

DEAR UNCLE MAX

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

The following questions were asked by POE and POE+ students.

Some anthem accompaniments are written for piano or guitar but our church only has an organ. How can I adapt these running notes on the organ?

I wrote in the January 1997 issue about an Alberti bass question that is somewhat related to yours. Actually, you are lucky if you can determine that an anthem is written for any one kind of instrument at all: piano, organ, guitar, celesta, theorbo. Many publishers provide accompaniments in a limited piano style that does not explore tonal colors and avoids anything too technically demanding (not a bad idea for something for general use); with regard to playing the accompaniments "rather like" something written for organ, it is often the case that the right hand is too busy to permit the accompaniment to be played in anything other than a cabbage-chopper style. Not so good!

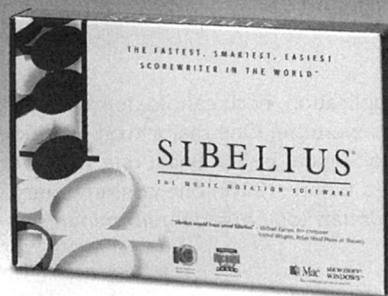
The importance of taking something not ideally suited to the organ and making it sound good is recognized on the FAGO examination by the requirement to arrange at sight a piano accompaniment on the organ. It is also touched on rather lightly at times in the choices for anthem accompaniments for the Service Playing and Colleague requirements (options are given). "These running notes" you refer to are not too descriptive. Running like scales? arpeggios? some kind of figure? Because of that I am going to suggest the books listed in the Professional Certification Bibliography.

1. Dickinson, Clarence. *The Art of Organ Playing*. H.W. Gray (now CCP/Belwin), 1922. p. 29 ff.
2. Ellingford, Herbert A. *The Art of Transcribing for the Organ*. H.W. Gray, 1922. Especially pp. 1-38 and 114-55.
3. Colleague Examination Study Guidelines, Section A, 1-3, revised 1990-91.

Some accompaniments are like making baked beans from scratch on a wood-burning stove; you put them on the back burner and let them sit and bubble. Whatever else, the accompaniment must be playable by you in the rhythm of the conductor, soloist, or chorus. Keep boiling away the nonessentials until it lies comfortably under your hands and sounds musical to the listeners.

I once had the privilege of attending a church music conference that included

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Applications

Applications and tapes must be postmarked by January 2, 2001. Notification of recipient will be in February 2001 for study to begin in fall 2001.

Repertoire

As part of the application, each candidate must submit a cassette tape of the following repertoire: One major work (Prelude and Fugue, Toccata and Fugue or Trio Sonata) by J.S. Bach; one work from the Romantic Period (composed before 1920); one contemporary work (composed after 1950). *Maximum total duration: 40 minutes*

For information and application forms, please contact:

The Mildred Flood Mahoney
Memorial Organ Scholarship

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a session on oratorio accompaniments led by the master of the art, David McK. Williams, the legendary organist of St. Bartholomew's in New York City, where they gave a large-scale oratorio or cantata every Sunday evening. One day it was the Bach *St. Matthew Passion*, the next *Elijah*, and finally the Verdi *Requiem*. He came to a section where the strings were required—with little or no harmonic action—to play tremolandos with the bows. "Ah," he said, twisting his tie into a ball, "this doesn't work on the organ at all! There is no drive and no rhythm. I did a figure which runs through the harmonic scheme to add intelligibility and excitement." It did, and it was glorious. He also remarked that he had once written out how he accompanied the *St. Matthew Passion*, packaged it, and had it stamped at the post office, carefully addressed to H.W. Gray, when he suddenly decided that the way he played it was too personal, too idiosyncratic to be put on the market. He may have been right. The lesson is, don't be afraid to make the accompaniments you play, playable for you. If they are idiosyncratic, who cares. Make them your own. What composer would not want his composition to sound its best under whatever circumstances?

What are the best 8' stops to use with mutations?

Play the stops of your mutations, 2½', 1½', whatever, quite low on the keyboard to determine whether they are flute or principal quality (could be something else, but unlikely), then support them by stops of the same family. Matching colors will surely be supplied by the builder. Mixed colors can work, but the pure colors work best for my taste.

Are the Preludes and Fugues of Bach appropriate to play for preludes?

From my standpoint, I would say so. To go right through a dozen, Sunday after Sunday, would be a poor beginning. Most of them are large-scale and perhaps

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ought to be reserved for special occasions. The traditions and customs of the church in which you play need to be respected. If they are totally unused to such a thing, try a Prelude and Fugue to see if it floats or lands dry on the sand. You might also use the Prelude prior to the service and its Fugue for the postlude.

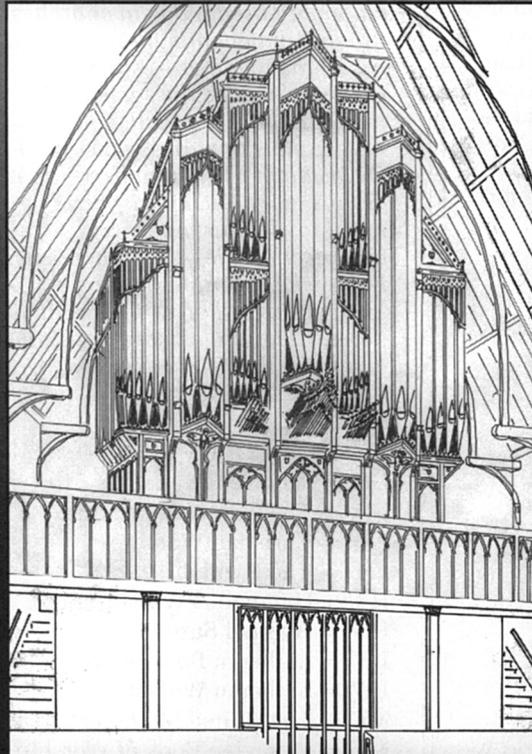
My church is buying a new organ and the committee likes the electronic organ salesman. What should I say to help them understand about pipe organs?

Be sure that you plan an excursion to one or more really fine pipe organs close by, where they can hear firsthand what one sounds like and can ask questions. If possible, have a singer or an instrumentalist perform with the pipe organ and later let them compare what is heard with the same music played on an electronic instrument. Quite different. Above all, do not let the electronic organ salesman play recordings of a pipe organ and an electronic and ask the committee to compare and tell the difference. The difference, when the sound is condensed and focused through a smallish speaker, is vastly different in effect from the diffusion of sounds from a live pipe organ with one pipe here, one there, one chamber here, one there, or different placements within a case. You may also want to remind your committee that rapid developments in electronically produced sound often render what you now purchase obsolete by the time major repairs may be necessary. You may have to totally replace rather than repair. While they shrug their shoulders and say, "C'est la vie," you grind your teeth and say, "C'est la guerre!"

I think it's nice your committee likes the electronic salesman! They are not, though, buying the salesman and won't have to live with him. Speak to the organ company of your choice and ask if they have someone better-looking and more charming they could send! Everyone knows committees are peculiar.

MAX B. MILLER, FAGO

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