

DEAR UNCLE MAX

Send questions to Dear Uncle Max, AGO National Headquarters, 475 Riverside Dr., Suite 1260, New York, NY 10115.

I participate in an ongoing and good-natured debate with a fellow who wishes I would move in strict tempo from stanza to stanza in hymns. He has several concerns, one being that he likes to know exactly when the next stanza will start and not be at the mercy of the organist. I rarely find it musically or logistically justifiable to march from stanza to stanza adding no more time than is indicated on the page. Sometimes moving in tempo but adding extra beats works. Sometimes extra breathing time or time for finishing my sense of musical phrase take me out of tempo. In general, the congregation seems to come in exactly when I do at the start of a stanza, so my approach must be working pretty well. I would, however, be very glad for your wise counsel on this topic.

L.H., North Carolina

If your congregation knows exactly when you start, you are in good shape. Nonetheless, as this question seems to come up at nearly every workshop on hymn playing, and organists appear to be experiencing insecurities in their desire to do things right, I'll expand your solutions with some illustrations.

It would be nice if we could make a one-size-fits-all rule and just say that doubling the value of the last chord is it! Clearly, it's not a good rule for all hymn tunes. To me the most curious solution along those lines was one in Clarence Dickinson's *The Technique and Art of Organ Playing*—really a very good book—where he suggests a manual change on the added bar like this:

The image shows two systems of organ music notation. The first system has two staves: the upper staff is labeled 'Gt. R.H.' and the lower staff is labeled 'Sw. L.H.'. The second system has two staves: the upper staff is labeled 'Gt.' and the lower staff is labeled 'Sw.'. Below the second system, there are three pedal markings: '(Ped. ⌘)', 'Ped. tacet.', and 'Ped.'. The notation includes various chords and melodic lines across these staves.

The few times I have heard organists do this, the extra chord, unrelated to either stanza, reminds me of a helium-filled balloon on the Fourth of July drifting purposelessly skyward.

I am sure most of us remember the first time we played for a service and it was at my first that I got some of the best advice. I believe I was a freshman in high school, studying with a piano teacher who occasionally did substitute playing. Having committed herself to playing and finding that she couldn't make it, she, in desperation, offered to give me an organ lesson if I would do it. I was thrilled. The organ, I recall, had two ranks, a flute and a string, chimes, and a nervous, knee-knocking tremolo all hooked up to an old piano to which had been added a pedalboard and a second manual. The piano, with strings still in place, was dead.

As I was practicing, the minister came in, checked the windowsills for dust, adjusted the flowers, turned to the proper pages in the large pulpit Bible, came by the console and said, "You'll be fine," then added, "Just remember that

at the end of each line the congregation needs time to breathe, and at the end of each stanza they need time enough to swallow!" Time to breathe; time to swallow. Those are the first principles.

It's the swallowing we have to worry about most, isn't it? I suspect that the organ needs to hang on a moment after the majority of the congregation has stopped singing—that's not too hard to sense. Then a good full beat is needed as a pick-up to the next stanza in the tempo of the tune as sung. This is the equivalent of a conductor's preparatory beat before any sound is produced.

Let's look a bit at the three situations you speak of:

- moving in strict time from stanza to stanza
- moving in tempo, but adding beats
- extra breathing time for finishing the musical phrase, which takes you out of tempo.

You have them in good order. The first is ideally the best if it works naturally. Unfortunately, it often doesn't seem right, nor does mechanically doubling the value of the last note. While I suspect hymnal editors would rather not discuss the situation, a curious case of the reverse of doubling may be found in the tune *St. Agnes* by John B. Dykes. It's one in the class of Victorian triple-threat Trinitarian tunes, begins on the third of the triad, three times repeated in three-four time. The older version went like this, it being a slow, meditative hymn, the end of the first line was usually a disaster as some loose cannon would sing on, boldly sallying forth before the full six beats.

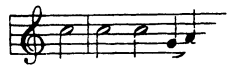
The image shows a full line of musical notation for the hymn 'St. Agnes'. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The music is in 3/4 time and features a melodic line in the treble and a harmonic accompaniment in the bass.

Editors have trimmed it by now, rightly I think, at the end of the second and fourth phrase. This probably would greatly offend the Victorians' sense of regular phrase structures, but it sings better.

The image shows a full line of musical notation for the hymn 'St. Agnes', identical to the previous image. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The music is in 3/4 time and features a melodic line in the treble and a harmonic accompaniment in the bass.



Your second situation can be illustrated by *Ein' feste Burg* as edited in the *The Hymnal 1940*. You will note that the second full bar has five beats in it—the whole note being used to avoid an ambiguous bird's-eye!—while the last bar of the line (same last line for the close of the chorale) has six beats counting the pickup of the second line.



While these are interior phrasings, they are relevant to final endings as well. *The Hymnal 1982* simply uses a vertical stroke to replace the bird's-eye and takes out the unequal measures. Unless the organist is willing to assume more rhythmic responsibility than the editors, you now have a curiously shaped tune moving in quarters and eighth notes until the second half, when two bar units ending in a dotted half suddenly come thumping along. Are we really to end the tune with a quarter note? (Lord, have mercy.) Or is it to encourage the use of the older rhythmic version given on the preceding page?



Lastly, extra breathing time to round out the phrase. A hymn tune is about the shortest musical composition in general use. It is not damaged musically if you sing two stanzas or seven. It seems to me a rhythmically dead spot is often reached at the end of a stanza—energy is played out, the tonic is reached, it simply rests. The energy begins anew with the silence that forms the upbeat to the next stanza. Between the rounded phrase and the silence is the singers' swallow time.

Your ongoing and good-natured debate is fine if you enjoy it. I suspect your singer friend is just looking for a chance to banter with you and get a little extra attention. That's OK. Does he cook? Get him talking about his favorite chocolate pudding recipe.

MAX B. MILLER, FAGO

Organmaster Shoes

FAST, COMPLETE SHOE SERVICE TO ORGANISTS
Order by Mail or Call:
(203) 453-1973

Money Back Guarantee

WOMEN'S
 Sizes 4-11, N, M, W.
whole and half sizes
 Black Navy Bone
 Silver Gold
 \$44 ppd.

Highest quality, genuine leather



Fast UPS Delivery

MEN'S Sizes 6 - 12, N, M, W.
whole and half sizes
 Black \$50 ppd.

MEN'S LARGE SIZES
 12½, 13—N, M, W. 14, 15, 16
 Black \$52 ppd. \$69 ppd.

ORDER BLANK

Men's/Women's _____
 Size _____ Width _____
 Color _____
 _____ Check _____ Money Order
 _____ Master Charge _____ Visa
 Card Number _____
 Exp. Date _____

Ship To
 Name
 Address
 City
 State Zip Code

Organmaster Shoes

282 Stepstone Hill

Guilford, Connecticut 06437 USA

ago