

# TRANSCRIBING PIANO ACCOMPANIMENTS TO THE ORGAN

## Registration

- Set up the Swell as a softer manual with flutes and strings (8's or 8's + 4's).
- Use the Swell for softer portions of the accompaniment, adding possibly a 4' Principal and/or 2' Flute as needed until the volume of the Swell approaches the volume of the Great.
- Do not use celestes, as they distort the pitch, except possibly once in awhile for a different effect in a particular area of a piece.
- Use the Great to Pedal reversible to balance pedal with Swell or Great (turn it on when accompanying on the Great; turn it off when on the Swell).
- Transfer to the Great when the accompaniment needs more support, gradually adding Swell to Great and more 4's and 2' Super Octave as volume increases.
- Avoid heavy reeds, mutations, and mixtures (mixtures can occasionally add brilliance but should be used judiciously).
- Dynamic changes can be effected by the use of the Swell pedal, registration changes, or manual changes (crescendo pedal may be used to achieve sudden "louds" or softs" or to achieve a longer, gradual crescendo if hands are too busy to pull on more stops.) However, if the crescendo pedal is used, much care must be taken when further engaging the pedal so that louder stops don't pop on while holding chords.
- A solo/accompaniment registration may be used to feature an interesting melodic line in the accompaniment or as a descant or obligato to the choir.
- For accompaniments with very high and very low ranges (remember, the piano has 88 keys, the organ only 61), bring the notes into the middle area of the organ. When 4's and 2's are on, any really high passages will be much higher and much more shrill.
- Remember that the only way to achieve accent on the organ is with silence, delay, or a combination of both. When you are preparing an accompaniment that is very orchestrally conceived (many ties and few rests), remember that you must provide articulation before strong beats in some of the voices to keep the forward motion and sense of rhythm clear to your choir and to the congregation.
- Your job as an accompaniment is to support the choir, not drown them out.
- Arrange for as many rehearsals accompanying your choir on the organ as possible. The size of the choir determines the size of your registration. It takes time and trial and error to come up with the best possible solution to accompany effectively on the organ. It will not happen with just one choir/organ rehearsal.

## Octaves

- Octaves often become single notes, in both treble and bass.
- Add higher-pitched stops if additional brilliance is needed in manuals.
- The use of 16' with 8' automatically gives bass octave doubling.
- Normally play upper notes of bass octaves and lower notes of treble octaves.

## Bass Lines

- Pedals do not always have to be used.
- If bass line is simple and well defined, it may be played in its entirety.
- Play a very rapid bass line on the manuals with the 16' pedal only on the accented beat.

## Chords

- Thin out the chord texture
- Put chords in "open" position
- Get rid of "doublings" (remember that by adding higher octave-sounding pitches [4's, 2's], the "doublings" occur automatically).

The image shows two musical staves side-by-side, illustrating the difference in chord texture between a piano and an organ. Both are in 3/4 time. The piano staff (left) shows three chords: a triad in the treble and a dyad in the bass. The organ staff (right) shows the same chords but with a simplified texture: the treble part has single notes instead of chords, and the bass part has single notes instead of a dyad. This demonstrates how organ registration and manual changes can 'thin out' the chord texture.

### Repetition

- A compromise must be obtained between too much repetition and too much tying (sustained block chords would rob the piece of its inherent motion - repeating every note would result in too choppy an effect).

Piano

Organ

### Arpeggios

- Arpeggios are especially problematic when transcribed for the organ.

Piano

Organ

(Louder registration for R.H. than L.H.)

Another possibility:

Organ

Or, for a somewhat lighter sound:

Organ

### Tremolos

- Although rare, tremolos do occur occasionally.
- Sustain the outer voices, and let the inner voices do the re-percussing.

Piano

Organ