

PRESTON ROCKHOLT'S CREATIVE SERVICE PLAYING

With the publication of Preston Rockholt's *Creative Service Playing* at the recommendation of the Committee on Professional Education, a new level of educational help has been offered to the Guild. To be sure, we have had cassettes dealing with improvisation that are helpful, but there has been no one workbook which really provides for our membership's needs.

Originally copyrighted in 1971 by Preston Rockholt under the same title with the subtitle "An Introduction to Improvisation," the workbook was developed to serve the needs of students in the College of Church Musicians at Washington Cathedral where Dr. Rockholt was on the teaching staff. The only changes in its republication are in the subtitle—altered to "An Advanced Improvisation Workbook"—and the omission on page iv which originally read: Part I, Exercises in Voice Leading and Transposition.

The first thing to be observed is that this is not a theoretical treatise but is really a workbook of problems to be solved. The introduction advises that the work is designed "for those who already have a solid foundation in harmony" and suggests the best use is under the guidance of a competent teacher. There is no reason, though, why it can't be used very profitably by just about anyone at any level provided they follow the good advice of proceeding slowly and bringing "each exercise up to a performing [quality and] tempo" before moving on.

It should also be noted that the scheme of the book is entirely devoted to the making of hymn variations of one sort or another; the development of a theme in larger harmonic or contrapuntal forms is meant to follow at a later time. Indeed, of the 117 hymn tunes used—a couple of repeats included—all but one may be found in *The Hymnal 1940*—the exception being Dr. Rockholt's own hymn tune "Woodley Road."

The content is divided into 43 assignments of varying lengths which, in addition to the hymn tune completion assignments, include asking for modulatory bridges from hymn tune to hymn tune through Assignment 8 and regular transpositions. The modulations receive scant treatment. The only help given is the request that the student work out "the barest harmonic skeleton possible" and then flesh it out with "melodic, harmonic or rhythmic motifs." Some models and examples would have enriched the book at this point. Transpositions are expected through Assignment 24 and are carefully planned by spacing the intervals from one assignment to the next so that skill is developed. One begins by transposing a single step up or down, then half steps, third and so on until all possible intervals have been drilled.

As for developing the hymn tunes, the process is somewhat like the weaver's art: one begins by adding an alto to three pre-existent parts, then soloing the tenor, adding alto and tenor, bass and so on; sometimes more complex rhythms are called for by the incipits. By Assignment 10 the hymn tune is placed in the alto part while various strands of the texture are to be completed in various combinations as before. At Assignment 16, the pedal takes over the cantus,

working into freer harmonic styles and imitations with derived motifs. This is followed by five-part texture with the tune called for in the pedal on a 4' stop.

Part II, Improvising in Short Organ Forms, begins at Assignment 25 with the making of variations. Reharmonizations with freer use of tonality and ornamented melodic lines lead to what Dr. Rockholt calls paraphrasing, which is a very free use of the tune with intervallic and modal changes which preserve the sense and outline but not the notes of the tune.

By Assignment 34, brief introductions, interludes and codas are called for. Toccata figures are introduced. The workbook concludes with the student being asked to develop short ABA forms. Here the author uses the expression ABA in a functional way, rather than as a strict definition which usually implies a B section as contrasting in terms of thematic material. Nonetheless, it is clear that the approach works musically

and is eminently practical. For example, to give the first form suggested:

- Short introduction, with derived figures;
- A. The tune accompanied by some use of the introductory figures;
Short bridge to a new key;
 - B. Paraphrase of the tune in the new key;
Short bridge returning to the original key;
 - A. The tune, possibly shortened;
Short coda related to the introduction.

A number of similar schemes are given and then students are asked to invent their own. The book concludes by reminding students they should continue by working now in larger forms, especially polyphonic ones.

There is a wealth of enriching work to do, adequate suggestions for proceeding—plenty of gold in the hill for the patient miner. Highly recommended for students and teachers alike!

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An Advanced Improvisation Workbook

by

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