



PLAYING YOUR WERSI AS A CLASSICAL PIPE ORGAN by Jeff Ormerod

Part One

The Basics

A typical classical pipe organ will have a minimum of two 61 note keyboards, referred to as *Manuals*, and a 30 note pedalboard. Larger churches, cathedrals and concert halls can have three or more manuals. The upper manual is always referred to as the *Swell*, the lower manual is the *Great*. The pipes of the Swell Organ are enclosed in a *Swell Box*, with shutters operated by a *Swell Pedal* to control the volume. The expression pedal on the Wersi replicates this function. The pipes of the Great Organ are unenclosed so no volume control is possible. Located on the organ console will be a variety of knobs or tabs known as **Stops**. Each stop will have the name of a particular sound inscribed upon it and it makes that sound by activating a collection of pipes known as a **Rank**. There will be a pipe in the rank for each key on the manual or pedalboard and to sound at the correct pitch each pipe will need to have a different length. At standard pitch the longest pipe in the rank will be 8 feet and corresponds to the lowest note on the organ's 5 octave keyboard, the C two octaves below middle C. This is referred to as an 8 foot stop and to signify this it will have an 8 inscribed below the stop name. If we double the length of all the pipes in the rank each key will now sound an octave lower, this is now a 16 foot stop. Conversely if we halve the length of all the pipes in the rank each key will now sound an octave higher and this then becomes a 4 foot stop.

Pipe organs are constructed from two basic types of pipe, namely **Flue Pipes** and **Reed Pipes**. The type of sound they produce depends upon the material used for their construction, (normally wood or metal), their cross-sectional shape, (cylindrical, conical or square/rectangular) and their scale (small, medium or large diameter). Reed pipes are essentially flue pipes with a vibrating metal reed incorporated to produce a more strident tone. These two types of pipe produce between them a range of stops that can be classified into four distinct tonal groups.

Diapasons

These are constructed from medium scale flue pipes and produce the characteristic pipe organ sound. As such they are not intended to imitate any of the orchestral instruments. They are usually labeled as **Diapasons** or **Principals** or **Prinzipals** and can span the complete pitch range from 32 foot to 1 foot.

Flutes

These are constructed from large scale flue pipes and are so called because they possess similar tonal qualities to the flute instruments of the orchestra. Stop names such as *Flute*, **Gedackt** and **Bourdon** are typical.

Strings

These are constructed from small scale flue pipes and are so called because they possess similar tonal qualities to the string instruments of the orchestra. Stop names such as **Celeste**, **Gamba** and **Viol** are typical.

Reeds

These are constructed from the reed pipes and are so called because they possess similar tonal qualities to the reed and brass instruments of the orchestra. Stop names such as **Clarinet**, **Oboe** and **Trumpet** are typical.

Also on a pipe organ we would typically have a number of stops that sound at non-octave pitches. These are called *Mutations*. For example a **Quint** stop sounds at a pitch of $2 \frac{2}{3}$. Often a number of higher non octave pitches will be combined together to form a **Mixture** stop, usually considered as part of the Diapason family.

Playing Styles

There are three ways of utilising the two manuals to play a piece of pipe organ music.

1) *Both Hands Playing on the Same Manual.*

Here all the parts of the music would be sounding with the same set of selected stops.

2) *Each Hand Playing on a Different Manual*

Here we have the opportunity to achieve tonal contrast by selecting a set of stops for one manual and a different set of stops for the other.

3) *Solo and Accompaniment Playing*

This is a variant of 2) in which chords are played on one manual (the accompaniment) and a single note melody (solo) is played on the other. Again this provides the opportunity for achieving tonal contrast.

Combining Stops

Combining a suitable set of stops, referred to as a *Registration*, for a particular piece of music will depend on the nature of the music, and unless specific registration instructions have been provided by the composer, what is considered appropriate can often be subjective. There are however certain combinations that work well together and some that do not. Here are some guidelines.

1) *Stops from the Same Tonal Groups*

In general stops from the same tonal group will blend well together. Add a stop with a higher pitch to brighten the sound and one with a lower pitch to fill in the sound.

2) *Stops from Different Tonal Groups*

Here it's important to combine stops together that have comparable volumes, for example soft flutes with strings, reeds with diapasons etc. In this way the tonal groups will complement each other. Conversely a powerful diapason stop, for example, will drown out a quiet string stop such that the latter will not be heard.

3) *Mutation Stops*

These stops need special attention because they sound at non-octave pitches higher up the pitch range. Always combine mutation stops with octave stops of lower pitches. Stops from either the flute or diapason tonal groups work well with mutations.

4) *Solo and Accompaniment Stops*

Pipe organs are restricted to a defined set of stops on each manual. We typically find quiet to medium stops on the Swell and medium to loud stops on the Great. In solo and accompaniment playing choose quieter stops for the accompaniment than those chosen for the solos. Flutes and diapasons make good accompaniment stops.

In the next part, Jeff covers the three main keyboards on all pipe organs; the Swell, the Great and the Pedals, giving examples of some of the Stops available on each.