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The organ offers unique opportunities for making music, with its distinctive expressive possibilities, its enormous dynamic range, and its long tradition as an instrument for both sacred and secular music. The organ's repertoire is at least five centuries old, ranging from the simplest music to the most complex, and covers a wide range of styles.

_The New Oxford Organ Method_ places this organ repertoire at its centre, using carefully selected pieces as the basis for learning the instrument. It teaches technique through the music so that you can make a direct connection between the pieces you encounter and the techniques which lead to a musical performance.

**How to use this book**

Most organ methods group aspects of organ playing—technique, style, registration, and practice strategies—into different sections, with pieces as a separate activity. Their structure leaves the student or teacher the constant challenge of selecting and ordering appropriate material from different sections. By contrast, _The New Oxford Organ Method_ presents an integrated flow of exercises, which incorporate all these aspects and lead to an engaging piece as the culmination of each chapter.

We recommend using the _Method_ with a good teacher, who will be invaluable for monitoring progress and giving tailored, immediate feedback. The _Method_ is also suitable as a self-teaching resource. Whether supervised or not, we advise you to work through the _Method_ systematically from beginning to end.

The _Method_ is designed both for beginners at the organ and for experienced players revising their skills. If you are a beginner, we expect you already have basic keyboard skills, such as being able to read music in treble and bass clefs, to play with both hands together, and to understand musical conventions such as repeat and da capo signs. This book will give you a comprehensive training in all the basic skills of organ playing.

If you are an experienced organist, there are of course no prerequisites, except a willingness to refresh both your technique and your awareness of style in interpretation. The _Method_ aims to give you all the tools you need to achieve stylish, confident performances in a variety of repertoire.

**Pieces**

The first part of _The New Oxford Organ Method_ presents ten pieces that use ordinary touch, the not-quite-legato touch familiar to players before the nineteenth century. Because organ tone does not decay, we believe ordinary touch, with its emphasis on timed releases of sound, is the most distinctive new aspect of the instrument for beginners. Ordinary touch trains the hands in position fingering, develops toes-only footing, and trains you how to play an expressive line through manipulation of note-lengths. The second part, comprising seven pieces, introduces the greater complexities of legato touch. We explain that both ordinary...
touch and legato touch are subject to a wide array of nuances, and your touch in both categories will develop increasing sophistication as the book continues. Once you have absorbed the basic principles of playing with both ordinary and legato touch, you will arrive at the third part: three pieces that focus on advanced style and technique.

We also direct you to our online companion resource www.oup.com/noom, where you will find other pieces to learn between chapters, and suggestions for further listening to inspire your interpretation.

**Technique**

Leading to the piece within each chapter there are technical exercises, and these technical exercises always relate directly to the upcoming piece, which gives them a strong sense of purpose. At first the *Method* provides comprehensive fingering and footing, but these markings reduce later, to encourage you to find your own solutions. There is often other fingering and footing which serves the music equally well, but we suggest that students do not change fingering and footing except under the guidance of an experienced teacher.

The pedals are introduced in Chapter 3 with one note per foot. As you progress, you gradually learn to cross the entire pedalboard, and you learn practical location skills so that you can find the pedal notes without looking at your feet. This careful grading of pedal activity prompted us to add a few pedal notes to the piece in Chapter 4 by Beauvarlet-Charpentier, but most other pedal parts are exactly as the composers wrote them. Scales and arpeggios in every major and minor key are also seeded throughout the book, some in traditional format, but many with new twists, incorporating additional pedal notes, for example.

**Style**

Playing stylistically means respecting the composer's intentions and the traditions of the period. For example, should you use legato or ordinary touch? Do you start a trill on the printed note or the note above? How do you accent a note? How do you shape a phrase? Which stops suit the music? The integrated structure within each chapter answers these questions as they occur, with exercises that frequently blend style and technique.

**Registration**

Topics involving registration also have their own exercises, not only giving students bite-size information about the subject but also gradually introducing them to organ management. Each chapter begins with an aspect of registration before moving to technical and musical training. For example, the first piece requires just one stop, and each subsequent chapter introduces new registration, covering various traditions according to the tone colours required by the piece.

To maintain our graded approach to training we have made a compromise in Chapter 4, changing the composer's registration from *grand jeu* to *plein jeu*. We introduce the *grand jeu* only towards the end of the *Method*, when the advanced student is more likely to have access to an instrument with suitable stops.

Although we offer specific registration schemes, we also show how to experiment, and at the back of the book there is a list of stops to support this. The aim, ultimately, is to make you resourceful, because each organ, and the acoustic into which it speaks, is unique.
Studies

Each chapter ends with three newly composed studies, sixty in all, which develop core technical features that the chapter has explored. These studies have a flexible use: they can be performed after brief preparation as sight-reading, played after a longer period of preparation as quick studies, or used for extended revision, consolidating technical points learned earlier in the chapter.

Practice

Each chapter trains you in how to practise. In addition, there are twenty practice strategies described at the front of the book (see pages xv–xxi), and each chapter refers you back to these.

Finally

This is a practical method based on extensive experience of teaching; consequently, we exercised self-control in not discussing topics of scholarly dispute. We know that expert readers may find some of our statements simplistic, but we believe that learning simple guidelines in the early stages develops confidence. Confidence is an essential foundation for progress, allowing you to develop creativity as you mature as a musician. As Pablo Picasso said, ‘Learn the rules like a pro so you can break them like an artist.’

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Previous writers of organ methods from whom we have learned as students, players, teachers, and now writers: Jacques Lemmens’s ground-breaking *École d’orgue* of 1862, which influenced more than a century of methods; those by Stainer, Alcock, Buck, Gleason, and our distinguished predecessor, C. H. Trevor, with his landmark *Oxford Organ Method* of 1971; later methods, for example by Roger Davies (1985), Ritchie and Stauffer (1992), and Sanger (1993), which incorporated more recent scholarship. We are also indebted to Peter Hurford, whose teaching and whose book *Making Music on the Organ* (OUP, 1988) marked a sea-change in interpretation and technique in the UK.
Would you like to learn without making any mistakes?

It may seem impossible, but you need only one thing to achieve it: to choose the practice strategy best suited to each task. We offer twenty proven practice strategies, and later we advise you which ones to use for each piece in the Method. The first, Slow–Staves–Segments, is the most important and the one to use for almost every piece; the remainder are not presented in any particular order. You can, of course, use any combination of these strategies.

Whatever your chosen strategy, aim for complete accuracy and believe you can achieve it. Of course, you may occasionally misjudge what is possible, or your attention may slip. If you make an error, always correct it immediately, never letting an error become a habit: three of the following strategies are particularly useful for correcting an error—Stop and think, Static focus, and Destination practice.

**Practice strategy 1: Slow–Staves–Segments**

The basic learning strategy is Slow–Staves–Segments. You can apply its three components, Slow, Staves, and Segments, in any order and in any combination.

**Slow**

Choose a tempo that allows you to be both musical and accurate. That probably means playing more slowly than you think. Playing slowly allows you to be accurate from the start.

**Staves**

Begin by learning each stave separately. In a three-stave piece, next learn left hand with pedal, then right hand with pedal, and then hands together. Finally, combine the three staves.

**Segments**

Divide the piece into manageable segments. The segments may be as long as half a piece, or as short as two or three beats. Repeat each segment until you know it thoroughly. When you have learned the whole piece in this way, link the segments together.
When playing the organ, there are essentially two types of touch: legato and non-legato. Legato means ‘joined-up’, so that there are no gaps between the notes, while non-legato means ‘not joined-up’, so that there are gaps (often very small) between the notes. This chapter introduces non-legato touch—or ‘ordinary touch’, as it became known—which was the standard touch for all organ music until the nineteenth century.

Henry Purcell was the outstanding British musician and composer of the Baroque era. As was the case with many seventeenth-century musicians, Purcell’s career began in the church, first as a chorister at the Chapel Royal, then as organist at Westminster Abbey, a position he held until his death.

**Foundation pitch**

Gently draw (which means pull out or activate) any stop labelled 8’ (8-foot).

8’ indicates that the stop speaks at foundation pitch, the same pitch as the piano. It is called 8’ because the longest pipe of the 8’ rank (the lowest note, bottom C) is often 8 feet long. Try various foundation-pitch stops (any stop with 8’ on it), listening to their different tone colours and characters—some bold, others less so. Choose an 8’ stop that you like, and at an mp dynamic level. Continue to use that stop for the exercises below.

**Ordinary touch**

Ordinary touch, with its subtle gaps between notes, allows each note to start and end clearly. To create these gaps you need to shave a fraction off the end of each note.

A good way to start is to play repeated notes in time as smoothly as possible, as in the following exercise, starting with the left hand:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{LH} & \frac{2}{2} & \frac{2}{2} & \frac{2}{2} & \frac{2}{2} & \frac{2}{2} & \frac{2}{2} & \end{array}
\]

(based on bb. 12–14)
The pedalboard

Italian organs of this period had just one octave of pedals, which organists used for long notes. This piece is typical, with just one long note for each foot.

Check that you are sitting above the centre of the pedalboard—that usually means E♭. Most organs position pedal E♭ exactly below the manual E♭. As you are about to play with your feet, check the advice about posture, organ bench, and organ shoes in ‘Getting Started’ at the front of this Method.

Register the pedals with Principal 16′. A note played on a 16′ stop sounds an octave lower than written, and 16′ is the foundation pitch on the pedals. Look down and play the C just to the left of the central E♭ of the pedalboard with the tip of either shoe:

Couple all the stops you have chosen on the manuals to the pedal.

Locate the following notes, and see below how they are notated:

Now look down to find the two pedal notes, A and E, for this piece, the first note with your left foot, the second with your right:
Prelude in F

attr. J. S. Bach
(1685–1750)
The second part of this Method focuses on repertoire using legato touch, the usual touch for Romantic music. Even advanced pianists can find that playing legato successfully on the organ demands new techniques and careful listening.

Walton composed this Elegy for the 1955 film Richard III, based on Shakespeare’s play. Its mournful music for manuals only accompanies Act 2, Scene 1, in which the dying king, Edward IV, learns of his brother’s death.

Legato touch

Legato literally means ‘bound’. This bound-together touch became standard in the late nineteenth century. It requires a tiny overlap between notes so that the first note masks the start of the next one. Consider how you walk: as you transfer your weight from one foot to another, both feet are briefly on the ground. It is just the same on the keyboard: when one finger moves to another in legato touch, there is a moment when both fingers are depressing keys.

Draw a Principal 8’ on both the Swell and the Great, and practise a scale in legato touch. As Elegy is in G minor, even though it has no key signature, play the scale of G melodic minor. Control the amount of overlap through careful listening: the overlap should be so brief that the effect is smooth, but without blurring. To help you monitor your touch, place your right hand on the Great and your left hand on the Swell. Then repeat with your right hand on the Swell and your left hand on the Great:

G melodic minor scale, hands together, legato touch
You may find that you need to adjust the registration. For example, one or more of the Reeds you have chosen might be too loud. You can also add a Mixture if it does not overwhelm the Reeds.

*ff* on the organ is one of the loudest sounds a musician can produce on any instrument, but it can be wearing on the listener, especially if you practise in a public space. A good practice registration could be just Great 8' and Pedal 16' plus Great to Pedal.

**Toe to heel on adjacent notes**

When you played in ordinary touch you used only your toes, but legato touch usually needs heels as well as toes. There are three possible signs for a heel in organ music:

○ U ◊ These signs all have identical meaning. This *Method* always uses the circle.

As with toe signs, those placed above the note indicate the right foot, while those placed below the note indicate the left foot.

To play with your heel, first rest your heel on the surface of a note, then imagine that a string attached to its base tugs it a small distance down, depressing the note. Prepare both feet before playing this:

![Image of a heel sign and toe sign combination](image)

Always play on the inner edge of the heel. This tilts your foot at the same angle you used for playing with toes. The next two exercises each alternate the toe and heel of one foot, with your toe pointed outwards:

![Image of exercises](image)

(based on bb. 31–2)
Grand Chœur

Tempo di Marcia ma poco animato

Théodore Salomé
(1834–96)
Descending scales as a rhetorical gesture

Rhetoric is the art of oratory, and in speech rhetorical gestures add power and clarity to the argument. In a similar way, rhetorical gestures in music add power and clarity to a musical argument.

Descending scales at various speeds—fast, moderate, and slow—feature in this movement for rhetorical effect:

(a) Fast scales, called passaggi, dazzle the listener with virtuosity. Baroque organists played passaggi with each hand taking four notes. There are two such scales, each of an octave, in the exercise below. Insert a breath between each scale, and play both scales with the most effective touch for your instrument, remembering that occasional legato touch is effective within a Baroque piece:

(b. 8)

(b) Moderately paced scales lend solemnity to the movement. Guided by the added commas, play the following example, defining the scale with a break before and after it. This slower scale benefits from ordinary touch, with a slight freedom in the rhythm:

(bb. 23–4)

(c) Slow scales in this piece combine in dissonant part-writing. Here your right hand has two simultaneous scales, each decorated with repeated notes, diversions, and accidentals. As you play, let your ordinary touch clarify the movement of the voices and their interplay:

(based on bb. 18–21)