

Example 2 - Drawing from *Continuatio ad Manuductionem organica* by J.B. Samber

ORGAN PLAYING FROM BACH TO MENDELSSOHN

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Writing in the late 18th century, C.F.D. Schubart commented:

Of all the instruments of our day, the clavier has fared the best. In the last century and in the first half of the present one there were entire provinces in which one could scarcely find a clavier player; now everybody plays, thumps, drums, and doodles: the noble, the commoner, the bungler, and the expert; woman, man, boy, girl. Indeed, the clavier has become a most important article of fashionable education.¹

A veritable explosion of keyboard activity took place in Germany following the death of Johann Sebastian Bach, but it involved the keyboard instruments that one could play at home—the clavichord, the spinet, or the newly popular piano. The organ was thought to be a holdover from the past, requiring a different technique and style of music. Even Bach's sons moved to other keyboard instruments. Although Wilhelm Friedemann remained a prominent organist, Carl Philipp Emanuel's most important position was as harpsichordist to Frederick the Great, and Johann Christian is known to have played one of the first public piano recitals. Most of the other famous musicians of the late 18th and early 19th centuries were pianists, although they revered the organ. Of the keyboard composers born around 1810, Felix Mendelssohn was the only one who was really an organist. Still, organists were performing Sunday after Sunday in churches, especially in Protestant areas. They needed instruction in the skills required for their positions. This article will survey the keyboard method books published in the 18th and early 19th centuries. It will also mention the famous pianists/composers of the time and their relationship with the organ. It will conclude with a discussion of what we know about Mendelssohn's organ playing.

The most important organ method book in central Germany for many years was the *Kurtzer, jedoch gründlicher Wegweiser, vermittelst welches man aus dem Grund die Kunst, die Orgel recht zu schlagen* . . . (Short but Thorough Guide by Which One May Learn the Art of Playing the Organ Correctly). It was so popular that it was printed eleven times from 1689 to 1753. It may have been used by Sebastian Bach's older brother Johann Christoph in teaching the boy, because it was from the circle of Pachelbel, who had been Christoph's teacher. It is the first German book after that of Arnold Schlick in 1511 to describe one's position at the keyboard:

In the beginning, a teaching master is concerned with training the student to hold his body upright and to keep his hands loose and his fingers neither too curved nor too stiff.²

The scale fingerings in the *Wegweiser* are typical of the time—3-4-3-4 ascending and 3-2-3-2 descending in the right hand, 2-1-2-1 ascending and 3-4-3-4 descending in the left. More interesting, however, are the fingerings for typical passages, shown in Example 1. In these, the fingering helps to articulate the meter and also the figures of which the passage is built.

Example 1 - *Wegweiser* Passages



Daniel Speer in his *Grundrichter Unterricht der musicalischen Kunst oder Vierfaches musicalisches Kleeblatt* (Basic Instruction in the Musical Art or Musical Four-leaf Clover) of 1697 gives the first German description of touch:

For this, one should show them with the use of both hands a light, full, and short striking on each key [leichte, völlige und kurtze Anstimmung].³

Speer seems to be describing a non-legato touch with little or no weight but with a definite stroke. His ideas on touch probably reflect the fact that the clavichord was the most popular practice instrument in Germany at the time. Fretted clavichords require a somewhat detached touch in order for all the notes to sound because adjacent notes are often played on the same pair of strings.

Johann Baptist Samber published his *Manuductio ad organum* (Manual for Organ) in 1704 followed by *Continuatio ad manuductionem organica* in 1707, which includes a description of pedal playing and the drawing in Example 2 (top of page).⁴ This is the first mention of the organ pedals in a treatise since Schlick's *Spiegel der Orgelmacher und Organisten* of 1511. Samber states:

. . . observe that at number 1 [in the drawing] is the place for the left foot and at number 2 is the place for the right, because one does not use the pedal in the higher clefs or in fast passages. One divides the pedal keys so that the left plays between numbers 3 and 4 and the right between numbers 5 and 6.⁵ [The last four numbers are at the bottom of the picture.]

Samber published his works in Salzburg. He obviously did not know of the music of North German organists like Buxtehude who were already using alternate toes throughout the entire pedalboard. The influence of Buxtehude, especially in pedal writing, is obvious in Bach's organ works from early on. It is interesting that organ method books still referred to the old way of pedaling as late as the 19th century.

The keyboard method books of Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg are fine sources of information on performance practices during Bach's lifetime. Although Marpurg's works were not published until the 1750s and '60s, much of his text is a word-for-word translation of *L'Art de toucher le clavecin* by François Couperin from 1716. Marpurg spent a number of years in France studying keyboard playing. He also knew the Bach family and was influenced by their ideas. He drops the Bach name in his introduction. The original sections of Marpurg's work reflect German performance practice.

Marpurg gives explicit directions for the position of the hands and fingers in playing and recommends the "coin on the wrist" as an aid to good position. He particularly warns against letting the fingers "slide carelessly over the keys, only to thrash at them at other times rather than depressing them [properly]." He adds, "Today one does not strike the keyboard instrument; one plays it. . ."⁶

Composers in the 18th century began notating the varieties of touch by slurs and dots. Marpurg discusses both of these extremes, beginning with Example 3 illustrating slurs.

"To slur" means not to raise the finger from the foregoing note before one touches the following one. . . . One often uses these arcs when several notes which are to be played in sequence and which harmonize with each other are intended to be held from the first to the last. . . . It is better, however, to notate such passages in the proper manner, as done in the example.⁷

(The second half of the example illustrates the way that Buxtehude and Bach notated over-legato.)

Example 3 - from F.W. Marpurg



Marpurg's is one of the first descriptions of staccato touch. Notice that it is not extreme:

In direct contrast to slurring is detachment, which consists of sustaining a note not for its [full, notated] value, but for only approximately half of it. This is indicated by dots placed over or under the notes intended to be detached.⁸

He then describes the non-legato touch preferred in the 18th century:

Both slurring and detaching are contrary to ordinary progression, which consists of very swiftly raising the finger from the preceding key just shortly before touching the following note. This ordinary method of progressing is never indicated [in the notation] since it is always presumed.⁹

Marpurg includes a detailed discussion of fingering, interspersed with musical examples. He begins by saying:

If [the fingering] is not comfortable, then one runs the danger [1] of missing the intended key and of touching its neighbor together with it, or of striking a wrong one; [2] of not applying the proper degree of pressure to the key, thus failing to bring out a series of successive tones roundly and neatly; [3] of not observing the metrical accent in a lively tempo with running figures, and of making an intrinsically long note short, or vice versa; [4] of lifting a finger too soon or letting it lie too long; [5] of slurring notes which should be detached, or vice versa. In short: [one runs the danger] of linking no tone properly with another.¹⁰

His item [3] refers to a concept called *quantitas intrinseca* expounded by theorists like Wolfgang Caspar Printz in his 1678 treatise on singing. *Quantitas intrinseca* is the idea that notes appearing on the beat are intrinsically longer than those appearing off the beat. Johann Walther, Bach's colleague in Weimar, wrote in his *Musikalisches Lexikon* of 1732:

Quantitas Notarum extrinseca, & intrinseca . . . is the apparent (or outward) and the inner value of the notes. According to the former, every note is performed equal to other notes of the same value, but according to the latter the notes are of unequal length: since, to be specific, the uneven-numbered parts of the beat are long and the even-numbered ones short.¹¹

In performance, metrically strong or "good" notes were usually held longer than "bad" ones. This did not affect the attacks of the notes as in the French *notes inégales*, but only the releases. Early methods of fingering often accomplished this effect automatically, but by the time of Marpurg it was considered an important part of good performance, to be cultivated consciously.

Johann Sebastian Bach's keyboard skill was legendary. Probably the most famous description appears in his Obituary, written by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel and his student Johann Agricola:

All his fingers were equally skillful; all were equally capable of the most perfect accuracy in performance. He had devised for himself so convenient a system of fingering that it was not hard for him to conquer the greatest difficulties with the most flowing facility. Before him, the most famous clavier players in Germany and other lands had used the thumb but little. All the better did he know how to use it. With his two feet, he could play things on the pedals which many not unskillful clavier players would find it bitter enough to have to play with five fingers.¹²

The characteristic of Bach's playing stressed in the Obituary is his development of thumb-under fingering, particularly to allow one to play in the "difficult" keys. His student Johann Philipp Kimberger wrote:

One should acquaint [children] with the rule invented by J.S. Bach: that in most cases the thumb is placed before [or] after the leading tone (*Semitonio modi*), whether the latter falls on [a white or black key].¹³

The evidence of the two fingered pieces in the *Clavierbüchlein vor Wilhelm Friedemann Bach*, however, shows that Bach taught early fingering practices to his then nine-year-old son.

Johann Forkel, Bach's first biographer, stressed another innovative aspect of Bach's keyboard technique—the release of the keys by drawing the fingers back toward the palm of the hand. Forkel wrote:

The drawing back of the tips of the fingers and the rapid communication, thereby effected, of the force of one finger to that following it produces the highest degree of clearness in the expression of the single tones, so that every passage performed in this manner sounds brilliant, rolling, and round, as if each tone were a pearl. It does not cost the hearer the least exertion of attention to understand a passage so performed.¹⁴

This aspect of Bach's playing was also described by Johann Joachim Quantz, Emanuel Bach's colleague at the court of Frederick the Great. Quantz heard Sebastian Bach on the latter's famous visit to the court in 1747 and wrote:

In the performance of these running passages, however, you must not raise the fingers immediately after striking the key, but rather draw the tips of the fingers back towards yourself to the foremost part of the key, until they glide away from it. Running passages are produced most distinctly in this manner. I appeal here to the example of one of the greatest of all players on the keyboard, who practiced and taught in this way.¹⁵

Forkel placed great emphasis on this aspect of the Bach technique, particularly for the clarity it enables. He complained that Emanuel Bach had given it so little emphasis in the *Versuch*.

Descriptions of the Bach touch are indeed somewhat hidden in the *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (1753) by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. He devotes an entire chapter to performance in general and begins by outlining the factors he considers important. (He assumes that one is playing a clavichord.)

The subject matter of performance is the loudness and softness of tones, touch, the snap, legato and staccato execution, the vibrato, arpeggiation, the holding of tones, the retard and accelerando.¹⁶

The word "snap" in this quotation is not *Schneller*, the little ornament described earlier in his work, but is the noun form of the verb *schnellen*—to snap or flick one's fingers. Bach refers to this technique several times in the *Versuch*. He describes it in his discussion of the trill:

When the upper tone of a trill is given its final performance it is snapped; after the stroke the upper joint of the finger is sharply doubled and drawn off and away from the key as quickly as possible.¹⁷

In his discussion of fingering for repeated notes he gives another description and also the reason for using the snap. He says it is "a quick retraction which occurs when a finger leaves a key as rapidly as possible so that the succeeding finger may play its tone distinctly."¹⁸ Because Emanuel Bach had no other teacher than his father, he learned the latter's playing technique as described by Forkel, wherein one releases notes by drawing the fingers back toward the palm of the hand. The snap is obviously a modification of this manner of releasing the key, wherein the pulling back is done as quickly as possible to give emphasis to the note that follows. It is an extension of the Bach technique that enables subtle articulations in the music without disturbing the rhythm or the relaxed position of the hand. Possibly it was so much a part of Emanuel Bach's playing that he did not feel the need to comment on it at great length.¹⁹

The organ method books from the period between Bach and Mendelssohn were written for those who were playing in church—harmonizing chorales, improvising for services, etc. Most of the method books assume that one is practicing primarily on a clavi-

chord and treat manual technique in sections related to that instrument. These books seek to train the whole musician—their subject matter is music theory, thoroughbass, and improvisation; the material on playing technique is a small part of the whole. One of the first of these treatises is *Anleitung zur Practischen Musik* (Introduction to Practical Music), first published in 1767 by Johann Samuel Petri. Petri was a student of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. It is an all-purpose method book and includes a wealth of information in a compact format, beginning with an explanation of notes, clefs, meter, and the various signs used in music (including slurs and dots). Petri also discusses ornaments, tempo markings, and includes a short section on “good” and “bad” notes or *quantitas intrinseca*. There is a lengthy chapter on singing and one on thoroughbass. Petri directs much of his work to church organists. He makes suggestions as to the style of music that is appropriate for each part of the divine service, and also recommends that organ registration reflect the meaning of the words of the chorales. He even gives recommendations for the size and makeup of ensembles to be used in church for various occasions.

Petri does not discuss manual technique on the organ because he treats finger technique in his section on the clavichord. He does say that one can change manuals smoothly by leaving the thumb on the lower manual and climbing up with the longer fingers to the upper, or leaving the long fingers on the upper and playing first with the thumb or little finger on the lower.

One of the most important sections of Petri’s book for musicians today is the one on organ pedaling because there are so few sources on this subject. He begins by saying that inexperienced organists play with the right foot in the upper octave and the left in the lower octave of the pedalboard as described by Samber. He also complains that they tend to play a fast bass part with the left hand, only adding the pedal here and there, which sounds bad. (Other method books allow this.) Petri recommends that one practice running figures, skips, and chords in the pedal and gives a number of exercises plus a flamboyant pedal solo. Example 4 shows three of his scales.

Example 4 - pedal scales from J.S. Petri



Daniel Gottlob Türk is best known for his monumental *Klavierschule* of 1789. His first publication, however, was *Von den wichtigsten Pflichten eines Organisten* (On the Chief Responsibilities of an Organist) in 1787. Its subtitle is “A Contribution to the Improvement of the Musical Liturgy.” Türk introduces his book by answering the question, “What is demanded of a good organist?” stating that it involves the following four points.

The organist must:

1. play chorales superbly, and consequently have a comprehensive knowledge of thoroughbass;
2. play a good, suitable prelude;
3. be adept in accompanying a musical work and be able to play in the less commonly used keys;
4. have knowledge of organbuilding, and try to maintain his instrument in good condition.²⁰

Türk’s suggestions throughout are practical and sometimes amusing. In the section on reflecting the text in chorale playing, he tells the following anecdote:

A certain organist read the words “fear and terror.” He immediately pulled out the tremulant—then he laid both arms on the coupled great keyboard, meanwhile placing both feet on the pedal and by this means produced such a terrible howl that the entire congregation—but in particular the poor bellows pumper, believing the bellows had burst—was more than startled. The result was certainly impressive, but it is easy to understand why everyone was disrupted in his devotion.²¹

Türk’s examples of pedaling are shown in Example 5. They are similar to those of Petri, whom he mentions. (The small arcs indicate that one foot crosses behind or in front of the other.)

Example 5 - from D.G. Türk



Johann Christian Kittel is known as the last pupil of J.S. Bach. Kittel traveled to Leipzig in 1748 and wrote in a letter that “I was under the direction of the well-known and famous Bach perfecting my musical compositions and particularly my keyboard playing . . .”²² Kittel was a popular teacher whose best-known pupil was Christian Heinrich Rinck. Forkel said of Kittel:

He is a very solid (though not very ready) organ player. As a composer, he has distinguished himself by several trios for the organ, which are so excellent that his master himself would not have been ashamed of them.²³

Kittel published *Der angehende praktische Organist* from 1801 to 1808. He says that the book is founded upon Bach’s fundamentals and reflects over 50 years of experience. Its main purpose is to teach the organist how to introduce and accompany chorales in the worship service. He writes:

The right accentuation, the expression, the correct retardation or acceleration which distinguish one passage from another; in short all the properties of a good interpretation have to be acquired, or at least to be developed and enhanced by knowledge of the arts.²⁴

In 1803, Kittel was commissioned to write a new chorale book for the Schleswig-Holstein churches. In the preface he says that most chorale preludes should be played in a moderate to slow tempo, and particularly warns against playing fugues and contrapuntal settings so fast that the counterpoint becomes unclear. He says that in chorale settings the soprano voice is usually played with the right hand and the alto and tenor voices with the left unless the alto is too far from the tenor to be reached. The bass is played with the pedals. This makes it possible to play the soprano on a solo stop or combination as is the case in many Bach settings.

The most important information in Kittel’s preface is about pedaling. He presents scales for the pedals with alternate toes as does Petri, contrasting this technique with the one described by Samber. Kittel’s preferred way of pedaling is shown in Example 6. He recommends keeping the feet ready to play and not resting them on the board as in the Samber drawing.

Example 6 - from J.C. Kittel



Kittel’s works provide insight into the organ playing of Bach during his last years. The description of pedal technique is particularly relevant. Although Bach probably used alternate-toe pedaling much of the time, the evidence of Kittel and others of the period indicates that he may have used a combination of toes and heels later in his life.

Surprisingly, the so-called Bach/Ricci piano method, published in Paris by Francesco Pasquale Ricci in 1786, contains some information on organ technique. Johann Christian Bach’s name is on the title page, but it is unlikely that he had anything to do with the book’s writing or publication, although he probably knew Ricci in Milan and later in London. Late in the method Ricci states that he has included some pieces for the organ as well as for the piano and harpsichord. He gives some recommendations for playing the organ as compared to the piano:

As the sounds of the organ are sustained, and the style is very different, the playing should be more connected and less brilliant.

One should raise the hand as little as possible.

It is necessary that the fingers fall surely on the keys and not strike them, and furthermore that they flow into one another in succession.

One must nurture the sounds and sustain them for their full value, instead of letting them go before their value is finished.

One can prolong the duration of the sounds by substituting one finger for another without raising the key.²⁵

Ricci's ideas on how to play ornaments at the organ are unusual:

The trill is done differently than on the piano; instead of striking the two notes of which it is composed, which makes a very bad effect on the organ, one holds the lower of the two notes and quickly strikes the upper note, finishing as usual on the main note.

Similarly in the mordent, one sustains the upper note and quickly strikes the lower note, finishing with the upper: that which would be a vice on the piano becomes a beauty on the organ.²⁶

He says that the pedal of the organ is used for pedal points and to play the fundamental bass part in continuo playing but mentions nothing about pedal technique.

One of the first organ books to be influential outside Germany, particularly in France, was Justin Heinrich Knecht's *Vollständige Orgelschule für Anfänger und Geübtere* (Complete Organ Method for Beginners and Experienced Players), published in sections from 1795 to 1798. The seven volumes treat every aspect of the organist's training—technique, registration, chorale playing, figured bass, modulation, and improvisation in strict and free styles. It continues the German tradition of teaching solid musicianship along with playing technique.

Knecht makes some interesting observations on the differences between playing the organ and playing the clavichord and fortepiano. His comments on how one's touch affects organ speech seem to recommend the Bach touch.

The manual keys of the organ, particularly the main manual, are generally deeper and more difficult to press down in comparison with the clavichord. This circumstance impedes organ playing generally and demands a greater finger strength than does playing the clavichord or similar instruments.

Likewise the strength and weakness of a tone depend on the adjustment of finger pressure on a clavier, especially the fortepiano. On the organ the strength or weakness of the tone is not influenced by the strong or weak pressing of the finger (see the next paragraph) but depends much more upon the registration drawn.

In organ playing the speech depends very much on how one presses the keys. If one presses down the keys slowly and feebly, the organ tone does not have the full strength and fire that it has when the keys are, so to speak, grabbed with a certain quickness and special stroke with the fingers.²⁷

Like Kittel, Knecht recommends a combination of alternate-toe and toe-and-heel pedaling and gives several examples. A few are in Example 7.

Example 7 - Pedal examples from J.H. Knecht

The pieces in Knecht's book are in a galant style for the most part and do not make use of the pedal technique that he has described.

The pedal is used sparingly and notated on the same staff as the left hand. He says that the pedal can play the bass note of chords on the beat or double the left hand, and indicates that it only rarely plays its own contrapuntal part.

The *Orgelschule* of 1805 by Johann Gottlob Werner provides information on pedaling that is similar to that of Kittel and Knecht. More interesting are his recommendations on fingering, as shown in Example 8. Notice that he introduces finger substitution, both to reposition the hand and to connect chords.

Example 8 - from J.G. Werner

Werner concludes his text with material on performance. He stresses the importance of clear articulation of slurs and dots, and gives examples with rests between slurred figures and staccato notes, thus showing that his use of substitution is not to achieve a continuous legato.

Johann Christian Heinrich Rinck's influential *Praktische Orgel-Schule*, Op. 55, was published in 1839. Mendelssohn owned a copy and met Rinck. The book contains no text but only short exercises, first for manuals alone and pedals alone, then for manuals and pedals combined. The early exercises are completely fingered and pedaled. Although some have no other markings in them, others are carefully marked for articulation, such as the Andante in Example 9.

Example 9

None of these organists was anywhere near as famous as the great pianists of the day. Many famous pianists/composers did have some experience with the organ. Haydn worked as an organist in churches from the time his voice changed, causing him to leave the choir of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, until he got his first real appointments, first with Count Morzin and then with the Esterházy family.

Mozart was always fascinated by the organ and played it whenever he could. One of his first encounters with the instrument is told by his father:

The latest news is that in order to amuse ourselves we went to the organ and I explained to Wolferl the use of the pedal. Whereupon he tried it *stante pede*, shoved the stool away and played standing at the organ, at the same time working the pedal, and doing it all as if he had been practicing it for several months. Everyone was amazed.²⁸

Because he was known primarily as a pianist, people were surprised at Mozart's interest in the organ and at his ability to improvise in a style appropriate to that instrument. He wrote to his father about playing an organ by Stein:

When I told Herr Stein I would love to try out his organ because organ playing was my real *Passion*, he was a bit skeptical, and said: What? a man like you? such a great Clavierist, wants to play an instrument that has no *douceur*, no Expression, no Piano, no Forte, but always sounds the same?—That makes no difference. The organ is in my eyes and ears the king of all instruments... We got to the choir, I began a Praeludium, he broke into a broad smile; then I played a fugue. I can well believe it, he said, that you love playing the organ; when one plays like you...²⁹

Another account by a priest and organist in Prague is interesting for its commentary on Mozart's keyboard technique as well as on his improvisational skill and choice of stops:

He mounted the console and played splendid chords, *pleno choro*, for approximately four minutes, and from these [illegible word] every connoisseur could observe that he was no mean organist. After this he wanted to play the Great without the Swell and the Choir. All four reed stops were too powerful for his liking. To the usual pedal without Mixture he added the eight-foot Trumpet. He now began a four-part fugue theme, which was the harder to perform in that it and its countersubject consisted largely of mordents, which are exceptionally hard to perform on an organ with such a heavy action. But the fourth and fifth fingers of the right hand as well as of the left hand were as strong as the first, second, and third fingers, at which every one was much amazed.³⁰

Beethoven's first important teacher and mentor was the court organist Christian Gottlob Neefe. At the early age of eleven, Beethoven substituted for Neefe at Mass. According to the reminiscences of a cellist named Mäurer:

His playing was so astonishing that one was forced to believe he had intentionally concealed his gifts. While preluding for the Credo he took a theme from the movement and developed it to the amazement of the orchestra so that he was permitted to improvise longer than is customary.³¹

In later years, Beethoven reminisced about the instrument, saying, "I, too, played the organ a great deal in my youth, but my nerves could not stand the power of the gigantic instrument. I place an organist who is master of his instrument, first among virtuosi."³² (He did improvise on the organ much later in his life for his friend Friedrich Starke.)

Schumann mentioned the organ in a list of instructions called *House and Life Rules* that he intended for publication with his *Album for the Young*:

Should you pass a church while the organ is being played, go into it and listen. If you long yourself to sit on the organ bench, try out your little fingers, and marvel at this omnipotence of music.

Lose no opportunity of practicing on the organ; there is no instrument which takes a swifter revenge on anything unclear or sloppy in composition and playing.³³

Chopin took organ lessons at the Warsaw Conservatory with William Würfel and later was appointed organist of the school. He kept up his interest in the organ, as documented by the following account:

During the last year of his stay in Warsaw, Chopin frequently visited the choir loft of the Wiyztki Church and liked to play either fugues of various masters or his own improvisations. The difficult part of the organ technique, i.e., the use of the pedal, presented no problems to him and he sometimes indulged in a virtual exhibitionistic display. At times, he would take the last section of the preceding Mass movement and improvise upon it.³⁴

Chopin apparently played the organ at the funeral of singer Adolphe Nourrit in Marseilles in 1839. A. J. Hipkins, in describing Chopin's piano playing, said that "He changed fingers upon a key as often as an organ player."³⁵

Liszt played the organ on several occasions. He often played fugues by Handel and movements of Beethoven sonatas, however, and not much real organ music. It was during his first years in Weimar that Liszt took special interest in the organ, visiting instruments in the surrounding area. While in Weimar he finished and published his six piano transcriptions of Bach's organ preludes and fugues, (BWV 543-48), although he had played two of them previously in concerts. He became friends with two young organists, Alexander Wilhelm Gottschalg and Alexander Winterberger. Gottschalg described their method of playing Bach:

Liszt usually gave the man who operated the bellows one thaler for his work. In order that I could hear how a Bach fugue should sound, he would reach over my shoulders to play on the manuals while I would play the pedals because he had no great fluency on them. Since he usually took very fast tempi it was often an effort for me to keep up with him.³⁶

Johann Gottlob Töpfer, principal organist in Weimar, was an organbuilder and influenced Liszt's ideas about registration. Liszt objected to the practice of playing Bach fugues on one *plenum* and thought that more color should be introduced. He suggested a method of notating the pedal parts wherein notes to be played with the right foot would have their stems up and those for the left have stems down. He also encouraged notating organ music on three staves, which was the common practice.

Liszt's first two large organ works, the *Fantasy and Fugue on Ad nos, ad salutarem undam*, and *Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H*, were written for the Ladegast organ at Merseberg. He worked extensively with Winterberger, who premiered both pieces, to achieve the registration effects he wanted. The *B-A-C-H* was supposed to be written for the dedication of the organ but was not finished in time, so Liszt asked Winterberger to play the *Ad nos* instead. He wrote to Princess Carolyne's daughter:

The inauguration of the Merseberg organ will take place on Wednesday, September 26. . . . I will have to be there from the evening of the 25th on, in order to try out some of the new registrations. Sacha Winterberger will play the *Prophète Fantasy*, which is now taking on quite a different character after the work I had him do.³⁷

The only accounts of Liszt's own performances of these works were on the piano, not the organ.

Mendelssohn was the only famous pianist/composer who was active as an organist. He studied piano with Ludwig Berger, the pupil of Clementi, and organ with August Wilhelm Bach. This Bach was not related to Johann Sebastian but had studied with Kittel. A brief note from young Felix to his organ teacher from 1821 could have been written today:

What does the sexton say, my dear Herr Bach? Can we play this afternoon? Or is there a wedding? or a confirmation? Please be so kind as to send answers to my many questions via the bearer of this letter. Unless we are thwarted by one of these things today, I'll be waiting at the tower punctually at four, with my sister (as you permitted). Greetings to the *Prelude and Fugue in G Minor*. I am presently sweating over an organ fugue, which will come forth into the world within the next few days. My heartfelt greetings to all of the principal pipes, yours faithful,
F. Mendelssohn³⁸

Mendelssohn only studied for two years but continued to play the organ whenever he could. It was difficult to get practice time, as he wrote to a friend in 1837:

If [people] only knew how I had to plead with, pay, and cajole the organists in Berlin, so that I might be allowed to play the organ for one hour, and how I had to stop ten times during that hour for this or that reason, then they would speak differently.³⁹

Mendelssohn's organ playing was particularly appreciated in England. John Gauntlett wrote in the *Musical World* of September 1837:

His execution of Bach's music is transcendently great, and so easy, that we presume he has every feature of this author engraven in his memory. His touch is so even and firm, so delicate and volent, that no difficulties, however appalling, either impede or disturb his equanimity.⁴⁰

Charles Horsley recalled his playing:

Many happy afternoons were spent in hearing his interpretation of Bach's Fugues, his wonderful extemporizing, and the performance of his own Sonatas, and other Organ pieces, then only existing in his memory. . . . I have heard most of the greatest organists of my time, both English, German, and French, but in no respect have I ever known Mendelssohn excelled either in creative or executive ability, and it is hard to say which was the most extraordinary, his manipulation or his pedipulation—for his feet were quite as active as his hands, and the independence of the former, being totally distinct from the latter, produced a result which at that time was quite unknown in England, and undoubtedly laid the foundation of a school of organ playing in Great Britain. . . .⁴¹

In 1840, Mendelssohn gave a benefit organ concert at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig to raise money for a monument to Bach. The program included Bach's Preludes and Fugues in E-flat and A Minor, *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele*, the *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*, the *Passacaglia*, and the *Pastorella*. Mendelssohn opened and

closed with improvisations, the first an introduction to the E-flat work. The second, according to Robert Schumann, was a *Freie Phantasie* on the Passion Chorale, ending with a fugal passage that included the notes B-A-C-H. Mendelssohn wrote to his mother:

I . . . practiced so hard for eight days previously, that I could really scarcely stand upright, and walked nothing but pedal passages in the street.⁴²

Elise Polko, a singer who performed with Mendelssohn in Leipzig, told of the performance:

Independent of the magic of his touch, which could only be felt, and not defined . . . and his finished technical powers, it was his *absolute* and *unqualified devotion* to the master whose work he was executing that imparted to his playing a character of perfection that probably never was heard before, and never will be heard again. In rendering the creations of others, he introduced nothing of himself; he was entirely absorbed in the soul and spirit of the composer.⁴³

Schumann wrote of the same concert:

How thoroughly Mendelssohn knows how to treat Bach's royal instrument is well and widely known; and yesterday he laid before us the most precious jewels, in a glorious arrangement of change and gradation, prefaced by a prelude, and closed by a fantasia of his own . . . many basked in the wonderful tones, thinking that in music there is no greater enjoyment than that of the double preeminence displayed when one master interprets another.⁴⁴

Mendelssohn did not teach organ, but English organists in particular claimed to have learned a great deal from him. It is interesting that the first edition of Mendelssohn's Six Sonatas, Op. 65, published in England, is entitled *School of Organ-Playing*.

All of the glowing reports of Mendelssohn's playing do not tell us some important things about it. For some clues to his preferences concerning articulation and touch we must examine the work of two pianists who were close to him. Ignaz Moscheles first visited the Mendelssohn family home in 1824 and wrote:

This is a family, the like of which I have never known. There is 15-year-old Felix. What a unique appearance, indeed! What are all the other child prodigies compared to him? Merely child prodigies, nothing more; whereas this Felix Mendelssohn is already a mature artist, and he's still only 15!⁴⁵

Mendelssohn's parents asked Moscheles to teach Felix and Fanny, and the families became lifelong friends. Mendelssohn revered Moscheles throughout his life, played piano four hands with him on many occasions, and ultimately invited the older man to join the faculty at the Leipzig Conservatory.

Moscheles's *24 Pianoforte Studies* were highly esteemed by young Mendelssohn, who received a copy of the works before their publication and wrote to his friend:

Once more a thousand heartfelt thanks for the happy hours I owe to your "Studies"; they will long find an echo in my mind. I am sure they are the most valuable of your works,—that is, until you write another.⁴⁶

Later he wrote asking that Moscheles add a third set:

Are we not to have a third book of Studies? I do not believe there is in all Germany a single pianist, worthy or unworthy of the name, who does not know the first two books, and plays them,—Heaven only knows how, to be sure,—and by publishing a third, you would really be conferring a boon on all musical people.⁴⁷

In his Preface to the *Studies* Moscheles states that he will give some rules for performance, even though they are present in most method books. He stresses the importance of making the meter audible, echoing the idea of *quantitas intrinseca*:

The author recommends a due regard to the accented part of each bar, which is in every species of Time, whether Simple or Compound, on the note which begins the bar. There is also a secondary or weaker accent on that note which begins the second half of the bar in duple meters.⁴⁸

Moscheles adds that syncopations are accented, and that there is a slight accent on every four or eight notes in running passages (or on every three or six notes in compound meters). He recommends that every note be held for its full length and no longer except in passages where several slurred notes belong to the same harmony. They can be played as in the Marpurg example.

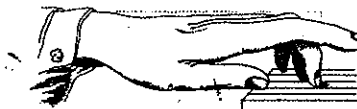
Moscheles stresses that rests must be carefully observed, with the hand or fingers elevated from the keys. Following Clementi and other authors, he describes three kinds of staccato—with dots, with wedges, and with dots under a slur. The last note under a slur of two to four notes is to be shortened as if it had a dot. Moscheles was considered to be rather conservative in his playing compared with other pianists of the time. He particularly warns against taking liberties with the tempo in music except in Preludes and pieces marked *Con Passione* or *Capriccio*.

Another pianist whose work Mendelssohn admired was Louis Plaidy, who joined the faculty of the Leipzig Conservatory in 1843. Mendelssohn recommended that his students study piano technique with Plaidy, concentrating on interpretation in his own classes. Plaidy's instructions on position and touch are therefore pertinent to Mendelssohn playing. In his method book, *Technische Studien für das Pianoforte-Spiel* (Technical Studies for Pianoforte Playing), Plaidy recommends that the elbow be a little above the keyboard, that the hand and arm be level, and that the fingers be curved, but that the fourth and fifth fingers be a bit extended. He particularly mentions not collapsing the knuckles.

Plaidy says that basic legato touch is played by the fingers only. He describes two different staccato techniques: the first uses the wrist and the second is accomplished by pulling the finger back off the keys. This is essentially the Bach touch, which Plaidy recommends for soft and/or rapid passages. He includes the drawings in Example 10 to illustrate it. Note that in the drawings the fourth and fifth fingers are not extended, but curved as much or more than the others. Plaidy's approach to touch still makes use only of the fingers and wrist. Arm weight is not mentioned at all.

Example 10 - from Louis Plaidy

Stroke of the First Finger for Staccato stroke



Position after the stroke



Organ technique in Germany changed quite slowly in the time between Bach and Mendelssohn. Modern fingering and pedaling replaced earlier practices, but did not really affect the clear articulation that was still recommended. Even authors who introduced finger substitution still stressed the delineation of the meter and of articulation marks such as slurs and dots.

Mendelssohn's playing was a product of his early training on both piano and organ. It also reflected the general ideas about performance that he shared with his pianist colleagues. He undoubtedly used many different touches, probably including the Bach touch described by Plaidy. Mendelssohn must have delineated slurs clearly and projected the meter in his playing, as recommended by Moscheles. Our decisions about the performance of Mendelssohn's music must take into account his strong connections with past performance practices and the influence of his friends and colleagues among the piano pedagogues.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), p. 110.
2. Translated in Walter B. Hewlett, "The Vermehrter . . . Wegweiser of 1698: A Translation and Commentary" (DMA, Stanford, 1980), p. 6.
3. Translation from Craig L. George Lister, "Traditions of Keyboard Technique from 1650 to 1750" (PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1979), p. 73.

CALL FOR LETTERS OF INQUIRY

Sponsorship of a Pipe Organ Encounter Advanced (POEA) in 2009

The Committee on the New Organist invites letters of inquiry from chapters having potential interest in sponsorship of a Pipe Organ Encounter Advanced in 2009. Based on a newly developed curriculum, this Encounter will be offered in addition to the current POE and POE+ opportunities. This would be the second POE Advanced, as the first is scheduled to be held in Lincoln, Nebraska, in the summer of 2008.

Admission Requirements: (1) 13–18 years of age, (2) Letter of recommendation from applicant's teacher, (3) Attendance at a previous POE suggested but not required, (4) CD/Cassette with the applicant's unedited performance of the following: [1] A short piece, not more than six minutes, by J.S. Bach, e.g. a chorale setting from the *Orgelbüchlein* or other collection; one of the Short Preludes and Fugues; a larger prelude OR fugue; [2] A short Romantic or 20th-century piece, not more than six minutes, e.g. a chorale prelude by Brahms; a sonata movement by Mendelssohn; a selection from *24 Pièces en style libre* by Louis Vierne, [3] An introduction and two stanzas of a hymn OR a similar accompaniment to a song from the applicant's faith tradition, chosen by the applicant.

Curriculum Requirements: (1) Daily one-hour organ lessons, (2) Daily classes in the following areas: [1] Organ Repertoire Master Class, [2] Improvisation Master Class, [3] Music Theory. In addition, one class during the Encounter will be offered in each of the following areas: [1] Hymn Playing, [2] Choral Conducting, [3] Organ Building and Design, [4] Career Opportunities.

Requirements of Host Chapter: (1) Practice facilities to accommodate the enrollment and (2) an Artist-Faculty for organ instruction and classes.

Letters of inquiry should be received by no later than January 1, 2008. Contact the AGO Committee on the New Organist, Denise Lanning, Director, AGO National Headquarters, 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1260, New York, New York 10115, or e-mail deniselanning@netscape.net.

4. Drawing courtesy of the Music Division, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.
5. Johann Baptist Samber, *Continuatio Ad Manuductionem Organicam* (1707), p. 49. My translation.
6. Elizabeth Loretta Hays, "F.W. Marburg's *Anleitung zum Clavierspielen* (Berlin, 1755) and *Principes du clavecin* (Berlin 1756): Translation and Commentary" (PhD, Stanford, 1976) Vol. II, p. 79.
7. Op cit., Vol. I, VII, pp. 7–9.
8. Op cit., Vol. I, VII, p. 9.
9. Op cit., Vol. I, VII, p. 10.
10. Op cit., Vol. I, II, Introduction, p. 1.
11. Quoted and translated in George Houle, *Meter in Music, 1600–1800: Performance, Perception, and Notation*, ed. Thomas Binkley, *Music: Scholarship and Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 82.
12. Hans T. David, Arthur Mendel, and Christoph Wolff, eds., *The New Bach Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 306.
13. J.P. Kimberger, *Grundsätze des Generalbasses* (Berlin, 1781) translated in Hays, "F.W. Marburg's *Anleitung zum clavier spielen* (Berlin, 1755) and *Principes du clavecin* (Berlin 1756): Translation and Commentary," Vol. II, p. 253.

14. David, Mendel, and Wolff, eds., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 432.
15. Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, trans. Edward R. Reilly (New York: Schirmer Books, 1966), p. 260.
16. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. William J. Mitchell (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1949), p. 148.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
19. For more on the *snap*, see Sandra Soderlund, "The Snap: Obscure Ornament or Essential Element of Performance?" *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1989).
20. Daniel Gottlob Türk, *On the Role of the Organist in Worship (1787)*, trans. Margot Ann Greenlimb Woolard, *Studies in Liturgical Musicology* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2000), p. xvi.
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22. Johann Christian Kittel, *Der angehende praktische Organist*, ed. Peter Williams, *Bibliotheca Organologica* (Buren: Frits Knuf, 1981). Introduction by Gerard Bal, translated by S. Taylor and Barbara Konietzny.
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24. Kittel, *Der angehende praktische Organist*. Translation in the English Preface.
25. Facsimile in Jeanne Roudet, ed., *Piano Forte: Méthodes et leçons pour piano-forte ou clavecin*, Vol. I, *Méthodes & Traités* (Courlay: J.M. Fuzeau, 2000), p. 43. My translation.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Justin Heinrich Knecht, *Vollständige Orgelschule für Anfänger und Geübtere*, Michael Ladenburger, ed. (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1989), pp. 54–55. Translation by James Harrod.
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32. From the memoirs of Karl Gottfried Freudenberg, translated in *Ibid.*, p. 956.
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