

DEAR UNCLE MAX

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

The pedals on my organ speak slowly and always seem to sound later than the stops on the manuals. What can I do to change this or work around the situation?

You have my sympathy. This is not unusual and very annoying! However, here are some suggestions that may or may not do much.

1. Get a friend who also plays the organ to play your registrations so that you can go out into the building and assess the situation from differing vantage points; it may be an illusion because of where the console is located.

2. Get the keys to the organ chamber and check for yourself exactly where the pedal stops are located in reference not only to the console but to the rest of the organ. The lower the pitch frequencies the more the sound will pass around obstacles and fill space; the higher the frequencies the more the sound travels in a straight line. For this reason, as well as aesthetic visual reasons, pedal pipes are often placed at the rear of the chamber (if there is one) or even behind something that may be blocking your access to the direct sound, as it has to pass around some obstacle before you hear it. Imagine straight lines drawn from where you are sitting to where the pedal pipes are placed to see if there are interferences.

3. Will how you register help? Perhaps. If you have a divided chancel, one division on one side and another on the other, it probably will help to see that the pedal is coupled to the side of the keyboard on which you are playing. Using the pedal uncoupled may prove counterproductive—try, then decide. The worst scenario is probably when you register each keyboard and pedal independently, especially if the pipework is separated by much space, across the chancel, or even on one side.

4. By all means check with your maintenance man. It may, after all, be simply a question of voicing or another adjustment that could be easily made. The repair person may even recommend moving some of the pedal pipes, or some new pipework.

5. I know it is sometimes suggested that the organist compensate by playing the pedal line slightly ahead. Difficult to do, and it is hard to be sure whether the

adjustment you make for your ears is not making it worse for the listener somewhere else in the room. It is good discipline to play as nearly together as you possibly can and keep going regardless—try a dialogue on a front and back organ separated by a couple of hundred feet and you will see. You can't always wait on the sound. Organists do have problems other musicians can't even imagine.

6. Arrange for a meteor to fall on the instrument and start over.

What is the difference between a quint stop and a nazard stop?


The quint, since about mid-16th century, is usually a chorus rank and not a flute mutation that sounds at 10%, 5%, 2%, or 1%. It sounds the third overtone in the harmonic series and emphasizes the pitch an octave and a fifth lower; hence, a pedal stop at 10% is used with a complementary 16' to give "a different tone (combination tone)—economically though not elegantly—the sound of a pipe an octave below the lower one" (Peter Williams and Barbara Owen in *The Organ* from the New Grove Musical Instruments Series). In other words, a fake 32' sound is produced.

The nazard (nasard) is most frequently found at 2% pitch, sometimes at 1%, and is usually a stopped rank. This would be the classic French use. Be alert for other possibilities. German specifications make less distinction between the quint and the nazard.

There is such a difference between Frescobaldi's toccatas and those by Widor and Vierne. What does "toccata" really mean?

The usual definition goes something like this: "Toccata comes from the Italian word *toccare*, an infinitive meaning *to touch*." This is a hopelessly useless piece of information. Presumably, if you are not wearing gloves, anything you play might be called a toccata! If a composer calls his composition a toccata, one supposes it must be. However, the range of meaning goes from the short liturgical toccata, used before the Elevation and expected to be a short prelude in a dignified style (cf. Frescobaldi), through various combinations of rapid passagework alternating with contrapuntal sections to a thoroughly *perpetuum mobile* style (cf. the Toccata from Widor's Fifth and the opening Toccata from his Fourth!). When next in a good library try Grove's or some other encyclopedic dictionary of music. This question is good for the making of fat, \$87 books.

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