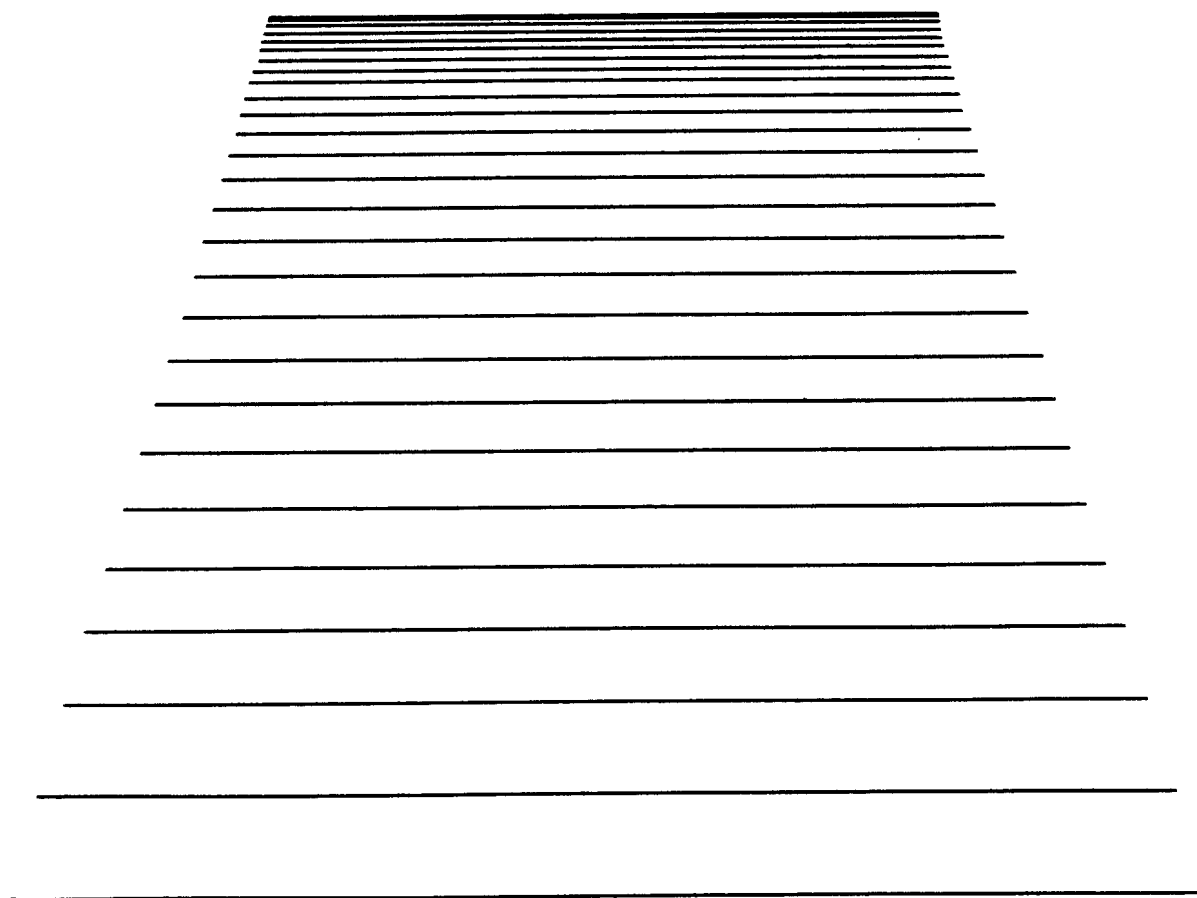


HYMN-PLAYING

AT THE PIANO

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND CHURCH MUSICIANS



Hymn-playing at the Piano

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— Franklin Eddings

Hymns are musical prayers. Singing them in church is a unifying act of worship. All can participate. The 1985 Hymnal is in use every Sunday throughout the world. A hundred or more can be found in every meeting house, and it is one of the most utilized resources in the church. "Using The Hymn Book" on pages 379-386 offers useful information and is highly recommended reading.

The piano has an important role for hymn-singing and devotional prelude music. While the organ is better suited for church service music, there are numerous occasions when the piano is needed.....in the home, Relief Society, seminary, Young Women's or at meetings held away from the church. Here are some basics to help in playing hymns.

Why are some notes hard to reach? The hymns are arranged for voices. This is evident in those which have wide intervals of a 10th between the bass and tenor parts. Unless the player has large hands it is necessary to take the tenor notes with the right thumb.

Example 1, #186 "Again We Meet Around the Board"

The image shows a piano arrangement of the hymn "Again We Meet Around the Board" in G major and 3/4 time. The notation is presented on a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The piece consists of eight measures. The first measure has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass line starts with a G2 note, which is significantly lower than the treble clef notes, illustrating the wide interval mentioned in the text. The melody is simple and consists of eighth and quarter notes. The bass line provides a steady accompaniment with quarter notes.

Hymn excerpts are from *Hymns Of The Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter-Day Saints*, © 1985.

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At other times as shown in the following example, the pianist may need to play several bass notes an octave higher (a) than written. Good voice-leading is needed (b) when again playing “as written.”

Example 2, #113 “Our Savior’s Love”

The musical score shows a piano accompaniment for a hymn. The right hand (treble clef) has a melody with a fermata over the second measure. The left hand (bass clef) has a bass line. Two annotations are present: (a) indicates that some bass notes should be played an octave higher than written, and (b) indicates that good voice-leading is needed when playing 'as written'.

The accompanist should not arpeggiate (break) the notes of a chord. The four notes are sung simultaneously. Therefore they need to be played all at one time.

How loud should one play? Whether the hymn is a vigorous or a meditative one, the pianist or organist should provide one-half the total sound. Consider the size of the congregation, the type of hymn and play accordingly. Keep in mind that timid playing leads to weak singing.

How fast or how slow? The metronome settings suggested for each hymn are helpful and reflect years of tradition. When a metronome is not available, sing silently the first line or two and set the pace *before* playing the introduction. Whenever possible, the introduction should include the first line of the hymn. Brackets above the staff indicate a suggested introduction.

Where to breathe. As musical prayers sung by mortal beings, hymns too must breathe. The piano is a marvelous instrument...but it is a machine. When playing hymns, the accompanist brings life to the piano by allowing the music a timely breath of air. The same is true with the organ.

Generally the accompaniment takes a breath where the singers do. In the next example, a catch breath (a) is equal to a 16th rest while a full breath (b) is like an 8th rest taken from the previous note. After playing a fermata (c), a full breath must follow. The fermata may require a full quarter rest to follow, resulting in additional beats in the measure as in this next example.

Example #3, #169 "As Now We Take the Sacrament"

Phrasing (breathing) is essential to good hymn accompaniment for another reason. It helps the congregation follow the accompaniment and stay in time. How is breathing done at the piano? The sustain pedal creates a breathing spot by controlling the release of the chord.

How to pedal hymns. Use the sustain pedal with great care. Usually the voices in hymns are stacked vertically in four-part chords. As each part (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) is sung, the notes flow in a smoothly connected manner as spoken words. To avoid over pedaling, the pianist must listen carefully to the harmony so as not to smear one chord into the next. One pedal action per chord is the rule. That is, the pedal comes up when the fingers go down on the keys.

Example 4, #79 "With All the Power of Heart and Tongue"

Those not entirely certain about pedaling hymns should first try playing the right hand parts with the pedal.....slowly enough to hear the effect of the pedaling. With faster hymns such as "Come Listen To A Prophet's Voice" (#21), it is easier to leave off the pedaling during passages with groupings of 8th notes.

For suspensions or passing tones (see 'a' and 'b' in the next example) it is essential to listen to the moving voices and pedal accordingly. In the following example, the half note "F" at (a) must be held with the thumb for its full value because the sustain pedal releases on count two. Use the fingers rather than pedal on the dotted rhythm at (b).

Example 5, #182 "We'll Sing All Hail to Jesus' Name"

Less prevalent today is the odd practice of holding down the sustain pedal for an entire measure. The notion was to create a gathered sound.....even a louder sound. Hence the misnomer "loud pedal." The effect might be compared to dragging wet fingers over a watercolor painting. See Supplement on pages 11 and 12 for a practical study on how to pedal.

Pedaling is best omitted when a measure or a phrase is sung in unison. These passages can be easily "pedaled" with the fingers as shown in this example.

Example 6, #28 "Saints, Behold How Great Jehovah"

How to get through a difficult or unfamiliar hymn. The best way all around is to select a hymn one knows well enough to play the notes as written. However, church musicians are minutemen, and with little notice they may be called upon to play at sight. On such occasions, it is

better for the less experienced to stay in time with the singing than to fumble notes and fall behind. Therefore it may be necessary to leave out some notes as suggested on page 385 of the 1985 Hymnal. Which ones can be left out? Certainly the melody must stay. It is paramount. But some inner voices may be dropped if there is no other way.

After the melody, the bass notes are next in importance. In difficult spots one can play at least the first bass note of the measure and other notes that fall on the beat.....or where the harmony changes. In the following example, try playing only the circled notes. While not as completely satisfying as the full harmony, it is a way around the problem some pianists might have in attempting to read, find and play all the notes and stay in time.

Example 7, #48, "Glorious Things Are Sung of Zion"

When there are pairs of 8th notes, the off-the-beat 8th note in the alto, tenor or bass might be omitted. And rather than read and play them incorrectly, accidentals in the inner parts might be dropped. Remember, this is a temporary solution. Strive to do better the next time.

A succession of repeated notes occurs in some hymns. Due to the percussive quality of the piano, repeated notes in the left hand become redundant. To moderate this the accompanist may elect to tie *some* of the repeated notes as in this example.

Example 8, #105 "Master, the Tempest Is Raging"

In the 1985 Hymnal, the editors made the hymns easier to read and to play by occasionally using keys with fewer sharps or flats. Still there may be times when the pianist or organist inadvertently misses a sharp or a flat from the key signature. If, for example, there are three sharps or flats in the key signature, the *third* is the one likely to be missed. If there are four sharps or flats, the *fourth* is often missed. Therefore in the key of four flats, it might help to pencil a circle around some of the D's before the first play-through.

Example 9, #20 "God of Power, God of Right"

Musical score for Example 9, #20 "God of Power, God of Right". The score is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff contains a melody with various note values including quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, along with rests and accidentals. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes. A circled 'D' is visible in the treble staff in the second measure, indicating a note that should be circled in the original score.

How to count the rhythm. Counting problems often come with hymns that are unfamiliar.

The mix of note values is usually the cause. The time signature may be 4/4, 3/4 or 6/8 but if a hymn has many 8th notes, designate the 8th note as the unit of count as shown here.

Example 10, #165 "Abide with Me; 'Tis Eventide"

Musical score for Example 10, #165 "Abide with Me; 'Tis Eventide". The score is in 3/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff contains a melody with dotted rhythms and eighth notes. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes. A legend at the bottom left shows a quarter note followed by an eighth note, with a circled eighth note below it, indicating that the eighth note is the unit of count. Arrows point to specific dotted rhythms in the treble staff.

In this example, the dotted rhythms at (a) and (b) should be well defined. Play the dotted note long.....and play the shorter note like an appendage to the note following.

Example 11, #217 "Come, Let Us Anew"

Musical score for Example 11, #217 "Come, Let Us Anew". The score is in 4/4 time and D major. It consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff contains a melody with dotted rhythms and eighth notes. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes. Two specific dotted rhythms in the treble staff are labeled (a) and (b) with arrows pointing to them.

In the next example, white notes (a) and (b) should receive their full worth which will include any time borrowed to take a breath. (See Where to breathe.)

Example 12, #7, "Israel, Israel, God Is Calling"

Musical score for Example 12, #7, "Israel, Israel, God Is Calling". The score is in 4/4 time and features two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure contains six white notes (semibreves) with a fermata above the first note. The second measure contains six white notes (semibreves) with a fermata above the first note, labeled (a). The third measure contains six white notes (semibreves) with a fermata above the first note, labeled (b). A tempo marking below the first measure indicates a quarter note equals a semibreve (♩ = ○). Small circles (○) are placed below the notes in the first and second measures, and larger circles (○) are placed below the notes in the third measure.

Prelude Music When hymns are used for devotional prelude music, choose carefully those most appropriate. Meditative hymns work better than vigorous style hymns. Organists use several methods to extend a hymn. One of these works with good effect at the piano and that is repeating the hymn in another key. See in the following example that the notes can be read on the same lines and spaces in either the key of four flats or the key of three sharps.

Example 13, #29 "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief"

Musical score for Example 13, #29, "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief". The score is in 6/8 time and features two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is four flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, D-flat). The melody is written in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The score is divided into five measures. The first measure contains six white notes (minims) with a fermata above the first note. The second measure contains six white notes (minims) with a fermata above the first note. The third measure contains six white notes (minims) with a fermata above the first note. The fourth measure contains six white notes (minims) with a fermata above the first note. The fifth measure contains six white notes (minims) with a fermata above the first note. The notes in the treble clef staff are arranged such that they can be read on the same lines and spaces in either the key of four flats or the key of three sharps.

Turn to the Hymnal and play one complete verse of Hymn #29 in the original key of four flats. Then play a second verse in the new key (three sharps) while disregarding the original key signature. This is a direct key change and no access chord is needed between the verses.

Try the same method with these hymns:

“Our Mountain Home So Dear” #33. Start in the key of five flats (Db) and repeat in the original key (D).

“Dearest Children, God Is Near You” #96. Start in the original key and repeat in the key of five sharps (B).

“Precious Savior, Dear Redeemer” #103. Start in the original key and repeat in the key of four sharps (E).

Playing Hymn #33 a half-step above the written key would be more difficult because that key, D# Major, has nine sharps. To find the preferred key, use this formula: If the hymn is in two sharps, the key change is in ~~five~~ flats ($2 + 5 = 7$). If the hymn is in four flats, the key change is in three sharps ($4 + 3 = 7$), etc. Remember to start in the lower key and repeat in the higher key. Take care to alter accidentals one-half step in the right direction.

Hymns written in the keys of F, C and G Major may be a challenge to play in a neighboring key. The key of F with a key signature of one flat goes to F# with six sharps ($1 + 6 = 7$). The key of C with no sharps or flats goes to C# with seven sharps ($0 + 7 = 7$). And the key of G would go to G#. It would be better to start in Gb and then go to G.

Now a word about how to determine the key in which a hymn is written. Look for the final bass note in the last measure. This is the *key note*. In Hymn #33 the final note in the bass is D, and D Major is the key of this hymn. With a key signature of two sharps, a hymn could be in the relative key of B Minor. However the final bass note would be B rather than D. With few exceptions, the hymns in the 1985 Hymnal are in major keys.

Another method useful to pianists and organists for extended prelude music is the use of a connecting or access chord to move easily from one hymn to another....and even to another as the time requires. Choose hymns that are compatible with each other.

In the next example, after playing one or more verses of "Come Follow Me" #116, look ahead to the destination hymn, "Come unto Jesus" #117, and locate the access chord (circled).

STARTING HYMN **DESTINATION HYMN**

Example 14, #116 "Come, Follow Me" - - - - - #117 "Come unto Jesus"

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows the end of Hymn #116 and the beginning of Hymn #117. The second system shows the continuation of Hymn #117, with a specific chord circled in the bass clef staff, indicated by an arrow from the first system. This circled chord is the access chord.

In most hymns, the access chord occurs directly before the final chord. But in Hymn #117, it occurs two measures before the end because the final chord is tied for two measures. After playing the access chord, go to the beginning of that hymn and play one or more verses as needed.

To continue to another, select an access chord from the next hymn. In musical terms, the access chord is a Dominant (V) Chord or a Dominant 7th (V7) chord. Either chord will lead to the beginning of any hymn. *However if the destination hymn is in the same key, no access chord is needed.*

In this example, the access chord is optional because the final chord of the starting hymn happens to be the Dominant (V) of the destination hymn as on line (a). On line (b) the access chord is used.

Example 15, #102 "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" - - - #100 "Nearer, My God to Thee"

(a)

(b)

In conclusion, it is worthwhile to discover the musical and spiritual treasures of all 341 hymns. A good way is to begin with the first hymn and sight read a new one each day. A thought for the day.....a hymn for the day.

Supplement

For aspiring pianists who want to play hymns, learning how to use the sustain pedal can be challenging. Here is an easy, step-by-step method: —

For correct feel and control, place the right toe on the sustain pedal with the heel directly behind. A metronome set at 60 may be used. With each click or pulse, say “down, *up*, down, *up*, down, *up*,” etc. If a metronome is not available, say the words one per second.

Next, begin moving the pedal in time with the words. Emphasis is on the word “up” which is said aloud. The word “down” can be silent.

At this point, place the right hand over the first chord of the example below. While working the pedal in time with each word, play the first chord on “up.” With the word “up,” move to the next chord, and the next, etc.....*but always play the chord on the up stroke of the pedal.*

♩ = 60

UP>down ——— UP>down ——— UP>down ——— UP>down ——— UP>down ———

There may be a tendency to press down on the pedal and keys at the same time. This neutralizes the sustain effect and the sound will be the same *with or without the pedal*. When done correctly, the chord will continue sounding while the hand moves to the next chord. In this example, play slowly enough to hear the right effect.....namely, one chord meets the next but does not overlap.

♩ = 60

The range and feel of the pedal will differ from one piano to another, and it may not be necessary to press the pedal all the way down. Further, a “clunk” sound can result if the toe separates from the pedal as it comes up.

Now add in the left hand. Two notes are sufficient.

$\text{♩} = 60$

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a piano exercise. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system shows a sequence of chords in the right hand and two notes in the left hand. The second system shows a similar sequence, ending with a double bar line. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 60$.

This is the method used to pedal hymns. Try it on Hymn #258 but remember to play slowly and, if necessary, one hand at a time.

#258, “O Thou Rock of Our Salvation”

The image shows the musical score for Hymn #258, “O Thou Rock of Our Salvation”. The score is in 4/4 time and shows a sequence of chords in the right hand and two notes in the left hand. The score is in 4/4 time and shows a sequence of chords in the right hand and two notes in the left hand.

