

## **Into Practice**

Notes on the Performance and Interpretation of:

1. Sigfrid Karg-Elert: Chorale Improvisation on 'Vom Himmel Hoch',  
Op. 65 No. 10
2. Sebastian Forbes: 'Ite, Missa Est, Deo Gratias'  
Edition: Oxford University Press
3. Jehan Alain: 'Le Jardin Suspendu'  
Edition: Alphonse Leduc Et Cie

Kevin Bowyer

*Kevin Bowyer was interviewed in the first issue of MusicTeachers.co.uk's Online Journal. He is internationally recognised as a leading recitalist and teacher; he currently divides his time between performing and teaching for the St. Giles Organ School and the Royal Northern College of Music. Kevin offers notes on the performance and interpretation of three intermediate organ works. The first two are on the syllabus of the Royal College of Organists' Associate diploma. With each, he offers practical advice on interpretation and suggests appropriate registrations for the RCO instrument at Holborn.*

**SIGFRID KARG-ELERT: CHORALE IMPROVISATION ON VOM HIMMEL HOCH, OP. 65 NO. 10**

Edition: Breitkopf

ARCO List C

**General Comments**

In many respects, the music seems to follow the text of verse 1 of the hymn:

|                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Vom Himmel hoch, da komm' ich her, | From Heaven above to earth I come  |
| Ich bring euch gute neue Mär,      | To bear good news to every home,   |
| Der guten Mär bring ich so viel,   | Glad tidings of great joy I bring, |
| Davon ich sing'n und sagen will.   | Whereof I now will say and sing.   |

(Tr. Catherine Winkworth)

JS Bach's harmonisation of the chorale melody, from The Christmas Oratorio.

**Musical Example URL:**

<http://www.musicteachers.co.uk/journal/2001-01/practice.bachchorale.mid>

The image displays a musical score for an organ piece. It consists of three systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The notation includes various note values, rests, and ornaments, particularly in the treble staff. The piece is a chorale improvisation based on the hymn 'Vom Himmel hoch, da komm' ich her'.

Notice the relative altitude and serenity of the opening right-hand solo compared with the earthy and thunderous growl of the final line. You might also find other musical references to the text: notice, for example, how 'Glad tidings' are brought forth from the Swell box and then presented as a huge crescendo on the Great.

#### Registration

My suggestions for registering this at St Andrew's Holborn are as follows:

| Bar       | RCO ORGAN (See notes for specification)   |
|-----------|---|
| 1-3       | RH: Swell, box open: 23, 29; LH: Great: 3, 4; Pedal: 16; Great to Ped (33)                              |
| 4-9.2     | Both hands on Great. Add: 6   |
| 9.3-11.2  | Remove: 6 and return to same disposition and registration as bars 1-3                                   |
| 11.3-13.3 | Remove: 4. Play on Great. Shut the box during this passage and add: 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30              |
| 13.4-15.3 | Both hands on Swell an octave lower to get the 16' effect. Add: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 15, 17-19, 32, 34 |
| 15.4-17.3 | Both hands loco on Swell. Swell opens during this period  |
| 17.4-18.3 | Both hands on Great and Swell closed  |
| 20        | Open Swell box to cope with 'general crescendo' marking   |
| 21        | Add: 11   |
| 22-end    | Full organ. Add: 12, 14, 20 (the full pedal composition pedal will do this)                             |

The second page looks less full of notes than the first and there may be a tendency to present the piece as 'a short work in two movements'. The piece, however, has a single-minded logic, which should find its way into your performance. The crescendo in the last three lines must be smooth, not lumpy or clumsy.

#### Interpretation

The first page seems to be an adagio, an impression given by the demisemi-quavers in the right hand solo. Hold to the marking *Andante amoroso*. Don't play too slowly: a crotchet speed of 64 is about right; if you adopt any slower a tempo, the piece sounds too relaxed. Notice the quaver rests in the solo line: the first two bars consist of two phrases, not one (similarly bars 9, 10 and 11). Uniformity of tempo is essential throughout.

The marking, 'Characteristic 8' tone' suggests a requirement for something that stands out from the texture: in effect, any 8' solo stop will be sufficient. It is not necessary to have the 4' in the left hand at this point, but its use will not affect the right hand's dominance, since it is pitched so high.

The subdivisions of phrasing in the right hand's melody are not really worth bothering with: they are a bit fussy and the ear should pick up both parts of the melody without too much trouble. The composer picks out the chorale melody through the tenuto markings in the top part of the left hand; these should only be taken into consideration where they are marked and played *poco non legato* — slightly detached, to make sure that they come through.

Example 1: Tenuto markings in bar 1



Example 2: Tenuto markings in the soprano and alto lines in bars 5-7



The dots above the soprano line in bars 13 and 14 are not staccatos; they are another means of indicating the notes of the chorale melody. In the first instance, they denote the end of a phrase; the second is only an echo of the first and therefore is not really a part of the chorale melody: they suggest a slightly larger articulation than before. It is important, however, to ensure that the tenor line plays over the phrase, otherwise it will sound far too disjointed.

Example 3: bars 13 and 14



The crescendo that occurs through bars 14 to 16 is important. Try to grade it carefully: the addition of big mixtures is not suitable, as these tend to come crashing in. If you feel you must use them, bring them in very carefully. From bar 19, there is a *molto* crescendo marking. Be careful not to change the tempo here: keep the momentum going. Few instruments have a general crescendo pedal, which this piece requires. Try to make the changes with either an assistant or general pistons — if you have these above the pedals, all the better. Although there might be the urge to do a *stringendo*, don't — it isn't marked.

## SEBASTIAN FORBES: ITE, MISSA EST, DEO GRATIAS

Edition: Oxford University Press  
ARCO List D

### Registration

Suggested registrations for St Andrew's Holborn are as follows:

| Bar | RCO ORGAN (See notes for specification)   |
|-----|---|
| 1   | Great: 4; Swell: 28 (box closed); Ped: 16, 18   |
| 5   | Great: change 4 for 2. Throughout this section, Great 4 & 2 are alternated for (A) and (C)  |
| 18  | Add Swell to Ped (33)   |
| 22  | Add Swell: 30 and play octave down to simulate 16' reed (The rest of the page is played an octave lower)  |
| 23  | Add Swell: 24   |
| 34  | After accented chord is played, remove: Swell: 28 (Still one octave lower)  |
| 43  | Swell: change to: 22, 28, 31; Great: remove 4, add 6. Play these passages an octave lower. Throughout, passages marked (C) are to be played on Great 2, as on the first page. |
| 53  | Pick out the final top C with the right hand thumb one octave lower on the Great  |

A perfect reproduction of the marks in the score should be the aim, not only in the notes and indicated sounds, but also in dynamics, crescendi, diminuendi, phrasing and articulation. The piece should be played strictly in tempo; crotchet equals 60 and quaver equals 120, precisely as the score dictates: there should be no *rallentandi* or manipulation of the pulse, although there are places where there could be an imperceptible placing of chords (see section: **Interpretation**).

Structurally, the music is like an arch, there is no feeling of upbeats and downbeats — the whole piece is more linear, building to a large climax in the middle before returning to the sounds heard at the beginning. For the last two bars even quieter registrations are required.

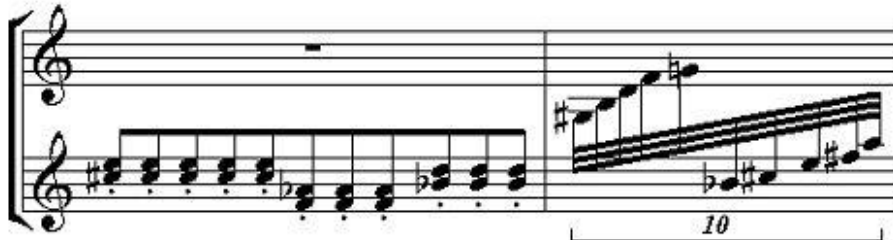
Note that there should be a strict difference between the staccato quavers in bar 5 and the much heavier (but still strictly a tempo) detached quavers in the pedal in bars, 11, 18, 24 etc. Ensure that legato is maintained wherever marked, especially when progressing from one sound to another, e.g. from bars 2 - 4 or from bars 10 - 11. Ultimately, the music should have a kind of simplicity, even naïvety, of expression. Try to avoid the conventional feeling of upbeat-downbeat; instead, think of the music in a more airborne way. Sometimes the clouds darken, at other times, the sound is full of sunlight — aim to communicate the relative densities of the sounds.

### Interpretation

The opening gesture should be played as evenly as possible. Judging the speed here is very important, but the hands are divided so that each has a group of five notes, each a

half-beat long. Keep the speed from the quavers in bar 5 in mind throughout this line, and keep the changeover in a similarly strict tempo:

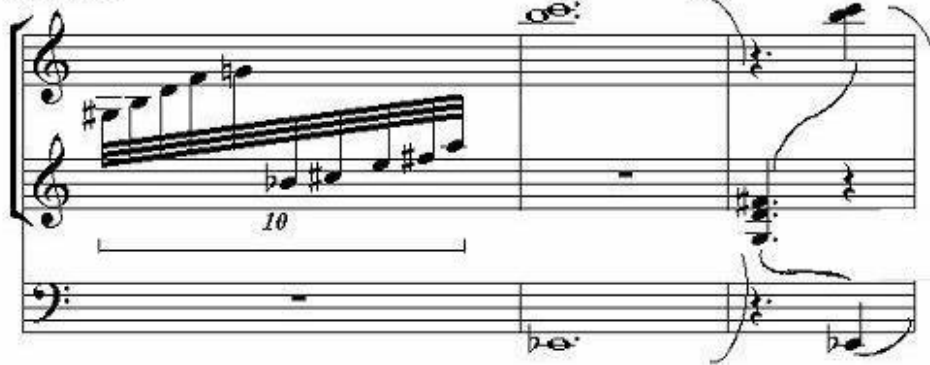
Example 1: bars 5 and 6



Bars 5 - 8 and similar places should be played absolutely legato — no gaps appear between sounds at all. For example:

Example 2: bars 5 - 8; bars 29 - 34

Bars 5 - 6



Make sure that the detached pedal quavers in the above example are like hammer blows: they should be heavy, not staccato.

Although there is a necessity to provide a rhythmically-precise performance, there are places where you can point chords by delaying the beat very slightly. Example 2 provides one such instance, where the first chord of bar 32 should be delayed very slightly. Other places include bars 10 and 24.

## JEHAN ALAIN: LE JARDIN SUSPENDU

Edition: Alphonse Leduc et Cie

### Background

Since legato is extremely important, the music should be played without any strong downbeats. The RNCM instrument has tracker action, which must be handled carefully in this work — palettes must be opened gently by depressing the keys slowly.

You will need to use a lot of finger substitution throughout. The hardest patterns to finger are those in the right hand at bars 3, 5 and 7, etc., and in the left hand at bars 39, 41, etc. Here it is wise to use the base of the thumb as an aid to getting the smoothness required.

4 2 1  
5 3  
4 5 2 3  
4 5 2 3  
1

1-base

Roll from the side of the thumb onto its base and back for the final note.

### Interpretation

The tempo indication Grave, crotchet equals 60, is original

The piece should be played pretty much as written. However, you should look out for a few things. In bar 24, note that the pause only occurs on the alto B-flat and that there is a quaver rest after the top note: release that and the remainder of the chord as written, but hold the alto part on longer so that it sounds alone.

Ensure that at bar 13 you notice the piano marking — this should be done with the box — don't worry about opening it too far: you have to make further dynamic contrasts in the following line, but, because of the pitch, the crescendo marked at bar 21 makes itself. Make sure that the E-flat in the left hand at bar 33 comes off before the chord change. The tenuto markings are genuine and you should play these notes slightly longer than the others. This central section is a kind of improvisation, but the underlying pulse in the left hand should be present throughout; any form of rubato should be in the right hand only. The notes that are marked tenuto are like anchor points; the music should lean towards them, as in the following:

Pos.  
6/4 *senza rigore*  
Réc.  
C  
5/4

In context, the high C-sharp at the end of the bar seems rhythmically ambiguous — treat it as a ritardando and try to feel the tension roll over into the next bar.

In bar 50, we see the first of a couple of arabesques, played on the Positiv by the left hand. Try not to do these too quickly; make them as free as you possibly can. The demisemiquavers are used only to give the visual impression of fitting into a crotchet — rather than stretching the whole of the right hand out, Alain has chosen to compress the left hand instead.

Riten. . . . a Tempo  
6/4  
C Réc.  
Très libre  
10

Interestingly, the 1939 imprint of this work, published whilst Alain was alive, contains a tie that is omitted here between the pedal B-flat of bar 49 and the B-flat in the soprano part of bar 50.

Make sure that the section after bar 58 is not too slow — it still needs to move onwards, despite its *lento e lontano* marking.



## Notes

### The Organ of The Royal College of Organists, St Andrew's Church, Holborn Built: NP Mander, 1989

| Great                 |       | Swell                |     |
|-----------------------|-------|----------------------|-----|
| 1. Double Diapason    | 16    | 21. Open Diapason    | 8   |
| 2. Open Diapason      | 8     | 22. Salcional        | 8   |
| 3. Gamba              | 8     | 23. Clarionet Flute2 | 8   |
| 4. Stopped Diapason   | 8     | 4. Principal         | 4   |
| 5. Principal          | 4     | 25. Fifteenth        | 2   |
| 6. Suabe Flute        | 4     | 26. Echo Cornet      | III |
| 7. Twelfth            | 2 2/3 | 27. Mixture          | II  |
| 8. Fifteenth          | 2     | 28. Cornopean        | 8   |
| 9. Flageolet          | 2     | 29. Hautboy          | 8   |
| 10. Sesquialtera      | III   | 30. Clarion          | 4   |
| 11. Mixture           | III   | 31. Undulant         | 8   |
| 12. Posaune           | 8     |                      |     |
| 13. Corno di Bassetto | 8     |                      |     |
| 14. Clarion           | 4     |                      |     |

| Pedal             |        | Great                           |  |
|-------------------|--------|---------------------------------|--|
| 15. Open Diapason | 16     | 32. Swell to Great              |  |
| 16. Bourdon       | 16     | 33. Great to Pedal              |  |
| 17. Quint         | 10 2/3 | 34. Swell to Pedal              |  |
| 18. Principal     | 8      | Tremulant (by pedal:left)       |  |
| 19. Fifteenth     | 4      | Great to Pedal (by pedal:right) |  |
| 20. Bombarde      | 16     |                                 |  |

Mechanical key action

Electrical stop action

8 adjustable pistons per division

— 16 levels of memory

12 general pistons (duplicated above pedal board)

— 96 levels of memoryIndependent sequencer

Two non adjustable composition pedals to each department:

| Great               |   | Swell           |   |
|---------------------|---|-----------------|---|
| i) Stopped Diapason | 8 | i) Salcional    | 8 |
| Saube Fluteii)      | 4 | Clarionet flute | 8 |
| Tutti               |   | ii) Tutti       |   |

## **Pedal**

- i) Bourdon 16
- ii) Tutti

## **Compass**

Manuals C-a''' (58 notes)  
Pedals C-f (30 notes)  
Mechanical key, pedal and  
drawstop action  
Balanced swell pedal  
Straight pedal board