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# Systematic Organ Pedal Technique

and General Interpretation

*by*

Reginald Goss Custard

GALAXY MUSIC CORPORATION  
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# Systematic Organ Pedal Technique and General Interpretation

## Chapter I

### WORKING TO A SYSTEM

ORGAN playing of to-day, as might be expected, makes a more rigorous demand on the player's manual and pedal technique than hitherto, by reason of the responsive action and artistic advancement of the modern organ.

This little treatise has been written with a view to assisting the organ student who, after cultivating a good manual technique, perhaps by the aid of the piano in the first instance, is then confronted with the many difficulties and pitfalls in acquiring a reliable pedal action and technique. In some of the standard editions of our great organ works the pedal signs are so misleading as to hamper instead of assist the student in his studies.

In the earliest stages of pianoforte playing a system of fingering is taught which, when thoroughly mastered, becomes the foundation for accuracy and facility in manual technique.

There are, as we know, certain established rules for fingering scales and arpeggios and the correct position of the hand, the flexibility of the wrist, and so forth, and I maintain that in a somewhat modified way these rules may be applied to pedalling.

Where there is no method, but merely an attempt to do a thing anyhow, there can be no confidence in oneself. "Anyhow" is not good enough for organ pedalling, as in this, like everything else, there is a right and a wrong way of

doing things. The acrobatic feats which one foot is called upon to perform are amazing, and it always seems a mystery to me how the right notes are hit upon. The other foot is completely forgotten and remains firmly planted on the swell pedal, waiting for an opportunity to make some kind of a crescendo, however futile.

In the ancient days of pump-handle swells, situated at the extreme end of the pedal-board, there was a reasonable excuse in a good many instances for this one-footed method. Organists were either content or compelled to do things with one foot which nowadays should not be tolerated for an instant. Also, there was the old-fashioned pedal-board with its straight and narrow keys and noisy and heavy action ; all these drawbacks were certainly not conducive to acquiring accuracy. The advent of the radiating board with a centralised swell pedal was the first advancement in modern organ building and quickly revolutionised pedalling facilities, making it possible for both feet to have greater control over the whole pedal-board.

In the earlier primers on organ playing, the student was first taught to use only toes of both feet for consecutive long notes, leaving the heels for later consideration. This, to my mind, was entirely wrong, because from the start the need for acquiring flexibility of the ankles and also for getting accustomed to using another part of the foot on a slightly different position of the key is most essential.

It is surprising to notice how awkward a beginner is in using his heels, yet after a little practice the action becomes quite natural to him.

Practically speaking, the heels should play a greater part in pedal technique than the toes, for the reason that when a heel is in action the toe is in easy reach of a short note either up or down or even as much as an interval of a third apart, whereas when a toe is on a long note it is out of position

for a short key. Alternate toe and heel work with the same foot very often prevents legato passages from being broken, and at the same time eradicates the too frequent crossing of the feet. This persistency in the use of more heel action brings me considerably nearer to my subject—*systematic* pedalling. The question may be asked: can there be any useful system? Do you not just put down the note with the foot which is nearest and most convenient and trust to luck with the next one? All this, I fear, is only too true. I have watched organists with a brilliant manual technique do the most appalling things on the pedal board, with no thought of playing a particular passage twice in the same way. The uncertainty of how best to pedal a particular passage is considerably diminished if there is some method to fall back upon, and by applying this method one can be sure of executing it in the same way every time.

In the subsequent chapters I will endeavour to explain as simply as possible a system which for many years has proved successful with my pupils who, in even the dullest cases, have in a short time been able to acquire confidence and accuracy in their pedal technique. The chapter on position will be wholly devoted to explaining the scheme, and all the examples will be quoted from the works of J. S. Bach as being the best medium for laying the foundation of a sound and reliable technique. The chapter on action will deal with the important matter of foot control, knee action, suppleness of the ankles, etc., after which a few examples will be quoted from the standard works showing how the system works in passages of varying difficulty. These examples may prove useful to the student for reference purposes. The last chapter will deal in a general way with three vital matters — phrasing, accentuation and registration, under the heading of "Interpretation." Although this chapter is not strictly in accordance with the

main title of the treatise, it has a direct bearing upon the subject in so far as interpretation is not wholly confined to those things which are done with the hands alone but rather with hands and feet.

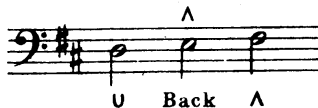
## Chapter II

### POSITION

BEFORE deciding which is the correct position for the feet on the pedal board the student is advised to adopt the simple method of putting both feet together and allowing them to rest above two central long keys on the board, say D and E, with the toes almost touching the short keys in front. He will then observe that considerable overlapping takes place and the toes get in the way of one another, with the result that the key would have to be struck more on the side than in the centre. If one foot is moved back until it is in a line with the instep of the other the position is improved. Now cross over with the foremost foot and notice the result : the heel of this foot is fouling the toe of the other. This, to say the least of it, is a clumsy and inelegant procedure and could not possibly be a safe method of performing a scale of long notes only. Let us try another position by putting a heel on one note and a toe on the adjacent long key. It will be seen by this position, with one foot slightly in advance of the other, that there is no interference between the two. Crossing is now a comparatively easy

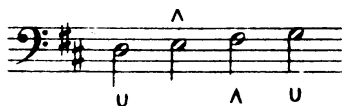
matter, because if the heel is well in front with the toe capable of reaching a short key without shifting, the other foot can pass easily *behind*. We come to a point where the answer to a question will decide our position for good and all. Which foot is to be in front?—because if the heel of the right is being used the left will go behind, and *vice versa*. *In no circumstances whatever will both positions work*, and furthermore, no system could be attained if this were the case. We can then make a rule for scale work and close formation of notes that the left heel will be in front and the right toe behind, making, as it were, two distinct lines across the board—one for heels behind the short keys and one for toes behind the heels.

It is to be hoped that the student has grasped this explanation, because any deviation from this position must immediately cause a breakdown of the system. Let us consider the scale of D major and add note by note upwards. According to our rule the first note will be given to the left heel, because toes on consecutive long keys are not allowed. For the sake of argument, supposing we begin with the toe, this will mean the heel of right on E and toe of the same foot on F#. Now we are out of position as we cannot possibly continue indefinitely with the right, so the left toe would have to go *behind* for G. Therefore the left heel must start the scale with the right toe well behind on E and by a slight movement the short key F# is then in easy access of the left toe, thus :



There is no reason why the next note G should not be taken with the right toe, except that the left will have to cross unnecessarily over to the A. We would, therefore,

prefer to give G to the heel of the left, as it is almost resting over it.



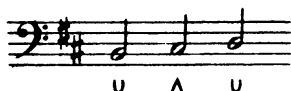
There is no other course but to use the right toe on the next note A—well back to allow the left heel to cross again over to the B.



To complete the scale is an easy matter, for C# is accessible for the left toe and the right will move up to the D.



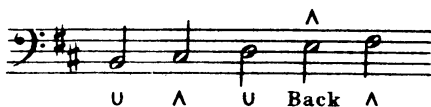
The downward scale will be pedalled with exactly the same markings. We shall now work a minor scale on the same lines. Starting on B with the left heel the toe is in position for C#, taking D with either the right toe or left heel, but the latter is preferable as it avoids crossing.



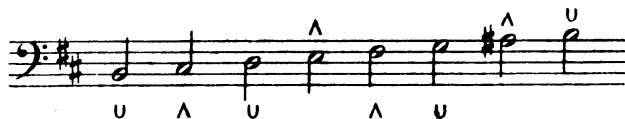
C# can be called a pivot note, a term which will be used more than once as it plays an important part in the system.

It really means the manipulation of a middle note, either a long or short key, the notes on each side being played with the same foot.

The next note E in the scale must be right toe to enable the left to cross to F#



The obvious procedure will then be—G left heel and A# and B right toe and heel, thus completing the minor scale.



Before leaving the subject of scales, it will be as well to deal with one mostly consisting of short keys. D $\flat$ , for instance, is a typical example because of the proximity of three short keys. The first two notes must be allotted to the left foot, otherwise if the right is allowed to play E $\flat$  we come into difficulties at once as the left must go behind, which would destroy our position and also compel the right to take all the remaining notes of the scale. F, then, is taken by the right toe, two short keys with the left and the remainder with the right, making a long note the pivot between two short ones.



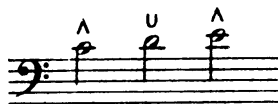
It will be seen at (a) that two toes occur in the middle of the scale (F and G $\flat$ ), but as one of the notes is a short key and with the right well back on the F there is ample room to cross over. Up till now all the examples have been illustrated

in the most comfortable part of the pedal board. Passages lying at the extremes of the board, either diatonic or chromatic, are, as a general rule, best managed with one foot, unless, of course, the particular passage is continuous in one position, when it will be necessary for one foot to help the other with the body slightly turned to preserve one's balance and ensure freedom of ankle work.

The bottom octave of the pedal board is used far more frequently than the top, and the awkward position of the left foot makes it difficult to acquire smooth playing. There is a temptation to hop from note to note with the toe; this is to be deprecated as it destroys evenness of tone and is liable to lead the student into bad habits. The natural radiation of the foot will decide the use of toe and heel. On two consecutive long notes, the heel being turned inwards will command the upper note. In a similar manner with three consecutive long keys the heel will command the middle note.



The same applies to the upper register.

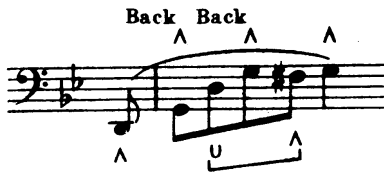


The use of two long keys and then a short one is not recommended with one foot as the toe is now out of position for the short key, and an inelegant slide with the heel would be necessary. It is well to remember that there is another foot to come to the rescue rather than to take the chance of smudgy pedalling and broken phrases too often caused by



relying on one foot to do the work of two. In extended chromatic passages the right toe should be used on long keys only—well back so as to allow the left to operate on alternative long and short keys, thus preserving the position of left in front and right behind. This, of course, does not apply to the extremes of the board, when the last three notes at least may be taken with one foot.

Having established our position with scale formation, the subject of broken chords and arpeggio passages can now be dealt with. As will be seen later, although strict adherence to alternate toe and heel action will not be so rigidly enforced the relative feet positions will remain the same. It stands to reason that where the notes are not adjacent to one another there will be less crossing of feet; but when a passage leaps an octave with one intermediate note, crossing is necessary to preserve the phrasing and smoothness of the part. The following is an illustration taken from the G minor Fugue:—



With a little practice this is quite easy, remembering to keep the right well back. Swing the body slightly as the left heel comes up to the D and the toe is then in position for the F#. An alternative footing is unsafe at speed.



The phrasing is bound to be broken in this case. Occasionally passages are to be met with in which we say

that the notes do not lie conveniently under the fingers or feet and consequently no systematic treatment is possible. This applies to all other instruments, and is particularly noticeable if the composer has not an intimate knowledge of the instrument for which he is writing. One can cite many arrangements of piano or orchestral works that are quite unsuitable for the organ, both in the manual and pedal parts, and all that can be said of these arrangements is that they do not "come off," and it would be sheer waste of time to attempt to unravel their difficulties and, in some cases, impossibilities. Passages where alternative notes for the left foot are scale-wise can be played with toe and heel:—

J. S. Bach

(a)  Musical notation for example (a) in bass clef, showing a scale-like passage with alternating notes marked with 'U' and 'A'.

J. S. Bach

(b)  Musical notation for example (b) in bass clef, showing a scale-like passage with notes marked with 'U' and 'A'.

(c)  Musical notation for example (c) in bass clef, showing a scale-like passage with notes marked with 'U' and 'A', and a "Back Back" instruction.

In example (c) note the action of the right foot which, after being in front for the short key  $A\flat$ , takes its place behind again for G in order to preserve the position.

It will also be observed that note C must be taken with the heel so as to avoid two toes on consecutive long notes. If the passage terminated on the second G, or proceeded

upwards, this note would be more conveniently placed for the right heel.



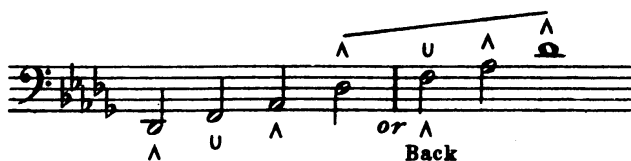
It will be seen now that the right foot is foremost in this phrase for the obvious reason that the upper notes are nearly all short keys. If the passage were in G major, the position would be reversed : *Right behind, left in front.*



The question may be asked : Why not heels on upper notes ? There is no reason why this should not be so, but as it would not facilitate matters at all, is it worth while altering the position of the feet ? These examples have been given to impress upon the student the fact that although a particular passage can be pedalled in some other way quite comfortably it is better to adhere to a system whereby confusion is eliminated and the risk of playing it in a different position each time greatly diminished.

Some of the most difficult passages to manage are the arpeggios. They cover a wide range of the pedal board, and the distribution of the feet is often a problem to solve. As a matter of fact, arpeggios of more than one octave are seldom to be found in organ music, as the extended forms are ineffective and extremely difficult to play connectedly ; but for the sake of argument and for systematic purposes a few examples of two octaves will be given. The main point to remember is to do as little crossing as possible, and then only at the interval of a third (major or minor), in the centre of the board.

Notes at the extremes must be managed with one foot with the exception of  $D\flat$  and  $E\flat$  upwards, in which case the second notes F and G respectively must be played with the right foot. In each case if the first three notes are played with the left the right becomes placed in an awkward position on the fourth note, and the following long note would either mean the left coming behind or taking all the remaining notes with the right foot, thus :—



Whichever way this is played it is clumsy and inelegant and does not comply with the system.

The correct pedalling will be :—



The arpeggio of  $E\flat$  should be pedalled in the same way. The only two arpeggios consisting of nothing but short keys, being  $E\flat$  minor and  $F\sharp$  major, will need a little consideration. It stands to reason that no actual crossing of the feet takes place, and it is a matter of one foot being drawn smartly back to enable the other to operate on the higher or lower note as the case may be. The best position for the change is at the interval of the perfect fourth, the feet having more chance of disentangling themselves on the wide interval ;

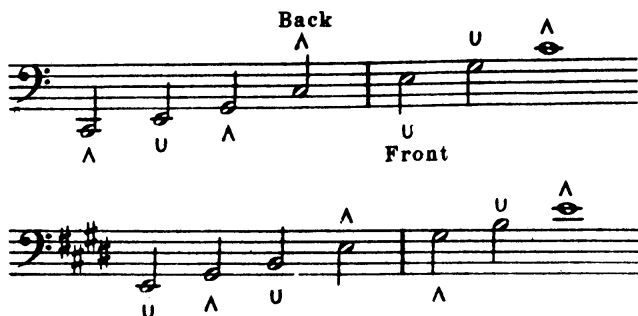
fortunately, extended passages on short keys are few and far between. E $\flat$  minor would be pedalled thus :—



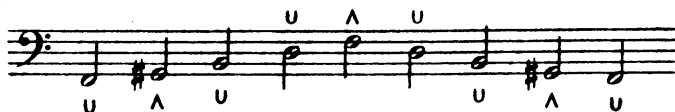
F $\sharp$  major in the same way.

Arpeggios in the remaining keys are more or less pedalled to a pattern, the first three notes at the extremes working on a pivot note. As in the case of chromatic passages, the right foot should be used as much as possible on the long keys, but if it is brought forward for a short one it must immediately take up the position behind again.

The examples in C and E major will suffice as patterns :—



Diminished chords can be pedalled much in the same way as common chords. They are easier to negotiate by reason of the fact that the long and short keys are more evenly divided. The compass seldom exceeds the octave in real organ music ; in which case more often than not crossing is unnecessary. For instance, the following example is quite easy and comfortable :—



Any extension of the above would necessitate crossing, and it will be as well to remind the student again that, as in the chromatic scale, the right foot will only operate on long keys (back):—



It is needless to give other examples as the other keys will be modelled on the same lines. We repeat what was said at the beginning: that the extended form of both common and diminished chords is seldom to be met with in organ music, and that these examples have only been given to verify the system, yet in a modified form the student will be able to frame his own ideas as to their treatment.

Pedal passages of a sequential nature, particularly when the figure is diatonic, specially lend themselves to systematic treatment and make an interesting study. We cannot do better than refer to some of the famous fugue subjects of Bach as concrete examples: in particular the Toccata in F, the D major and minor Fugues and the great G minor. In all these works there are long stretches of sequential passages diatonically constructed which can be patterned, as it were, with a uniform system of pedalling. This does not mean to say that every figure can be footed in the same manner, as the position of the long and short keys in the pattern must necessarily decide the position of the feet. Take, for example, the D major fugue subject. According to the system no other alternative is possible for the first entry than the following:—



While the right is stationary on B the left is negotiating a major third with scarcely any movement whatever—in fact, the third could be played simultaneously with ease and comfort. This passage is more often than not played with two notes to one foot. Try it and see the difference.

The second entry in the tonic key is similar, but in the B minor and F# entries we have to resort to two notes with one foot unless the left is put behind on the long key, which is less satisfactory and unsafe. The next phrase in the subject gives a definite example of pattern playing, as it is sequential. Here is the pattern :—



The entire sequence can be pedalled on this model.

Before we leave the D major Fugue an excellent example will be found in the solo passage at the end. The passage is sequential for two octaves comprising the whole range of the pedal board, starting thus :—



The pattern is the same for the next three sequences :—

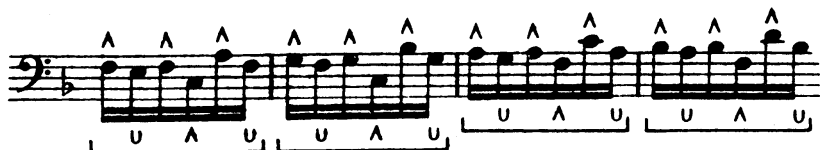


After which the pattern is slightly altered by commencing with the left heel :—



It will be observed that no crossing of feet occurs in the whole passage.

The next and last example is the pedal solo in Bach's Toccata in F. The rising sequence in the first four bars makes it possible to pedal each bar in the same manner, the lowest note in each group being played with the toe of the left—not heel :—



As the left foot notes skip an interval of a fourth and fifth there is no object in using all heels—it is not only unsafe but inelegant. The passage is similar to the one in the D minor fugues, where alternate notes are taken with toe and heel, except in the case of two adjacent long keys where the heel of the left must, of course, be used.

The next six bars consist of a falling sequence, and it will be noted that the lower notes are repeated in scale form. All these will be taken with heel of the left foot as there is no object in changing the position on reiterated notes. The three highest notes in the eleventh and thirteenth bars may be played with the right foot if preferred. The succeeding pedal solo in the dominant key will be pedalled in the same manner. The student will be able to find numerous



examples in other standard organ works where sequential passages can be pedalled to a pattern, and considerable interest should be derived from working out the system for himself as set out in this chapter.

## Chapter III

### ACTION

IN the last chapter we dealt entirely with the position of the feet on the pedal-board based upon a systematic scheme. There is a great deal that can be said with regard to foot-control: for instance, the correct action of toe and heel, flexibility of ankle and freedom of the knees, etc.

To begin with, a word about footwear will not be out of place here. The student need not be fastidious about this, but there is no doubt that shoes are more convenient than boots, because the ankles are afforded freedom, whereas a heavy boot is inflexible and cumbersome on the pedal. Shoes with fairly stout soles with the toes not too pointed are best, and some people prefer to keep a pair of shoes for organ playing only. The inconvenience of carrying special footwear about seems unnecessary, however, and ordinary walking shoes are all that are needed; but, of course, rubber heels are fatal.

It is a common fault of the beginner to use the flat of the foot on a key, with the result that two notes are liable to be

sounded together. This is either due to the stool being too low or the inability to give sufficient action to the ankles. The seat should be just high enough to enable the player to rest his feet lightly on the face of the keys. Having made the correct adjustment (most stools now are adjustable), be careful to raise the heel for toe playing and the toe for heeling. The foot should never be allowed to strike the key edge-ways, as bad habits very quickly develop, and when any speed is required smudgy playing will be the result. Another common fault is for the player to shuffle from one long key to another by means of toe and heel action on the same note, which really means that he intends playing two consecutive long keys with the toe by using the heel as a pivot. This is quite unnecessary, as loss of time must occur, to say nothing about bad pedalling.

The note which is being operated should have the toe or heel, as the case may be, in position for the next long key. Pedalling with facility and ease will depend a great deal on the early tuition in organ playing. There are many dodges which are supposed to assist the player in finding his way about the pedal board. One in particular: when the leap of a wide interval is taken with either foot the gap between the two sets of short keys is frequently used as a means of intimating the position of the note to be played. For instance, if the leap of a fifth, say, from D to lower G, is required, F# is automatically felt for before G can be located. Such a practice as this is contrary to all laws of organ pedalling, and it is impossible to see how any progress can be made, or speed attained, by what might be called a lack of confidence on the part of the student. How then does one manage to leap accurately without looking down at the feet? It is certainly not by guesswork, neither is it by making a particular spot on the pedal-board a "refuge in time of need."

Instinctively distance by intervals is the surest method. The leap of anything greater than an octave is seldom executed with the same foot, and, if this is the case, one might ask the question, *What is the other foot doing?* Intervals of a 2nd or 3rd are easy enough because the keys are adjacent enough to allow of a legato action with toe and heel, or *vice versa*. Skips of a 4th or 5th require more judgment, there being a definite action of the foot for these intervals. It was stated in the last chapter that the natural radiation of the foot will decide the position of toe and heel on two consecutive long notes. We will take, for example, a skip from bottom C to its 5th, played with toe and heel alternatively. As the foot moves upwards a distinct inward curve will be apparent, and an outward one for the opposite direction. This is due to the radiation of the foot and the forward position of the heel when it comes to rest on the upper note. If both notes are taken with the toe of the same foot proceeding in almost a straight line, the interval is liable to be misjudged. Taking into account the distance the foot has to travel for the interval of an octave, this method would not apply, therefore it is better to use toes for both notes. These skips with one foot are generally confined to the lower part of the pedal-board when the other foot cannot be spared from the swell pedal and also when the bass notes are intermittent.

Another important action is that of playing two or even three consecutive short keys with the same foot. Shuffling or wriggling from one to another is a bad practice, there being a danger of both notes sounding simultaneously. The action should be definite by slightly raising the foot before proceeding to the next note, the movement being smart enough to avoid breaking the legato.

Never slide off a short key on to the next long one with the toe, there is always a heel ready. Changing feet on the same note requires neatness of action. If the change is

being made upwards, slide the right toe back and put the left heel in front. In the opposite direction put the right toe behind the left heel. It is impossible to try to place two toes on the same key, as the heel of the foremost foot will foul the other foot. Care should be taken to see that the key is not released during the change. If the note is a repeated one, as in the following example by J. S. Bach, the position of the feet will be the same, but the release of the toe must be prompt.



Talking about the prompt release of keys brings us to the subject of staccato action. To be effective, very much depends upon the promptness of speech of the 16 ft. pipes. It is not an uncommon occurrence to come across fine organs with perfect manual actions, beautiful voicing, instantaneous stop control, etc., but leaving much to be desired in the pedal department, which fails entirely to respond to any kind of staccato action. However, as this is not a treatise on organ construction we must assume that the instrument will do what is required of it.

The pedal staccato should be quite as definite as the manual staccato, but difficulty arises in keeping the action consistent throughout the passage. One of the most difficult tasks in teaching the organ is that of imparting to the student the necessity of acquiring a separate action with another part of the body, the feet invariably wanting to do what the hands are doing. For pedal staccato the toes can be used more frequently, especially in the lower part of the board when a passage is permissible with one foot only. In the case of scale formation the position and footing must be the same

as for legato playing, otherwise confusion and bad pedalling will be the result. The release of the key is the most important factor. Semi-staccato requires a firm pressure with a quick release, but a real staccato, giving the idea of a *pizz.* *Double Bass* effect, is executed by a sharp tap with the toe, just sufficient to depress the key. No knee movement is necessary; the ankle will do all that is required.

The following examples will help to explain the various types of staccato :—

Adagio (Prelude and Fugue in C major). Bach



The action in this example must be semi-detached throughout, taking care that evenness of tone is regular.

Minuet Gothique. Boëllmann



The combined legato and staccato action here is very important, as it is a repetition of the left hand in the opening bars. As the passage is in scale form, alternative use of toe and heel will be necessary and definite phrasing is required to make it effective.

Sonata No. 5. Mendelssohn



The staccato in this movement should be very short, the toe just tapping the key in order to give the *pizz.* effect. Notice that toes only are used.

In considering knee and body action a great deal may be said for feeling at ease at the keyboard. A stool which is too high or too low, a badly scaled pedal-board or a cramped console for lack of space are serious drawbacks from the player's point of view. The stool should be dead straight with the keyboards, and in such a position that it will not interfere with the balance of the body when playing on the upper manual. Some organists appear to make organ playing hard labour, the body swaying from side to side and their pedal action appearing as if a treadmill were being operated. There is really no necessity for these contortions of the body, as the action of the modern organ has made everything so easy and comfortable for the player. A steady upright position as far as possible should be aimed at, the body turning naturally with the radiation of the feet as they reach towards the extremes of the pedal-board. In a long pedal solo the question is often asked, Where should the hands be? The body undoubtedly requires some kind of support, otherwise the balance is easily upset, and the best method is to place the palms of the hands on the stool with the fingers overlapping the edge. This position will tend to steady the body and give the necessary freedom to the feet—folded arms are a mistake.

Knee action is just as important as ankle action. In all pedal passages where the feet are close together the knees should be in a similar position. Any sprawling attitude will upset the proper action of the feet, and the key will be struck on the side, thereby causing inaccuracy and loss of speed. Rapidity is chiefly acquired through freedom at the knee joint, and any stiffness at this point will tire the player in any long spell of pedal work.

The student is recommended to spend some time in making himself efficient in these various actions by practising scales and arpeggios together with some of the well-known

pedal passages to be found in the works of Bach. It will repay him over and over again.

Before concluding this chapter, one item of importance must not be overlooked—the action of the foot on the swell pedal.

Assuming that the balanced type of pedal is in use and the organ a moderately sized three-manual with an enclosed choir organ, the swell pedal, which is the more frequently used, should be on the right of the choir pedal for obvious reasons.

Balanced swell pedals vary, not only in position but also in weight. This is more a matter of taste, although a very light pedal does not give the best results. Swell shutters are very sensitive (or should be), and unless a proper balance is attained great difficulty will be experienced in effecting a gradual increase and decrease of tone. The foot should be firmly planted on the pedal with the weight evenly distributed—for opening, press with the toe, keeping the heel well down on the lever; any attempt to operate the pedal with the toe only will make it impossible to obtain a gradual crescendo. For closing, press with the heel without raising the toe. In the case of a sudden decrescendo it is always permissible to do so with the toe on the edge of the pedal. Expression on the organ is not entirely dependent upon the swell shutters as some people are led to believe; neither is the organ an expressionless instrument as we are told by some musicians who are not and never were organists. Phrasing, for instance, is one of the greatest assets for expressing the music in an intellectual manner. So many organists forget the fact and are content to rely upon the swell pedal for expressing their emotions. Organ accent is too often unregarded, and a piece becomes lifeless and dull. However, these other means of expression on the organ will be dealt with in the chapter on interpretation. The swell pedal is a dangerous weapon for the

student who is starting for the first time to put expression into his pieces. The common fault is to put the right foot on the pedal and keep it there! So much inaccuracy in pedalling is caused by this practice. Why will organ composers and arrangers write expression marks where it is impossible to regard them? In a good many instances neither hands nor feet are available for any increase of tone, and the most we can do is to manipulate a thumb piston which does the wrong thing at the wrong moment. Although the modern organ provides so many accessories and gadgets for controlling the instrument, the fact remains that it is still a difficult matter to obtain a really artistic crescendo without the tone being doled out in "chunks."

Let the student therefore first acquire a sound pedal technique before attempting to apply his activity to organ playing.

## Chapter IV

### APPLICATION

THERE are many pedal passages in the standard works of organ composers, and particularly among the modern organ compositions, which present not only to the students, but to players of experience, considerable difficulties, and unless some system is adhered to the particular pedal passage is in danger of being inaccurately played every time. It must be stated that no system is entirely infallible, but in the following examples it will be found that only one or two alternative examples do not conform to the system which the writer has



endeavoured to explain in the preceding chapters. The rule for left heel in front and right toe behind must be rigidly enforced unless otherwise stated. The first example, quoted for phrasing in the last chapter, would appear on paper to be quite easy, because it has no sharps or flats, but many keyboard executants will declare that the scale of C major is as difficult as any to play neatly. This is also the case on the pedal-board :—

## Minuet Gothique. Boëllmann



The two upper notes are taken with the right foot in order that the lowest note D of the scale may be played with the left.

Downward scales from the middle of the pedal-board :—

## Sonata No. 5. Mendelssohn



It will be noticed that when a long and short note occur consecutively both may be taken with the same foot. The low A in the second scale is given to the right to avoid a clumsy action with the left on the last two notes. An alternative footing with the right toe on the second minim will alter the pedalling slightly, but either example is correct.



The augmented interval two bars later need not entail any alteration in the pedal marks, but the C natural will be a little more awkward to manage.

The next example of downward scales will present little difficulty if the first scale is taken more or less as a pattern :—

Prelude and Fugue in D minor. Bach  
(Dorian)



The first three notes in bar 3 should be taken with the right foot to avoid the feet clashing on the semitone, E $\flat$  to D.

A similar passage in ascending scales is interesting :—

Fugue in E minor. (Wedge) Bach



In the 2nd scale the short notes must be taken with the left foot, otherwise the left will have to go behind on the E, thus destroying the position of the feet.

The next example is difficult :—

Finale 1st Sonata. Guilmaut



The rising thirds interspersed with tone and semitone and the right hand manual part in contrary motion with the pedals, is always liable to give trouble unless a definite footing is decided upon. The first five notes may be a pattern for the next four, which means that the feet cross once in

each case. The semitone E and F must be taken with the left foot, otherwise it will mean crossing again on the last two upper notes, which would not be advisable here on account of speed. If in the first three lowest notes the F had been sharp all three could have been taken with one foot, thus avoiding the right getting down to G; but to commence in this fashion would be clumsy and unsafe at speed.



A similar passage in a modern work in the reverse position may be quoted:—

Finale 1st Sym. Vienne



As both hands are stationary all attention can be given to the pedal passage. It will be seen that the feet do not cross until the lower D in order that the body may move slightly with the downward motion of the passage. The repeated F $\sharp$  and E are best taken with the left. We give an alternative footing for this passage, which may, perhaps, appeal to some players.



The repeated F $\sharp$  and E are taken with separate feet, which entails more crossing afterwards. However, both pedallings conform to the system and with a little practice become comparatively easy. Before leaving the subject

of scales, one typical example of a chromatic scale involving the entire range of the pedal-board may be useful :—



This passage is simple if the student will remember to use the right foot on long keys and the left on the short ones as stated in an earlier chapter. In order to do this the first three notes must be taken with the left foot.

Some examples will now be given of passages which, if not always difficult in themselves, become more involved by the technicality of the manual parts. Space will not admit of the manual parts being given, but in each case the particular passage can easily be found in the works :—

(a) The Wanderer Fugue. Parry



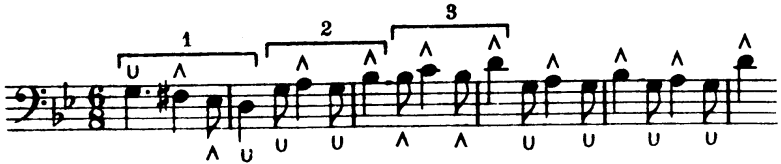
(b)



These passages immediately following one another, although similar in construction, need entirely different pedalling :—At (a) in the third group of semiquavers the heel of the left passes over on the D, and at (b) at the same point the toe of the left must pass over to the E $\flat$ . Note the alternative heel and toe in the following arpeggio passage

at (b). The manual parts in both cases will need careful phrasing and legato movement.

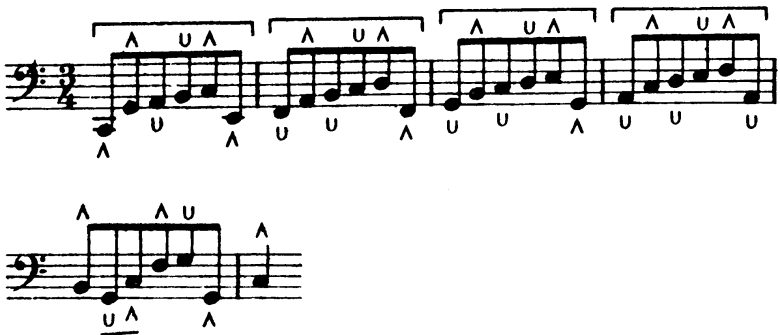
Fugue in G minor. Dupré



This passage occurs at the end of the work, and is awkward because of the contrary motion on the manual. The three sections of four notes each mark the entry of the hands in succession, thereby defining the phrasing. Two heels occur on the fourth and fifth notes respectively, otherwise the whole of section 2 must be taken with the right foot, which would be unsafe at speed. The change of feet on the B $\flat$  at the end of section 2 and the beginning of section 3 is imperative.

Two examples from Bach's Trio Sonatas contain features which have not yet been met with :—

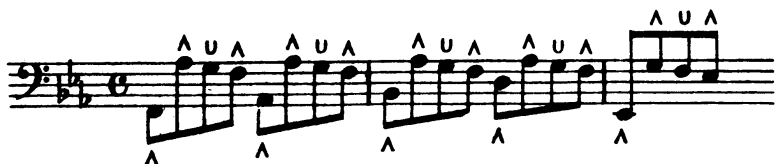
Sonata No. 5. 1st movement. Bach



The whole passage being sequential on long keys, each sequence can be pedalled alike, taking the first as a pattern.

The right hand manual part is again in contrary motion which adds somewhat to its difficulties :—

Sonata No. 2. 1st movement. Bach



In each case the upper notes of the groups must, of course, be played with the right foot, and in order to obtain a neat action the heel must slide back slightly on the G so as to avoid the toe fouling the F#. Many examples might be quoted where this action is most useful ; it is quite clear that no other pedalling is possible for this passage.

Another passage of considerable difficulty will be found in the first movement of Widor's Sixth Symphony where, owing to the fact that it is confined to the bottom octave of the pedal-board, together with its speed, the left foot has to do most of the work whichever way it is pedalled.

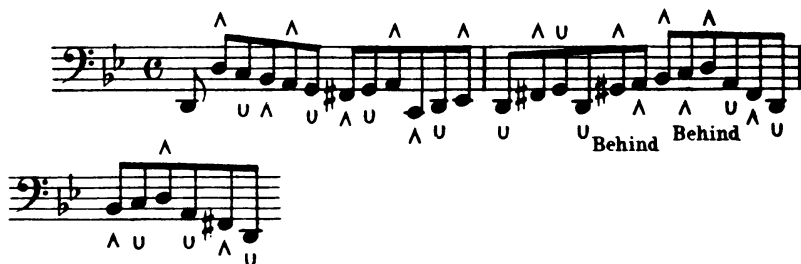
6th Symphony. Widor

The image shows two staves of music in bass clef, representing the left hand part of Widor's 6th Symphony. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The music consists of a series of eighth-note chords moving in a stepwise fashion. Above the first staff, there are several groups of notes, each with an accent (^) above it. Below the first staff, there are several groups of notes, each with an accent (^) below it. The notes are connected by lines, indicating a continuous melodic line. The overall effect is a complex rhythmic pattern that requires precise pedaling.

The left foot could be slightly relieved by taking the E<sub>b</sub> in the first bar with the right. The awkward skip of an augmented fourth from the D to G# in the second bar cannot be avoided unless the G# is taken with the right and the left

passed behind on the A and again on the C. This, however, is contrary to the system and would scarcely improve matters.

Thus :—



Arpeggios mostly on short keys must be conveniently distributed between both feet, as it is obvious that no crossing can take place.

Dithyramb. Basil Harwood



The last illustration to be given is a pedal cadenza comprised of semi-tones.



It will be better to use alternate feet here rather than to take two notes with one foot. The knee action will help to execute the passage clearly and greatly encourage speed.

The trills in each case will be taken with left heel and right toe.

In the foregoing examples of varied types an attempt has been made to convince the student that the system will work itself out in every case, however complicated the passage may seem at first sight. Badly laid-out pedal passages will conform to no system just as in the same way a composer with little or no knowledge of strings, wood-wind or brass is apt to score passages for the instruments which are either out of the compass or are extremely difficult to execute. The student will no doubt during his organ studies come across passages similar to those already illustrated, and if he will take the trouble to work out the pedalling on the same lines the writer believes that his task of overcoming difficulties will be considerably lessened.

## Chapter V

### INTERPRETATION

HOWEVER perfect an organist's pedal technique may be, it does not necessarily follow that his studies are at an end with regard to organ playing. The act of phrasing, both on the manual and pedals, the control of the expressive departments by means of the swell pedal, together with a judicious management of the stops, either by hand or mechanical means, all these things are vitally important to the student who is desirous of becoming a first-rate organist.



An organist's career nearly always commences by accompanying a church service, a simple one perhaps, requiring little skill but an immense amount of good taste and restraint. An artist is more readily detected by his or her accompaniment of the psalms and hymns rather than by a showy voluntary. As a general rule, more time and thought could easily be spent on these essential portions of the church service. The writer contends that one of the best mediums for acquiring a sound pedal technique is by playing a hymn tune in four-part harmony with the pedal-board assigned to its proper pitch and not, as is so often the case, with the left foot jumping about in a staccato manner over the bottom octave of the pedal-board. A little thought will convince the student that such a practice is not only inartistic but ineffective. The ponderous tones of the 16 ft. pipes destroy the clarity of the harmony, and if used for verse after verse it becomes monotonous and aggravating to the choir and congregation. The habit of keeping the right foot continually on the swell pedal and unconsciously working the lever up and down is a bad one, and the sooner it is overcome the better. This does not mean to say that bottom octave pedalling should never be resorted to; sparingly used the effect is called for, thereby showing the resourcefulness of the player. What a relief it is to hear a verse or two of a hymn played in pure four-part harmony without pedals! A fact so often overlooked is that the choir are present to lead the singing, not the organ to lead the choir. Sudden bursts of sounds from the organ with handfuls of chords are always ineffective, especially if manual doubles are being used at the same time. The doubled major third, as we know, is harsh and should be rigidly avoided in four-part harmony.

Reference was made in the preceding chapter with regard to other means of expression than by the medium of the swell pedal, *i.e.*, phrasing and accentuation. Without these

attributes no music can be intelligible. The organ, unlike any other keyed instrument, is not expressive at the key, so we are entirely dependent upon mechanical means of expression in this respect. The swell pedal is for producing varied degrees of tone and the stops for the individual quality of tone and power, each of which is mechanically controlled. The act of phrasing, the sense of rhythm and accentuation, do not, of course, come under the category of mechanical control but are solely dependent upon the musicianship of the organist and should be applied to organ playing to an extent which will make up for, and to a certain extent take the place of, the other means of expression, which are only mechanically obtained. No instrument is more sensitive to legato playing than the organ by reason of the fact that the action is on the top of the key, and unless a definite release is effected the endings of phrases cannot be completed. Therefore phrasing on the organ must be slightly more exaggerated than on the piano. Another point to remember is that unless the building is exceptionally "dead" the resonance prolongs the sound beyond the phrases and the music becomes incoherent. The observance of phrase marks for the pedals (when indicated !) is not always thought of by the student as important. This is a great mistake, because the pedal part does not merely supply the bass notes to a chord but, as in all music, it must necessarily form part of the music structure as a whole, and frequently in a melodic capacity. Even in the simple four-part harmony of hymns and psalms the pedal part should be in keeping with the manuals. Nothing is more irritating than to hear a hymn being played legato on the manual and staccato on the bass and void of all phrase observances at the end of the lines.

Good phrasing and accentuation are the hall-marks of a true artist, and an organ, however large and resourceful, cannot fail to reveal its mechanical defects and other

shortcomings in the hands of a player who is lacking in what might be termed the most vital attribute of the organ's means of expression. A great many of the standard works of the earlier organ composers are sadly in need of re-editing, if only on account of the phrasing marks. The following example from Rheinberger's Twelfth Sonata will show how hopelessly misleading the signs are :—



According to these groupings, it would be an impossibility to emphasise the accent on the second beat of the bar, thus losing the sense of syncopation entirely. If phrased in this manner :—



we at once preserve that rhythmical accent which surely was the composer's intention.

Dr. Harvey Grace's new edition of the Rheinberger Sonatas should be a valuable help to the student. Not only has the phrasing been given careful consideration, but also some helpful suggestions for manual changes and stop registration have been added.

The phrasing of a fugue subject should be clearly defined at its first entry, and every part treated in the same manner. When the pedals enter, the phrasing is sometimes almost a nonentity, whereas this part is in need of just as much careful phrasing as the others, because the heavy 16 ft.

tones are apt to destroy the rhythm and settle the whole fugue down to a dead level. Although there is more than one way of phrasing certain fugue subjects, the following examples are generally accepted as being the most authentic :—

## Great G minor



## A major



## A minor



## D minor (Dorian)



## St. Anne



In the Bach Trio Sonatas unending opportunities will be found for developing the art of phrasing, both on the manuals and pedals. Many instances occur where 8 ft. tone only on the pedals is called for ; every part there is in the same pitch and will require that amount of individuality which tends to preserve the interest of the work as a whole.

**ACCENTUATION.** Although the organ is expressionless at the key, accentuation is not impossible. It *must* be possible, otherwise the music will be void of all rhythmical sense. We certainly have not that facility for producing accent as on the piano, for instance, where a particular melody note or inner part can be reinforced, but we have considerable command over the organ by means of the swell pedal, either in ensemble or solo work. The crescendo pedal (or its more ancient title, sforzando pedal) is not the slightest use as a means of accentuation for the simple reason that reinforcement is obtained by adding at the moment other tone colours which will not blend with the rest of the phrase. A sforzando  $\langle sf \rangle$  is not quite equivalent to an accent  $\rangle$ . This is a point which is sometimes overlooked. The swell pedal is capable of producing an effective accent by opening the box a little below half-way and shutting it smartly while the note or chord is being played. If the shutters operate rapidly, as they should, accent is possible either in chord or solo work. The only other means is by isolation, or, in other words, by breaking up the tone in front of the accent. This, of course, is achieved by definitely lifting the hands from the keys at the exact moment of accentuation. A group of FF chords with emphasis on each is a good example, for if these chords are not struck with technical precision no accent can possibly be effected.

**RHYTHM,** or the sub-division of accent, is as valuable an asset to the organist as phrasing and accentuation. Reference has already been made to the fact that the organ is more susceptible to legato playing than any other keyed instrument. This being so, it is an easy matter, if we are not careful, to smooth out one's playing, as it were, until the rhythm is scarcely defined at all. The great toccatas and fugues by Bach are the finest examples of rhythmical music.

The making or marring of a work depends upon the

player's sense of rhythm. It is a very common fault to hear a fugue subject with its pace set too fast to be consistent throughout, for when the pedals enter the speed has to be reduced in order to comply with the performer's limited capabilities in pedal technique. On the other hand, nothing is more wearisome than to listen to a toccata or fugue played under speed, as the music immediately becomes lifeless and unrhythmical.

On the whole, the tendency is to play too fast on the organ. Bach especially is played at a greater speed in this country than in Germany or France. The modern action is perhaps partly responsible for this, as the absence of key resistance undoubtedly gets the better of the player's technical powers, whereby rhythm and accent run riot for want of rigidity and control.

**REGISTRATION.** However useful and necessary stop-controls may be in the modern organ, the fact must not be overlooked that hand registration is still one of the most essential factors in organ playing. Stereotyped effects can never take the place of individual tone-colour, there being so many occasions where the desired effect cannot be obtained from mechanical controls. The diapasons, as we know, are the foundation of organ tone, but their beauty and pureness are so often hidden by contrasting colours. A single diapason in chorales, fugue subjects and even in accompanying a hymn tune, is satisfying and far more effective than being used with a reed or flute tone of another pitch.

It is surprising also to note how many more individual effects can be obtained by uncoupled manuals. The great organ is too often used in conjunction with the swell, one might suppose, for the reason that unless the Great is enclosed no means of expression is available. This may be so, but it should be remembered that there are times in which it is a relief to hear those tones which are not hampered by a box round them!

The more mechanical pistons an organ possesses the greater the danger there is of the organist becoming mechanical too. It is a comparatively easy matter to register by piston, but hand registration requires thought and aptitude. A meaningless tonal scheme is just as bad as a dull and uninteresting one. This applies especially to solo work. Sometimes a melody is not allowed to pursue its course without undergoing various changes in tone-colour for no other reason than an excuse for stop-changing. When the music is of an imitative character, then, of course, the natural process is a change of tone-colour well contrasted and well-balanced. Even then in a number of cases the desired effect can be obtained on another manual which has already been prepared for, thus avoiding any break in the rhythm or phrasing. In small organs where the choice of solo stops is limited, an addition of an 8 ft. or 4 ft. flute is most effective.

It is not always possible to adhere to the composer's markings for registration, and a complete rearrangement of the tonal scheme is necessary. Recital programmes are often injudiciously chosen (especially orchestral arrangements for organs of inadequate resources), with the result that the composer's intention cannot be carried out and the interpretation becomes a ridiculous mimic of the original. Organs are not standardised with regard to the position of the stops, and it is then that registration marks become a hindrance. Arrangements therefore become rearrangements, so to speak, to suit the particular organ on which they are to be performed.

The study of fugue construction will greatly assist the student in his registration of Bach works. It is by no means an easy matter to know where to change manuals effectively, or where a particular entry on another manual can be made conspicuous. No hard and fast rule is possible on this point; it is only the musicianship of the player that can help

him out of his difficulties. One thing is certain, and that is that immediately the pedals are silent this is by no means the given signal for a change of manuals. Some fugues suggest a gradual building up of the organ to a climax, others call for a quiet and unobtrusive treatment throughout, while others require a toccata-like touch with a more or less even tone throughout. For instance, one cannot imagine either the Great G minor or the Toccata in F being played on a soft organ throughout, neither can one conceive the subject of the B minor Fugue being announced on the full organ!

It may be true to say that no other organ composition needs more careful regard to registration and variety of tone-colour than the fugue. There is generally plenty of noise obscuring the clarity of the part writing by excessive use of manual doubles, tiresome misuse of swell reeds and ponderous pedals; all these things quickly pall upon the ear and tend to make the fugue a thoroughly dull composition to listen to. If, as is the case, every fugue that Bach ever wrote can be played effectively on a two-manual instrument, how much greater are the player's facilities on a three-manual! The third manual is able to supply the contrast to a quiet swell, especially in imitative passages or lengthy episodes, without worrying much about stop-changing. When the time comes again for building up the organ to a climax, a gradual crescendo should be aimed at, avoiding spasmodic increases of tone which, to say the least of it, are inartistic.

In conclusion, the student will observe that the whole of this chapter has been devoted to those vital points, such as phrasing, accentuation and registration, which it is to be hoped will help to assist and interest him in his organ studies from their very commencement.









