

VOLUNTARIES FOR THE SMALL ORGAN AND THE MODEST PLAYER

There are two limiting factors affecting the choice of organ voluntaries: (1) The scope of the organ; and (2) the capability of the organist. The first factor should not be taken as a complaint that the organs in small churches are too small: smallness is no vice where the most useful stops are present. The complaint is that very often the most useful stops are not present, whereas a selection of stops from one of the less important divisions of a cathedral-size instrument often are; the provision of a chorus of 8, 4 and 2 foot pitches ought to precede all else, yet how often do we find instead Echo Gambas, Oboes, and swell-boxes which make no contribution to leading congregational singing which is the principal reason for the organ's existence.

The second factor should not be taken as a snide comment on the many people who give regular and loyal service in the unenviable capacity of directors of music in small churches: so long as the training of organists remains such a haphazard affair, it must be expected that people of weak flesh though of willing spirit will have to fill the breach. It is by no means beyond the wit of a competent pianist to discover the differences between the piano and the instrument in the local church, but the discovery, if left to a process of trial and error, may take more time than it need.

Until we come to the greener pastures on the other side of the fence, we must direct our efforts to obtaining the most satisfactory results which our present resources can produce. It is the objective of this article to suggest some organ voluntaries which will not be too badly affected by the limiting factors outlined above.

In discussing organ music, it seems desirable to start from music which is basically in the idiom of that type of music with which most organists are familiar, that of the hymn-tune. This may be defined as music which has an obvious predominant melody and 'traditional' harmony. The bulk of such music comes roughly from the period 1700-1900, and henceforward will be referred to as '18-19th century'. When the player has established his roots in this period, he may branch out to earlier and later periods, which will be referred to as 'pre-18th century' and 'modern'.

It will be appreciated that this period division is entirely arbitrary and that much music which might belong to these periods in strictly chronological terms ought to be under another heading; for example,

much music from the period 1900-50 will here be considered under the heading '18th-19th century'.

This does not, however, invalidate the division, since at present it is with the idioms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that we are most familiar, while the idioms on both sides of this period stand out as exceptions against this background. Though we may bemoan this state of affairs, especially as it affects the music of our own time, we must work in the conditions which we find. In these conditions it seems reasonable to approach the subject in this manner.

Two further remarks ought to be made before the main part of the article is embarked upon. It is the author's firm conviction that the organ ought to be regarded as a musical instrument in its own right, with its own repertoire. This conviction leads logically to the exclusion of such pieces as the march from Wagner's *Lohengrin*, which has not the remotest connection with either Christian marriage or the instrument on which it is most often heard. This article is, therefore, concerned exclusively with music composed (not transcribed) for the organ.

The second remark concerns the performance of pieces from heavily-annotated editions. After the introduction of pedalboards and easy stop-changing mechanisms in British organs, instructions for swell-box effects, manual-changes, stop-changes and pedal parts were added to the texts of much music from previous periods. Such anachronistic editions will not be mentioned below, but it will be well to bear in mind that if such editions of, for example, Bach's works be used, the additional markings may be ignored with a clear conscience. More recent music, too, may be improved by failing to observe all such markings. Much music becomes accessible to the intended readers of this article when this chastening has been administered.

Throughout the remainder of this article, pieces which are playable on an organ without a pedalboard will be marked with an asterisk; it should be assumed that those not so marked require a pedalboard.

The article is divided as follows:

- I. Albums containing works by more than one composer; this section has been placed first since this is a cheap, convenient way of building up a varied collection of music.
- II. '18-19th century' music.
- III. Pre-18th century music.
- IV. 'Modern' music.

I. Albums containing various groupings of music are readily available. The Oxford University Press catalogue contains eight albums for manuals only, while the Peters' catalogue contains many more,

though some are of little interest to us. Anyone wishing to discover the contents of these catalogues should obtain copies from their publishers.

The album *For Manuals Only* (OUP) contains a varied selection of pieces, none of them difficult. The two volumes of *Seasonal Chorale Preludes** and the four volumes of *Old English Organ Music for Manuals** (OUP) offer a good selection of pieces, mostly from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The two volumes of *Fiori dell'Organo** (Kalmus) contain easy pieces coming (respectively) from the Sweelinck to Bach and the Bach to Franck periods.

For instruments with pedalboards, *A First Organ Album*, *A Book of Simple Organ Voluntaries* and *An Easy Album* (all OUP) are worth investigation. For the player with very advanced taste and more advanced technique, the two books of *Easy Modern Organ Music* (OUP) should go most of the way towards satisfying it, though they may chase the congregation out even more rapidly than usual.

C. H. Trevor is a very satisfactory anthologist, who is responsible for *Organ Books Nos. 1 and 2* (OUP), which contain pieces from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, as well as for the series *The Progressive Organist* (Elkin), which progresses in seven volumes from Grades 4 to 8 of the Associated Board examinations. Many of the pieces in Mr. Trevor's collections are not available elsewhere. The five volumes of *Cantantibus Organis* (Kalmus) contain pieces of widely ranging difficulty from early to most recent times, predominantly by Continental composers, some requiring manuals only. Volume 2 contains perhaps the greatest number of simple pieces.

For more specialized collections of non-British pieces from before the nineteenth century, the reader is referred to the catalogues of Bärenreiter, J. and W. Chester, Peters, and Schott and Co.

A good selection of chorale preludes by 17-18th century German composers is contained in the two volumes of 'Choralvorspiele', edited by Adolf Graf (Bärenreiter). Most of these pieces are not very difficult, and the majority do not require a pedalboard. A similar collection is published by Peters under the title *Chorale Preludes of the 17th and 18th Centuries*, which are mostly quite easy, and 56 of which (from a total of 80) are playable without pedals.

A collection of 79 short pieces (chorale preludes, fantasias, preludes and fugues) by 'early baroque composers', intended to provide voluntaries for village churches in Denmark, has recently appeared from Hinrichsen. Many of the pieces are for manuals only; as I have not seen the book, which is entitled *Organ Music, Vol. 1*, and edited by Finn Viderö, I can make no further comment.

II. It is one of the misfortunes of the organ that only one composer of the highest stature has made a large contribution to its repertoire.

Although many of the works of J. S. Bach are beyond the scope of this article, there remains a significant number of pieces which are not. Of those not based on hymn melodies, the *Pastorale in F* is probably the easiest. The preludes and fugues in E minor (BWV 533) and C minor (BWV 549) are more difficult, but would seem the most worthwhile of the easiest works in that genre; both are in Volume 2 of Novello's edition. Not so demanding are the eight 'short' preludes and fugues attributed to Bach, which are published as Volume 1 of Novello's edition.

There are many chorale preludes by Bach which are not difficult, but they appear throughout the volumes cheek by jowl with more difficult works. For the purpose of self-improvement in technique and for sheer beauty, the *Little Organ Book* (Novello, Volume 15) cannot be bettered. There would appear to be a large concentration of not too difficult pieces in Novello, Volume 18, some not requiring pedals.

Several selections of Bach's works are published for small organs: *An Album for Manuals Only: J. S. Bach** (OUP), *J. S. Bach – 30 Compositions for Organ Without Pedals** (Chester) and *Works for the Small Organ*, edited by Keller (Peters).

Eight Chorale Preludes, by F. W. Marpurg (Novello) are worth playing; the pedal parts are mostly quite simple, although two manuals are required.

Some of Domenico Scarlatti's keyboard sonatas have been considered suitable for the organ, and have been published as *Five Organ Sonatas** (Schirmer) and *Two Organ Sonatas** (OUP). It is well to remember that the action of the harpsichord (for which most of the sonatas were written) is more sprightly than that of most British organs.

Handel's organ works are written in the idiom of a large group of English composers. Many instruments lacking a pedalboard will be able to cope adequately with these works, although nimble manual work is often required of the player. Works by Boyce, Greene, Stanley, Walond and many others may be recommended in this category. A large number of them are represented in the 36 volumes of Hinrichsen's *Tallis to Wesley* series.

The player seeking the least difficult of such pieces may be referred to *Six Voluntaries* by Croft (Hinrichsen), to *Two Voluntaries for Manuals Only** by Handel (OUP), to *12 Diapason Movements from the Voluntaries** by Stanley (Hinrichsen), and to *12 Short Pieces for Keyboard** by Samuel Wesley (Hinrichsen), which includes the easy *Air and Gavotte** (available separately from Novello and Hinrichsen). The last-mentioned pieces appear also in *Old English Organ Music for Manuals**, mentioned in Part I above, to which readers looking for a judicious selection of such music are referred.

Of the organ works of Mendelssohn, the easiest sonata is probably No. 4, although not by much. It would seem preferable to begin with the *Andante with Variations*, which appears in *Two Andantes*, published by Hinrichsen. Neither piece (the other is by Hummel) requires a large instrument or an advanced technique.

Volume 2 of Liszt's *Complete Organ Works* (Peters) contains a number of easy pieces in some of which the pedal part may be omitted, or incorporated in the left hand part. The player who has no wish to acquire in addition the pyrotechnical works based on *Ad nos ad salutarem undam* and *BACH* may buy the *Short Organ Mass* and 4 *Short Organ Pieces* (Hinrichsen) separately.

Several of the 11 chorale preludes by Brahms should be within the capacity of every organist; some require no pedalboard, and none is very difficult (published by Novello and Peters).

Of the works by Max Reger, only the 30 *Short Chorale Preludes*, Op. 135a (Peters) come close to our requirements. Four may be played without pedalboard and the remainder require agile pedalling. The word 'short' in the title is significant.

The easiest work by César Franck is the *Andantino in G minor*, which requires two manuals and pedalboard. This work, together with the Pastorale, the Prelude, Fugue and Variation, and some harder pieces is published in *Favourite Pieces* (Paxton), though some simplification of the editors additions would be beneficial. 59 of the pieces which Franck wrote for harmonium are published by United Music Publishers; although some are quite difficult, all are playable without pedals.

In the second half of the nineteenth century English organ music underwent a major change as a result of the introduction of pedalboards. Although most of the works of Parry and Stanford, who blazed the trail, are beyond the scope of this article, one may mention *A Little Organ Book in Memory of C. H. H. Parry* (A. & C. Black), which contains pieces by several of their followers.

A vast amount of music has been written by twentieth-century English composers in similar vein, under titles such as 'Interludes', 'Short and Easy Pieces', 'Short Preludes', 'Miniatures', etc. Of those known to the author the most interesting and readily available would seem to be:

A. Gray, *Twelve Short Preludes** (two books, Galliard)

J. Ireland, *Miniature Suite* (Ascherberg) – two out of the three movements are quite easy.

Arthur Milner, *Threnody* (Ashdown)

G. Oldroyd, the first of *Three Liturgical Improvisations* (OUP)

E. Smith, *Three Fancies* (Ashdown)

P. Whitlock, *Reflections* (OUP)

H. Willan, *Five Pieces for Organ* (Kalmus)

III. Music from before the eighteenth century shows the roots from which the later music grew. The chorale preludes of Bach have their models in those of Buxtehude, Pachelbel, etc., whose works are generally less difficult to play than those of Bach. *Six Organ Preludes on Chorales* (OUP – ignore the swell-box markings!) by Buxtehude and *Selected Organ Works*, Volume 4 (Bärenreiter) by Pachelbel offer the easiest introduction to the works of these two composers.

Very short pieces by J. K. F. Fischer and G. Muffatt are found in *Ariadne Musica** (Keith Prowse), which contains twenty preludes and fugues, and in *Zwölf kleine Praeludien** (Kistner und Siegel/Novello), most of which are easier than they look or sound.

Some of the works of the leading Continental composers are available apart from collected editions. Bärenreiter publish the *Fiori musicali* of Frescobaldi, which consists of pieces of varying length and difficulty in several genres of the period. The same firm publishes *Selected Organ Works* by his pupil, J. J. Froberger. Peters publish a *Selection from the Organ Works** of Frescobaldi, as well as Sweelinck's *Echo Fantasia*.

While the music mentioned above may be played with some satisfaction on the limited type of instrument under consideration, the greatest part of French music depends so much on the specific colours demanded that the author feels obliged to disregard it.

The player who is interested in English music of the seventeenth century would do well to approach it through the works of Byrd* (Hinrichsen) and Weelkes* (two volumes, Stainer and Bell), from the first of which he will be prepared to tackle the complex-looking ornamentation in the works of Gibbons* (Stainer and Bell), Blow* (Schott) and Purcell* (Novello).

Austere music in the idiom of Palestrina was written by A. Cabezon, a selection of whose works are published by Schott under the title *Tientos and Fugues**. The slow moving counterpoint of these pieces gives the player plenty of time to find and depress the correct keys.

IV. 'Modern' music does not always present the terrors expected of it. Many composers of very difficult music write also more simple music. Dupré's *Le Tombeau de Titelouze* (UMP) provides good teaching (or learning) material, some of which is easy, and a little for manuals only – this is strongly recommended for the determined organ student. Langlais has written an *Organ Book*, *8 Pièces modales*, and three collections of two-stave pieces (all UMP). His *12 Petites Pièces** (UMP) present few difficulties of technique or idiom. Besides the numerous complex pieces, Flor Peeters has written 35 *Miniatures for Beginners** (2 volumes, Peters), and an *Aria* (Hinrichsen) in neo-classical style which requires two manuals and pedals, but which is

not difficult. Vierne's *24 Pièces en style libre** (2 volumes, UMP) vary considerably in difficulty, but many are quite easy.

Satie's *Messe des pauvres* (UMP) contains 6 pieces of varied length, written for organ or piano, in a distinctive style far removed from the composer's 'nightingale and tramcar' music; some re-arrangement of the lower parts may be necessary to make them playable, but these pieces are very attractive and useful.

Alain's *Deux Chorals* and Messiaen's *Le Banquet céleste* (both UMP) offer the easiest introduction to the works of these two composers, although the latter requires a larger organ (and preferably a larger building) than the former.

Micheelsen's *Das Holsteinische Orgelbüchlein* (Bärenreiter) contains 7 pieces for small organ. Pepping's *Kleines Orgelbuch* (Schott, some two-stave) contains 18 short, quite easy pieces based on chorales. Schroeder has written 4 *Kleine Intradn* and 6 *Kleine Präludien und Intermezzi* (both Schott), of which the former are the easier.

German composers have been active in writing simple pieces in a rather angular modern idiom, and those mentioned above are but the most accessible.

Nielsen's *29 Small Preludes for Organ or Harmonium** (Chester) are mostly easy, though short.

'Modern' British composers have not been quite so active in producing simple music. Britten's *Prelude and Fugue on a theme of Vittoria* (Boosey and Hawkes) is not as complex as some of his accompaniments, although it requires quite a volume of sound. Groves' book of *Six Scottish Hymn-Tune Preludes** (Elkin) makes original use of some well-known tunes. The same is true of Phillips' *Six Carol Preludes* (OUP). Some of Hurford's *Five Short Chorale Preludes* (OUP) are quite easy, though others require more effort; all require two manuals. Ratcliffe's *Figures Plain and Fancy* (Novello) contains eight short pieces, each of which demonstrates one aspect of organ style. Two of Walton's *Three Pieces* (OUP) are quite easy, although they require considerable agility. Wills' *Elegy* (Novello) is easier, both in idiom and technique, than most of his works.

It will be seen that there exists a considerable body of music both in familiar and in slightly less familiar idioms which is playable by modest players on small organs.

The reader who wishes to delve further into this field will find James B. Cowie's *A Recommended List of Books and Music for Organists and Choirmasters*, published by the Scottish Societies of Organists, most useful. The present writer has found Mr. Cowie's work invaluable, not only in finding voluntaries under various classifications (by season, by difficulty, etc.), but also in finding text-books and choral music.

It is to be hoped that the organists for whom this article has been written will feel inspired to search out some of the music it mentions. So much good organ music is now being published that there is no excuse for continuing to play the same pieces from month to month or from year to year. The musician who feels himself alone, cut off from the musical world, should be comforted by the thought that other musicians have a similar experience as church organists; we can all benefit from comparing notes (both literally and figuratively) with our colleagues.

There is considerable scope for diversifying the sounds which may be drawn from the small organs in many Scottish churches; this may be achieved by playing in more varied ways, and by playing new music. Merely by exploring new music, different ways of playing the instrument will suggest themselves.

While new ways of playing will help to conceal the failings of many organs, they cannot be relied upon as permanent substitutes for good instruments. Nevertheless, players who have mastered some of the pieces mentioned in this article will be well prepared to cope with new, effective instruments when they are installed, and in the meantime will be able to make a more fitting contribution to the people's worship.

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