8 measures
(D) 8 meas. in B minor (related to D major)	8 "
(C) 8 meas. as before, or somewhat varied	8 "
Fanfare	4 measures
(A), (B), (A) as before, so far as can be recalled	24 "
Coda 4 meas. on tonic pedal	4 "
Total:	84 measures

Another "scenario" for the same improvisation might be this:

Fanfare, 4 meas. in G, ending on dominant of key	4 measures
(A) 8 meas. in G major	8 "
(B) 8 meas. in E minor (related key)	8 "
(A) 8 meas. as before	8 "
TRIO:	
(C) 8 meas. in D major (related to G major)	8 "
(D) 8 meas. in A major (related to D major)	8 "
(C) 8 meas. as before	8 "
Fanfare and (A), (B), (A) repeated	28 "
Coda 4 meas.	4 "
Total:	84 measures

As one goes on in the practice of this short and simple March-form one will naturally learn to distinguish the different sections (A), (B), (C) and (D) rhythmically; since the March is essentially a rhythmic form, the rhythmic figures become of importance. It is easy to fall into a rut in this respect. After one has accumulated four or five different and effective figures, it is the proper thing to store them in one's memory for the future. A good *improvisateur* has all his plans, his rhythmic figures for different meters, his little technical "dodges," always ready for instant use. Below are some suggestions for different rhythmic figures to be employed in the March.

22a


b


Sixteen-measure Phrases

24. As one practices the short March-form worked out in par. 23, a feeling that the various sections are too short for an effective and "grown-up" extemporization will naturally manifest itself. We may well enquire how to improve the form.

A study of forms of this nature, that is, forms made up of definite bits of music sharply set off from each other by cadences marking their limits, shows that sixteen-measure phrases give just the sense of extension that satisfies. The sixteen-measure phrase is manifestly an 8 plus 8; or a 4 plus 4 plus 8; or an 8 plus 4 plus 4; or a 4 plus 4 plus 4 plus 4. Taking the last distribution of cadences we find that it is often managed as follows: 4 measures in tonic key (half-cadence on dominant); 4 meas. modulating to key of dominant; 4 meas. on a dominant pedal, which pulls the tonic key back; and the last 4 a repetition of the first 4, with full cadence in the tonic key. The player ought to practice this sixteen-measure scheme until he can work it instanter with any hymn-tune phrase suggested. Other ways of working out the sixteen-measure plan will be noted in the study of hymn-tunes, although the element of recurrence to the first phrase is too often missing in hymn-tunes. Of course, it will not do for the extemporizer to use the same formula for all the sections of his March; he must have at least two formulæ at command.

Extemporizing in Four Parts

25. Although the illustrations presented in "First Lessons" have been written usually for four parts, it is by no means suggested to the student of extemporization as one of the necessary things to work for; such an ambition would handicap him so that he would be unable to do anything at all. On the other hand, entirely to neglect all the principles of part-writing would be fatal to true progress. The first steps the writer himself took in improvisation were wholly nullified by his being obliged to work with three parts only, a task far too difficult for him. A "reasonable conformation to the principles of musical composition" is all that may be demanded of the student.

SECTION V

Inversion of the Theme

Melody in the Bass

26. No improvisation can be carried along very far without some appearances of the melody or of the theme in the lowest part (bass), or in the middle part (tenor). It is much more difficult to adapt one's self and one's ideas to the melody in the lowest part for this reason: It is often impossible to use the same harmonies for the melody in the lowest part as were used for that same melody when it appears in the highest or a middle part. The first four measures of *Nicea*, for example, use the tonic and

subdominant harmonies only; but if one puts the air into the bass the fifth melody-tone cannot, without using a most distressing 6/4, be harmonised by the tonic chord, but must be a part of the dominant chord. This change of harmony is momentarily as disturbing to the neophyte as a slight inequality in the road is to a trotting horse: the horse will very likely change his gait at the inequality. So soon as one change in the harmony is made, other changes will be involved. The point of these remarks will appear after inspection of Nos. 23 and 24 below. Note the changes of harmony here and there made necessary by the avoidance of the 6/4 referred to, and note how much superior No. 24 is to No. 23, in that 24 carries out the rhythmic motion suggested in the first measure of the theme (air).

Nicea (Dykes)

23

24

Melody in the Tenor

27. When the melody is in the tenor (a middle part), there will be none of the difficulty connected with the harmony suggested in par. 25. Every improvisation may be considerably freshened up by the transference of the theme at times to the violoncello range. If the player makes any attempt to add a counter-theme in the highest part it is well to stick to contrary motion between this part and the melody. (See par. 16.) Only a practiced *improvisateur* will be able to add with any musical success a counter-theme to the principal melody.

25

p simile
Sw. Ch. mf etc.
Ped.

SECTION VI

Varying the Harmony—Registration

28. In warning the would-be extemporizer (in par. 20) against a mere stringing together of chords without melody or rhythm, it was not intended for one moment to suggest that it is not an excellent plan, as an extemporization develops, to vary the harmony which clothes the theme. In fact, this is one of the easiest and most fruitful of all the devices for creating color and interest; it may easily be overdone, of course. There is nothing less difficult than to overload a melody with chromatic, complicated and bizarre harmonies destroying the very object for which they were introduced.

Consistency in Accompanimental Figures

29. By "figure" is meant the arrangement of the chord-material for the purposes of accompaniment, especially with regard to the rhythm.

The principle to be observed is: Stick to the rhythmic pattern and general arrangement with which the start is made. In No. 25, for example, the accompanimental figure was a quarter-rest and three quarter-note chords; any figure must be adhered to rigidly for at least one section, or until it is evaluated, when the figure may be changed. The arrangement of the chord-material irrespective of the rhythm is also to be noted; a chord on the second beat in the measure is followed by the same chord on the third beat, but in the next higher position; this is kept up consistently until worked out.

The Developmental (Continuous) Style

30. So far in "First Lessons" the suggestions as to extemporization have all been directed to making music with the four-, eight-, or sixteen-measure unit. This results in definite blocks of music, each block set off against its neighbor-blocks in perfectly definite sections. In some respects this is the most difficult form that improvisation can take, for any defects in the form are immediately apparent to the musical listener. On the other hand, forms made by combining in various ways the four-measure units are very easy to understand.

But if one examines a composition like Mendelssohn's *Hunting Song*, or a movement from one of the earlier sonatas of Beethoven, one notes that, while the four-measure phrase is by no means absent, there is a continuity in the music that is opposed to the square-cut, well-balanced structure of the Chopin Nocturne in E flat, for example. It is no part of "First Lessons" to go into a subject so difficult to reduce to a practical teaching basis; a player who has mastered the lessons so far

given and who has heard a good deal of good music will quite naturally find his way into the new paths, combining with the continuous enough of the square-cut and formal to keep the improvisation somewhere near the ground. The lessons following are based on the assumption that the player has absorbed a good deal of the continuous or developmental style, and is able to "keep going" without losing his rhythmic way, yet without consciously balancing every eight measures by another eight.

Importance of Attractive Registration

If the player will make the experiment of repeating an organ improvisation, so far as memory will serve, on the piano, it will be patent even to his ears how much more attractive the former extemporization was. Organists will probably not quarrel with the fate that has made it possible for them—granted a rich-toned organ, with the fascinating modern tone-colors—to interest a congregation in something that is less good than it sounds! The *improvisateur* ought not to become so absorbed in the working-out of his theme that he forgets to clothe it richly and appropriately.

Some of the things that suggest themselves as important in registration are, (1) to see that, wherever possible, melody and accompaniment are contrasted in tone-color, as well as in strength; (2) to change, when one does change, from one tone-color to another contrasting color; (3) to avoid restlessness, changing without purpose; (4) to suit the combination or the single stop to the sentiment of the music; do not play on the Vox Celestis what ought to have the Diapason tone-color, or expect a sensuous, passionate phrase to be expressed by a Melodia.

General Schemes

The best general scheme for all-round use is that of the Song-Form, or the Introduction, A, B, A, Coda. This is capable of expansion into a large piece of music, or it may extend over twenty-eight measures only. (See pars. 17, 19, 23.) A lyric melody (Bluebells of Scotland, Schubert's Ave Maria, etc.) is possibly best treated in this form, for the middle section, B, seems to invite contrast.

SECTION VII

The Chorale Prelude

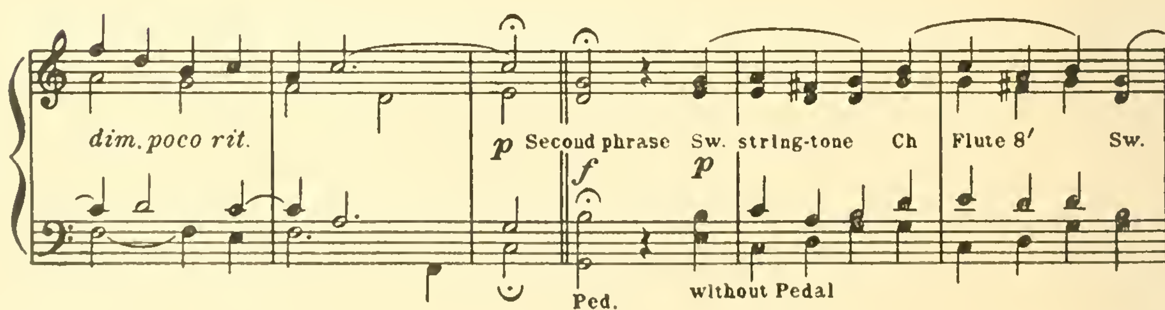
If the student will get down his volume of J. S. Bach's Chorale Preludes for the organ, he will note that the phrases of the Chorale are separated by florid or more elaborate passages based on the Chorale phrase. It is difficult for any organist, no matter how gifted, to imagine himself doing the same sort of thing with any approach to the work of Bach, but there is a suggestion in the Chorale Prelude of the Leipzig cantor for us with our more humble powers. Take any syllabic tune (St. Ann, St. Bride, or tunes where a long pause at the end of each phrase is effective), and interject, as it were, florid extemporizations based on some melodic or rhythmic figure derived from the phrase just played. Play the hymn-tune phrases on the Gt. Open Diapasons with pedal, following this sturdy and robust registration by softer and more luscious combinations for the interjected, florid phrases. These interludes, as they may be called, must end each time with the last chord in the phrase on which they are based, and hold it; the player is then ready to go on with the next hymn-tune phrase. The chorale prelude is more difficult than would seem from simply reading

the above, for if one uses the tunes that admit of a pause at the end of each phrase, it will be found that the rhythmic suggestions from them are few; and if pauses are not possible rhythmic suggestions are more numerous. To see exactly what is meant, try York, Nicea, St. Gertrude, making a hold (*fermata*) at the end of each phrase, noting how impossible it is to make the pause after some phrases.

No. 26 gives the melody of *St. Ann* (Croft), and the first few notes of the interludes; No. 27 will expand the interludes a little farther.

26

27



Ch. Sw.
rit.
f
Third phrase
Sw Vox celestis
Ped.
without Pedal

simile

Brightly
f
Fourth phrase
Sw. 8′
Ped.
Ch. Gedackt

dim.

poco rall. al fine
pp

SECTION VIII

The Fugato and Other Forms

By "fugato" is meant free fugal imitations. Any one who has heard Guilmant, Lemare, Alfred Hollins, or Marcel Dupré, extemporize will have been fired to emulation of their facility in using the fugal imitations, often going far towards the improvisation of a formal fugue. If the player has never studied counterpoint and fugue it is hopeless for him, until he does study, to attempt even the faintest fugato.

But let us assume that he has written fugues of doubtful value and is very much in earnest in his wish to extemporize fugatos; what course shall he pursue? Why, the usual course of having a plan, and practicing. The plan will include three or possibly four successive entries of the theme, beginning with the lowest part and rising in order to the highest (for this is the most effective order); these to be followed by perhaps two more entries, one in the Pedal, *ff*, and one in the highest part; a free coda will finish the fugato. Not a very ambitious plan, to be sure, but a practical one. For the practicing, both writing and playing are recommended. (See pars. 3 and 22.) The writing, however, is to be entirely independent of the keyboard work; writing is merely a mode of technical discipline. The fugatos written are never to be played as extemporizations.

Technique through Writing

(1) The writing must be carried through as nearly as possible under extemporizing conditions; (2) subjects may be taken from "500 Fugue Subjects and Their Answers" (Novello, or H. W. Gray & Co., New York); (3) write three-part fugatos first, beginning with the subject in the lowest part. (4) Take only those subjects that admit of "real" answers. In public improvising it is well to remember (a) that Prout says that a real answer is *possible* to any subject, and that (b) if the subject is too much modified by a tonal answer the audience fails to recognize it, and loses interest. There is always an element of the spectacular in extemporizing that must be taken into account. Guilmant always asked to be given a *familiar* theme, and in extemporizing on the Bridal Chorus (*Lohengrin*) he gave the real, that is, the unmodified, answer. (5) Writing must also be absolutely without erasures to be preparatory to extemporization; (6) Further, it must be at a fairly regular speed. It is nonsense to expect writing to be done in tempo, but it can be done with a fair amount of steadiness; the quick decisions that must be made in effective extemporizing may be practiced just as effectively in writing, provided no erasures are allowed. It is indispensable, after writing, that the fugato shall be played and the time taken in writing noted. Various plans for the free coda may be made. Keyboard work will be as before—much of it, and steady tempo.

Improvising the fugato is by no means beyond the persevering player who has some natural contrapuntal taste and facility. It is, possibly, the most brilliant form that extemporization can take.

Other Forms

The organist who has gone as far as this page, and has worked out with some success the various schemes recommended, has no need of suggestions as to combinations or extensions of the forms already practiced: he can go along as far as he likes,

putting into practice the schemes that his own ingenuity will suggest. He ought by all means to hear all the players in his vicinity who have even the least skill in the art. There is no reason why a professional friend should not join with him in mutual practice and criticism. Men do not seem to do this sort of thing as often or as helpfully as women, but the suggestion may be worth considering.

Bibliography

Books in English treating on the subject of extemporization are few; the present writer knows of two only, "Extemporization," by F. J. Sawyer, published by Novello (H. W. Gray & Co., New York), and "Extempore Playing: Forty Lessons in the Art of Keyboard Composing," by Dr. A. Madeley Richardson (New York, 1922).

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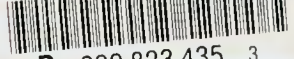
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