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Organ Improvisation Pedagogy: A Comparison of Four Treatises

What is improvisation? Can it be learned? If so, what is the best method? In this essay I will attempt to answer these and other questions regarding improvisation at the organ as it relates to American students today. To do so, I have enlisted the help of Bill Porter, David Arcus, Mel Butler, and Tom Trenney, all of whom I interviewed via phone, email, or in person. After some preliminary considerations, I will compare the improvisation treatises by Marcel Dupré, Gerre Hancock, Jan Overduin, and Jeffrey Brillhart, and will make a recommendation for a hypothetical undergraduate student who hopes to eventually enter the American Guild of Organists National Competition in Organ Improvisation.

"Improvisation is a mystery," says Jeffrey Brillhart in the preface to his treatise, *Breaking Free*; it is the search for a personal language, musical coherence, self-expression, and beauty.<sup>1</sup> Charles Tournemire calls improvisation the "quintessential domain of the mysterious." He likens it to a battle plan or spoken discourse, and refers to César Franck as an "architect-poet."<sup>2</sup> Bill Porter describes improvisation as the art of composition in performance, and draws an analogy with oral poetry such as Homer's *Odyssey*.<sup>3</sup> In both, says Porter, the moment of performance has been prepared, but in a different way than playing organ repertoire or reading a text; the difference, he says, is a lack of "fixity."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Hans Haselblöck writes, "Seen in the light of historical development, one can term improvisation really an early phase of composition."<sup>5</sup>

This view differs from Marie-Claire Alain, who writes, "To improvise is *not* to compose," [accent is Alain's]. In context, Alain was explaining why she does not write down her improvisations. She continues, "One doesn't improvise for posterity but for the present moment. [...] To improvise in front of a microphone is the worst thing I know of; nothing else so cuts short all inspiration."<sup>6</sup> Tom Trenney notes that to write out an improvisation doesn't always work, even though many notated pieces begin as improvisations.<sup>7</sup> In conclusion, it would seem that improvisation and composition are closely related, but improvisation remains more fluid and should not necessarily be written down. Still, a more exact definition of improvisation remains elusive.

One is therefore invited to ask the inverse: What is improvisation *not*? Harold Vogel writes that it is not, "an innate musical faculty acquired at birth which cannot be learned."<sup>8</sup> Tom Trenney says improvisation is not merely the reharmonization of a tune, nor is it a vehicle to show off the improviser's skills in a liturgical setting. Haselböck writes that as the organ works of J.S. Bach became more popular, they became seen as, "compositions of unattainable mastery, whose quality could neither be reflected nor achieved by any improvisation."<sup>9</sup> Tournemire agrees, saying, "In the course of an improvisation, it is nearly impossible, in a sustained fashion, to attain contrapuntal purity of the work ripened over a long period [...]"<sup>10</sup> Bill Porter reinforces this point, noting with humor that, "We need Vivaldi," to remind us that there is a shared language to the Baroque style, and not all composers of that period sounded like Bach. Improvisation, therefore, is not an innate skill and should not strive for the contrapuntal perfection of J.S. Bach.

Why learn to improvise? Gerre Hancock puts it simply: "Our musical personalities are incomplete and underdeveloped if we are unable to express ourselves in a spontaneous fashion."<sup>11</sup> Jan Overduin writes that, "Improvisation is about the full use of the human imagination," and that, "Unless you know at least a little about creating your own music, it is unlikely that you will be able to play another's with proper insight and empathy."<sup>12</sup> Along these lines, Harold Vogel says, "Improvisation can be a key to unlocking the secrets of interpretation."<sup>13</sup> It would seem that even modest experience as an improviser can benefit the performance of repertoire, especially that which is improvisatory in nature.

Of course, one of the most direct applications for improvisation is in the liturgy. Tom Trenney says improvisation can teach one how to be present in the moment, whether improvising in a liturgical or concert setting. He believes it also improves sight reading, saves money from having to buy repertoire for services, and teaches one how to capitalize on the available resources of the situation; this refers to the coloristic options on a given instrument, or being sensitive to the atmosphere of a given liturgical action or mood in the concert hall. Hancock agrees, saying that improvisation allows for flexibility, giving continuity and flow to the liturgy's inherent drama.<sup>14</sup> Overduin adds that the, "most effective way for church musicians to fight the increasing pressure to replace organs and organists with technology and machines is to develop the ability to improvise in ways that will bring life and excitement, meaning and beauty into the worship services of the church."<sup>15</sup>

In addition to its uses in the liturgy, Vogel writes that, "In Europe, the tradition of improvisation remained intact not only as a necessary part of service

playing, but also as the very best way to "try out" organs of any period."<sup>16</sup>

Improvisation therefore allows an organist to efficiently sample the different stops on an unfamiliar organ, which can be a valuable time-saving skill when giving recitals.

Lastly, for teachers of music theory and music history, Susan Summerfield believes that improvisation can be a tool to test a student's understanding and technique, and that improvisation has "always remained a consistent, formidable proof of musicianship."<sup>17</sup> This may be true, but many theory departments in the United States already struggle to get non-keyboardists to pass basic skills tests, let alone improvise in a given style. Perhaps Summerfield's advice is best applied to keyboardists only.

Is a treatise necessarily the best method for learning improvisation? Bill Porter questions the very premise of this essay, noting that composition teachers don't usually use a treatise. Neither Porter, David Arcus, Tom Trenney, nor Mel Butler, use treatises in their teaching.<sup>18</sup> Overduin says he never taught his course the same way twice,<sup>19</sup> and Brillhart adds that there is no "one size fits all" for learning or teaching improvisation.<sup>20</sup> Trenney says that the uniqueness of each person's experience makes it difficult to find an appropriate treatise for classroom use, and that improvisation is always a very person endeavor, which is difficult to codify. Perhaps Porter's criticism is justified, but in the absence of an expert instructor, a treatise can still be a guide for a student who is working alone. As an alternative, Porter suggests the use of other written pieces as improvisatory models; Trenney

proposes listening to recorded improvisations of the masters; and Bruce Neswick recommends sightreading, and then continuing to improvise in that style.<sup>21</sup>

Whether working with a treatise or not, many organists struggle to find a balance between repertoire and improvisation, if they practice improvisation at all. According to Stephen Nachmanovitch in his book, *Free Play*, "Many western musicians are fabulously skilled at playing black dots on a printed page, but mystified by how the dots got there in the first place and apprehensive of playing without dots."<sup>22</sup> Haselböck sees the decline in improvisation in historical perspective, saying that the increasing popularity of Bach in the 19th century led to a discrepancy between improvisation and repertoire, and that, "the problem became more acute in the 20th century, as interest in Bach's organ works increased and the absence of a generally accepted contemporary style evolved. Therefore, the practice of improvisation in the musical language of the time gradually lost ground."<sup>23</sup> Vogel is harsher, writing in 1986 that, "The general absence of improvisation in American organ playing - in contrast to the various European traditions still active - constitutes a musical deficiency which should not be allowed to continue."<sup>24</sup>

Tom Trenney offers a more hopeful perspective, noting, as a sign of increasing interest in the subject, that he was recently asked to review five new improvisation texts that are ready for publication. Mel Butler has noticed that there is much greater emphasis on improvisation in the US than there was 20 years ago, pointing out that there were not improvisation classes at Oberlin or Eastman 40 years ago.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the annual American Guild of Organists National

Competition in Organ Improvisation was begun in 1988, two years after Vogel's article.

The AGO's requirements for the competition will serve as general guidelines for evaluating the treatises by Dupré, Hancock, Overduin, and Brillhart. As mentioned earlier, my criticism of these treatises will be based on the needs of a hypothetical undergraduate student with moderate keyboard skills, little formal theory training, a regular church job, an interest in improvising in concert eventually, and a desire to enter the AGO competition in the future.

The requirements for the first round of the 2012 competition were:

1. An improvisation on a given cantus firmus that includes a harmonization of the tune and an improvisation on the tune.
2. An improvisation on a given free theme.

*Preparation time: 30 min.; Maximum performance time: 15 min.*

The requirements for the semi-final round of the 2012 competition were:

1. Historically inspired improvisation based on one hymn melody, chorale tune, or plainsong. This may be a single-movement improvisation (chorale fantasy); no fewer than four versets in the manner of Scheidemann or Weckmann; a partita à la Böhm, Pachelbel, or Bach; or plainsong verses including Plein Jeu, Fugue, a third movement of the competitor's choice, and a Dialogue sur les Grands Jeux in the manner of Couperin, Clérambault, or Grigny. The competitor will indicate his or her choice to the proctor prior to the improvisation, and the proctor will announce the choice to the judges and audience. [15-minute time limit]

2. Improvisation on one of the given free themes, or on one given free theme and a secondary theme of the contestant's choosing. [10-minute time limit]

The requirements for the final round of the 2012 competition were:

1. Prelude, fantasia, or toccata and a fugue based on given theme(s), which may be sacred or secular. [15-minute time limit]
2. Free improvisation based on a given musical theme or a non-musical theme (literary passage or artwork). The competitor will indicate his or her choice to the proctor prior to the improvisation, and the proctor will announce the choice to the judges and audience. [10-minute time limit]

*The total maximum performance time is 27 minutes, during which time competitors may pause for no more than two minutes between the improvisations.*

Clearly, the AGO values the ability to improvise in various historical styles, and this will therefore factor into my discussion of the four named treatises. As an aside, Bill Porter believes that the argument against historical improvisation is based on the sound argument that to recreate older styles will always fall short because it lacks the original context. However, he continues, with the breakdown of stylistic consensus in the 20th century, historical styles rose up in importance; therefore, if we play historical repertoire, we ought to improvise in historical styles. David Arcus agrees with this perspective, and adds that the connection between repertoire and improvisation should be extended to include organ building. Lastly, Tom Trenney believes that historical styles are valuable because they help the improviser break out of his comfort zone.

The criteria for judging the 2012 competition were:

- Thematic use and development. Development of portions of the theme is acceptable.
- Harmonic integrity.
- Clear presentation of form.
- Timing as appropriate to style, form, development, and contrast.
- Stylistic consistency.
- Rhythmic integrity and interest.
- Intentional direction and melodic/linear contour.
- Effective use of the instrument, e.g. registration, range, texture.
- Sophisticated use of imitative counterpoint

At last, let us begin evaluating the treatises of Dupré, Hancock, Overduin, and Brillhart, using the AGO requirements and criteria as guidelines.

Marcel Dupré's two-volume set, *Complete Course in Organ Improvisation* was published in 1962 and has been translated into English. Hancock views it as the definitive, learned treatise, which "cannot be praised too highly. [...] [Dupré's] approach is thorough, method logical, and teaching inspired."<sup>26</sup> Dupré's treatise is extremely detailed, sequential, strict, historically minded in relation to form (but less towards content, except the use of plain chant). Tom Trenney wonders whether there is a disconnect between Dupré's stated method and his recorded improvisation. Mel Butler, along with this author, believes that it is simply not necessary to complete the entire two volumes to become a skilled improviser. Personally, I find its length and level of detail to be impractical, and its musical style



slightly dated. Dupré intends it for both liturgical and concert improvisations, as suggested by the Appendix outlining the form of the Roman Catholic Service (before the reforms of Vatican II) and the use of lengthy secular forms, such as the symphonic forms, which would only be appropriate for a postlude because of their length.

The second volume in Dupré's method begins with a strict regimen of daily piano studies. As Tournemire writes, "'the organist who is only a mediocre pianist will never become a great organist."<sup>27</sup> However, to complete the entire course of exercises every day, as Dupré suggests, is not practical. Chapters 2 and 3 in volume two, while interesting, are too detailed, at least for beginning and intermediate students. In Chapter 6, which is about fugue, Dupré states that a thorough knowledge of *Traité de la Fugue* by André Gédalge is a prerequisite. Given the length and sheer complexity of the Gédalge treatise, a student couldn't begin improvising fugues for at least a year, and probably more. This attitude is shared by Tournemire, who writes, "It goes without saying that long preparatory studies are necessary, that is to say, the thorough study of harmony, of counterpoint above all, a high dose of fugue, and intensified orchestration. He cannot honestly improvise unless before he begins he has the prudence to arm himself in the manner that we have just said."<sup>28</sup> This approach, which emphasizes long periods of preparatory study, stands in contrast to the other three treatise, which aim to encourage improvisation as soon as possible. Compared to the AGO guidelines, Dupré seems to value imitative counterpoint (fugue and canon) more than the competition judges do, given that it

was last on their list. Dupré does not include mention of historical styles, which would leave a student lacking in the semi-final round.

Overall, the Dupré treatise is interesting as a historical document and to read through, trying various exercises, but it is less valuable to a student with little theory knowledge and the need to improvise immediately in a liturgical setting. It is also interesting to note that Jeff Brillhart's book, which is specifically about 20th century French improvisation, makes no mention of Dupré except in the bibliography.

Gerre Hancock's method, *Improvising: How to Master the Art*, is intended for church organists with little formal theory training, and is, in Hancock's words, "oversimplified."<sup>29</sup> Hancock states in the preface that in contrast to Dupré's comprehensive treatises, "My book is intended instead to serve as an informal workbook, a compendium of very basic ideas that will point the musician in the proper direction on the road to the mastery of improvisation."<sup>30</sup> However, I believe Hancock's attempts at simplification are not effective for the beginner student, and instead would be viewed as too vague in comparison to Overduin's method.

There are several general approaches outlined in the Hancock treatise. The first is to analyze the form of a model piece, write out your own adaptation in both musical and non-musical outlines, and practice on the keyboard what you have written down. Hancock also gives sample pieces that are only partially completed, and recommends that the student complete the piece in a similar style. He suggests practicing hands alone, right hand and pedal, left hand and pedal, and finally all parts together. This is in contrast to Dupré's practice suggestions at the beginning of

his *79 Chorale Preludes*, where he specifically cautions the student against dividing the hands and feet, instead always practicing with all parts together.<sup>31</sup> This is an interesting different, given that Hancock values Dupré's method so highly.

Tom Trenney studied improvisation with Gerre Hancock for one semester at Eastman School of Music, during which time he used Hancock's treatise. Trenney believes it to be slow, but sequential and practical. I believe that it is valuable for general advice aimed at the inexperienced student, but ultimately I believe the exercises are still too complex. For instance, many exercises suggest completing consequent phrases to given antecedents, but the antecedents are in 3-5 voices with complex rhythms and harmonies. I imagine the beginner student would not be able to continue these phrases successfully.

Various other aspects of Hancock's method seem unclear. He recommends using a common practice tonal language as a starting point, but I also find that his example exercises are too harmonically complex for beginners. Page 43 makes a general comment about staying within voice ranges, but doesn't define what they should be. Chapter 7 never clearly defines what song form is, instead just saying that it is flexible. On page 115, Hancock says, "Having written out and played your own version will enable you to improvise differing versions with ease." I don't believe this is necessarily true. Page 153 gives no explanation about how to compose a contrapuntally appropriate countersubject (only to provide contrast of character with subject). The bibliography is also lacking compared to Overduin and Brillhart. He doesn't touch on historical styles very much, but does make a rather complete

survey of general forms. His use of non-musical outlines is very useful for beginners, however, but all three of the other treatises also make use of this tool.

In summary, I find the Hancock treatise to be too general in nature, even though there are many musical examples included. I also believe the parameters of the exercises are not defined narrowly enough for beginner students. Hancock encourages stylistic freedom (for instance on page 148, where he suggests experimentation with trios with each voice in a different key), but doesn't spend enough time establishing a stylistic home base to begin with.

Jan Overduin's treatise, *Making Music: Improvisation for Organists* is very well constructed, provides clear exercises, and is thorough in its scope. It is aimed at getting beginners improvising as soon as possible, and I believe it is successful in this regard. For instance, it presents common sequences patterns, but doesn't get bogged down in definitions for each one. Like the Hancock, it also makes use to hymn tunes as thematic material, and is purposefully aimed at church organists. Overduin also provides a *very* thorough bibliography. Appendix A is a fascinating insight into the pedagogy of Jean Langlais, whom Overduin studied with, and Appendix B is an interesting original cadenza to Mozart's *Epistle Sonata*, K.336 for organ, two violins, and bass. The overall approach has many simplified musical examples with very specific instructions, with thorough information and balanced opinions about matters such as modulating interludes between hymns.

Jeffrey Billhart's treatise, *Breaking Free*, is an inspired and well-organized treatise also aimed at getting the improviser making music as soon as possible. One of the most successful aspects of this treatise, in my opinion, is the consistent use of

ostinato and pedal point. These two techniques, especially used in combination, are wonderful tools to create full textures that help bolster the confidence of a beginner. The philosophical asides sprinkled throughout the book are delightful, such as the quote from Philippe Lefebvre that "One must search." Bill Porter especially likes the discussion of modes, which he believes to be well organized. Brillhart's passion for teaching the subject shines through the whole text, but especially in the introduction, where his outlook can only be described as very encouraging.

Given the artificial restraints placed on this evaluation, Brillhart's book would not prepare our hypothetical student to improvise in historical styles as well as Overduin's treatise. Also, while Brillhart draws thematic material from hymn tunes, chorales, and plain chant, some aspects of the harmonic language might be too dissonant for liturgical use. This last point is debatable, however. Harold Vogel writes that, "I have come to realize that the best starting point for the beginning improviser is the style of the 17th century, in which only the simplest harmonies (root position and first inversion triads) are employed."<sup>32</sup> If this is true, then Brillhart's method should be reserved until the beginning improviser has internalized the common practice style more fully.

In the final analysis, I believe the breadth and clarity of Jan Overduin's treatise makes it the most valuable for our hypothetical undergraduate student. In reality, I would suggest working through both Overduin and Brillhart's books, since they both have much to offer. I believe Dupré's text to be too detailed and lengthy, while Hancock's method is too vague not entirely appropriate for beginners.

The art of improvisation is closely related to the art of composition, but improvisers should not necessarily strive for the perfection of a written piece. Improvisation is not an innate skill, but is learned over time with consistent and conscientious practice. Improvisers should not be discouraged by the contrapuntal perfection of J.S. Bach, but rather, should strive to internalize the general style of Baroque period. The study of improvisation can improve one's understanding of repertoire, and is indispensable skill as a church musician. Tournemire says that improvisation is, "logic and fantasy at the same time."<sup>33</sup> Choosing the best treatise, the main topic of this essay, may seem more concerned with logic than fantasy, but hopefully the reader will remember that, at its heart, improvisation is whatever we wish it to be.

Dupré, *Complete Course in Organ Improvisation, Volume 1: Preparatory Exercises*

<b>Lesson 1</b> Harmonizing the Scale	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Harmonize major and minor scales in four voices, in open position, in the soprano, in all 24 keys, using only root position triads, including pedal.</li> <li>2. Add first and second inversion triads.</li> <li>3. Move the scale in the bass voice, played by the pedal.</li> <li>4. Move the scale to the tenor voice, played by the left hand.</li> </ol>
<b>Lesson 2</b> Harmonizing Given Melodies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Harmonize the given melodies (8 bar chorales) in four voices, in the S, B, and T successively, using root position and first inversion triads, avoiding second inversion triads.</li> <li>6. Harmonize 16 bar melodies in four voices.</li> </ol>
<b>Lesson 3</b> Antecedent and Consequent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Complete 4 bar antecedent phrases with a 4 bar consequent, ending in a PAC, in four voices, using the pedal.</li> <li>8. More varied antecedent phrases; consequents need not end with PAC.</li> </ol>
<b>Lesson 4</b> Modulating Consequent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Compose modulating consequents to given incipits to each of the 5 neighboring keys in major and minor. Apply same procedure to melodies in Lesson 3.</li> </ol>
<b>Lesson 5</b> The Commentary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. "Commentary" vs. "Deductive Commentary;" Compose commentaries by transposing the given theme to each of the seven degrees of the scale, harmonized in four voices.</li> </ol>
<b>Lesson 6</b> Parenthetical Sections	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. "Parenthetical Sections" applied to consequent phrases.</li> </ol>
<b>Lesson 7</b> The Binary Exposition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12. Binary vs. Ternary form; the 16 or 20 bar binary form, based on a four bar theme and deductive commentaries.</li> <li>13. 20 bar binary exposition with key areas defined for major and minor themes; examples given.</li> </ol>
<b>Lesson 8</b> The Placement and Order of Voice Parts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14. Compose deductive commentaries in B (pedal), T (LH on separate manual), and B (8' pitch as tenor, with LH playing bass with 16' manual stop), then in the alto.</li> <li>15. Accompany a theme with a diatonic or chromatic, ascending or descending stepwise line in the bass or soprano, in four voices; introduce ostinato pattern in the alto voice.</li> </ol>
<b>Lesson 9</b> The Modulating Bridge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16. Compose a 12 bar modulating bridge, which modulates to the dominant (or relative major), using fragments from the theme in each voice successively, on sequential basslines.</li> <li>17. Bridges combining two fragments with more remote tonalities.</li> </ol>
<b>Lesson 10</b> The Development - the first part (rhythmical)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>18. Dividing a theme into the rhythmic figure, the lyrical fragment, and the fragment for the bridge.</li> <li>19. Development vs. Bridge; avoiding PAC's in the development.</li> <li>20. Choosing the tonality of the development and its related keys;</li> </ol>
<b>Lesson 11</b> The Lyrical Part and Preparation for Re-entry	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. How to introduce the lyrical fragment.</li> <li>22. Choice of tonalities by ascending or descending whole or half steps, alternating major and minor keys.</li> <li>23. Tonalities for the preparation for re-entry.</li> </ol>
<b>Lesson 12</b> The General Plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>24. Registration based on the character of the theme (usually soft 8' and 4' flues; no reeds); Andante Moderato as ideal tempo for beginners;</li> <li>25. A detailed outline of thematic areas, length, tonality, manuals, and registration for a hypothetical 100 bar sonata form.</li> <li>26. Examining a theme for mode, length, modulations, compass, harmonization, fragmentation, and opportunities for canons.</li> </ol>

Dupré, *Complete Course in Organ Improvisation, Volume 2: Organ Improvisation*

<b>Chapter 1</b> Organ Technique	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Piano as the basis for organ technique.</li> <li>2. Manual technique at the organ.</li> <li>3. Pedal technique</li> <li>4. Rubato, tied notes, separated notes</li> <li>5. Registration</li> </ol>
<b>Chapter 2</b> Natural Harmony	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The harmonic series</li> <li>2. Modulations by symmetrical chords</li> <li>3. Resolutions of Polytonal Aggregations</li> </ol>
<b>Chapter 3</b> Theme	<p>Introduction</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Church modes</li> <li>2. Rhythm based on Greek classification</li> <li>3. Theme Analysis (key, harmony, mode, rhythmic figures, counterpoint)</li> </ol>
<b>Chapter 4</b> Counterpoint and Chorale	<p>Introduction of chorale harmonization in four parts</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contrapuntal considerations; canons</li> <li>2. Chorale forms: canonic, contrapuntal, ornamented, fugal</li> </ol>
<b>Chapter 5</b> The Baroque Suite	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Binary form - the Air</li> <li>2. Ternary form - the Minuet</li> <li>3. The Prelude</li> <li>4. The Toccata</li> </ol>
<b>Chapter 6</b> Fugue	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Subject Analysis</li> <li>2. Plan of the Fugue: countersubject, exposition, counterexposition, episode, subject entries, stretto</li> <li>3. Five-Voice Fugue</li> <li>4. Fugue with Two Subjects</li> </ol>
<b>Chapter 7</b> The Variation The Tryptique	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Air with variations, passacaglia, variation in the modern style</li> <li>2. Tryptique (set of three previously defined forms)</li> </ol>
<b>Chapter 8</b> The Four Symphonic Forms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Allegro (sonata form)</li> <li>2. Andante (song without words, with two themes, one theme and two developments, variations)</li> <li>3. Scherzo (trio form, or form with two themes)</li> <li>4. Finale (modified rondo, form with two themes, or variations)</li> </ol>
<b>Chapter 9</b> Free Forms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Purely musical forms: fantasia and rhapsody</li> <li>2. Descriptive pieces: spinning song, barcarolle, etc. (trio form, form with two themes, form with refrain, form with one theme)</li> <li>3. Summary of forms</li> </ol>
<b>Appendix</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Roman Catholic Services: opportunities for improvisation, the verset, the accompanied cantilena.</li> </ol>



Hancock, *Improvising: How to Master the Art*

<b>The Scale</b>	Melodies based only on an ascending or descending scale, with 1-4 accompanying voices, in any style or character. Write out ideas away from keyboard and then test at keyboard. Improvise consequent phrases to the given examples. Count aloud while you practice (1-2-3, 2-2-3, 3-2-3, etc.). Experiment with nonconventional time signatures. Hypothetical weekly practice regimen.
<b>The Phrase</b>	Improvising consequent and then antecedent phrases to given examples in 1-4 voices. Writing your own antecedent phrases. Harmonization by parallel intervals (2nds through 7ths). Slow practice of hands and feet alone.
<b>The Interlude</b>	Phrases as the modular units of larger pieces. Form outlines in words vs. notation. Modulating and non-modulating interludes of known length. Modulations by ascending or descending 5ths. Interludes between stylistically different pieces. Practicing each phrase ("module") individually.
<b>The Hymn</b>	Descants by inverting S&A or S&T. Variation techniques: passing and neighboring tones, suspensions, pedal point, independent descants, new bass parts.
<b>The Ornamented Hymn</b>	Bicinium and tricinium in various rhythmic patterns with ornamented and unornamented hymn tunes in the soprano, then middle voice. Flexibility of style. Practice strategies of various hands and pedal combinations.
<b>The Hymn Prelude</b>	Ornamented hymn tunes. Tune in long note values ("organ hymn prelude"). Repeat, with interludes ("interpolation prelude"). Fugal interludes ("point-of-imitation hymn prelude"). Extended hymn prelude ("hymn fantasy").
<b>The Song Form</b>	ABA' form based on 8-measure units. Extended forms with hypothetical outlines for section, key, number of voices, and measure numbers (similar to Dupré).
<b>The Sonata Form</b>	Sonata as outgrowth of song form. Hypothetical outlines as in previous chapter. "Bridges" as meaningful thematic material, not just "filler."
<b>The Toccata</b>	Toccatas in French style, based on hymn tune in the pedal. Define hand position first, then add various figuration patterns.
<b>The Canon</b>	"Stop and start canons" (alternating activity). Downbeat consonance. Canons in song form with non-musical outlines. Pedal as canonic voice, with one hand accompanying. Intervallic alterations. Pentatonic scale as means of avoiding dissonance. Canons in three parts. Analyze canons in repertoire.
<b>The Duo and the Trio</b>	Bach as model. Duos with thematic soprano. Trios with thematic upper voices and accompanimental pedal. Detailed non-musical outlines.
<b>The Fugue</b>	Fugues based on three part form (exposition, development, recapitulation). Subjects derived from hymn tunes. Practicing countersubject on all scale degrees.

Jan Overduin, *Making Music: Improvisation for Organists*

Improvising Melodies	Begin stepwise. Utilize unison improvisations. Set various specific limitations. Make vocal melodies. Emphasize melody in the LH. Adding consequent phrases. Various assignments using different ideas.
Improvising on One of Two Chords: Registration and Imagery	"Activating" the rhythm. Use imagery when deciding registration. Combine melodic ideas from previous chapter with two-chord accompaniment.
Thirds and Sixths	Useful as accompaniment. Contrary motion is best.
The Pentatonic Mode	Avoids problem of dissonance. Useful for building contrapuntal coordination between hands and feet since any note will work. Avoid parallel 5/8s but only in two voice textures. Stagger entries in trio texture. Establish rhythmic limitations (similar to species counterpoint) for each voice.
Bicinium	Two voice texture can have high degree of control compared to thicker textures. LH and pedal should be able to play any theme. Knowing scales & arpeggios until they are automatic.
I, IV and V	"Keyboard" vs. "Solo" style. Suggestions for ornamentation. Introduction to toccata figuration.
Harmonizing Melodies	Begin with only root position. Begin with folk tunes because of slower harmonic rhythm. Accompanimental patterns.
Improvising Hymns/Songs	Common meter and Long meter. Rhythmic frameworks for hymn improvisation.
Binary Form	
Other Progressions	
Suspensions and More Effective Hymn Playing	The importance of suspensions in creating vocal lines to facilitate singing. Suspensions (and appoggiaturas) in context. Vary the type of suspension.
Ostinato	Harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic ostinatos.
Harmonizing Scales and Melodies (I)	Harmonic patterns for memorization. Embellishment techniques.
Sequences	Circle of 5ths as the basic unit. Three of the most common sequences.
Chaconne	Chaconne vs. Passacaglia. Example progressions. Sample ornamentation patterns.
Passacaglia	Defined. Default harmonization. Overall crescendo. <i>Manualiter</i> variations. Hypothetical plan in text form, very general. Sample ornamentation patterns.
Ornamenting Melodies (I)	General principles. 4:1 as default ratio. Begin contrary to overall motion of melody. Sample patterns.
Ornamenting Melodies (II)	Reasons for ornamentation. More emphasis on trills and mordents rather than passing notes.
Modulation	1. Four chord method, 2. Sequence method, 3. Circle-of-fifths method.
Harmonizing Scales and Melodies (II)	Harmonization strategies. Bass lines based on leaps or steps, diatonic or chromatic motion.
Reharmonizing Hymns	Rationale. Patterns based on soprano scale degrees. Hymn tune in the bass. Harmonizing scales in the bass.
Ornamenting Inner Voices	<i>Orgelbuchlein</i> as model. Alto, tenor, and both in 4:1 or 3:1.
Cadences	Differing the cadence for a repetition of the last phrase. <i>Echo chorale preludes</i> .
Descants	Bach cantatas as models. Basis in upper partials. Frequency of use. "Flipping" alto or tenor above soprano.
Interludes	Uses in liturgy. Hymn interludes based on thematic material. Various suggestions regarding length and harmonic strategy.
Modulating Interludes	Arguments for and against. Whole vs. half step. Need for textual basis.

	Harmonic strategies.
Canon	Soprano/pedal is best, with RH leading. Using hymns in canon for practice, without regard to counterpoint.
Rondo	Defined. Hypothetical plan in text form. Use of previous ideas for intervening sections.
Toccatà	Uses in concert or liturgy. Seventh chords as versatile accompaniment. Consistent fingering. Models from repertoire. Quiet toccatas.
Partita	Bach and Pachelbel as models. Partitas on hymn tunes are useful for liturgy. Sample strategies.
Three-Voice Fugue	Defined. Stretto and pedal point. Differences between written and improvised fugues. Episodes defined. Sample outlines.
Hymn-Anthems	Defined as essentially improvised form. Sample outlines.

Jeffrey Brillart, *Breaking Free*

<b>Part 1</b>	
What is Improvisation?	Improvisation as conversation. French vs. German styles. Overcoming fears and inhibitions. Absorbing building blocks.
How to Practice	Daily ritual of practice. Avoid perfectionism. Tell a story. Rhythmic flow. Journals to track progress. Remember what you already know.
Analyzing the Theme	Harmonic, melodic or rhythmic qualities. Guidelines for analysis.
Developing the Theme	Pedal point and ostinato. Techniques defined.
The Exposition	Binary vs. Ternary forms. Foreground vs. background material. Thematic clarity. Consequent phrases. Start simply.
<b>Part 2</b>	
Harmonization with Perfect Fifths	Useful for beginners. Pedal points as harmonic stabilizers. Remember good and bad moments for future reference.
The Pentatonic Mode	Useful for beginners. Incorporating canons early on using hymns or free material.
Harmonization with Perfect Fourths	Associations with texture of fourths. Various examples with pedal point and ostinato.
Harmonization with Major Seconds	Increased dissonance. Accompaniment in contrary motion to melody.
Harmonization with Major and Minor Thirds	Used by Vierne for stability with chromatic theme. Diatonic or chromatic thirds.
Harmonization with Major and Minor Sixths	Same advice as previous chapter.
Harmonization with 6/3's, 6/4's and 6/5's	Parallel motion. Chromatic or diatonic.
Harmonizing a Motive	Summary of previous chapters.
Harmonization with Sevenths	"Sevenths" meaning seventh chords. Types of seventh chords. Sequences. Embellishing techniques.
Harmonization with Dominant Sevenths	Adding extensions (drawn from jazz). Use of chord scales in "ii7 - V - I" progression (also from jazz).
<b>Part 3</b>	
Charles Tournemire	<i>L'Orgue Mystique</i> as improvisation models. Exotic scales. Other aspects of Tournemire's musical language.
Ecclesiastical Modes	Defined.
Dorian Mode	Examples from Tournemire. Plain chant given in original form.
Phrygian Mode	Using tritones. <i>Pange Lingua</i> and other chants.
Bartók Mode	Defined. Association with Bartók.
<b>Part 4</b>	
Olivier Messiaen's Musical Language	Importance in French tradition. <i>Technique de mon langage musical</i> .
The Second Mode of Limited Transposition	The octatonic mode and its three transpositions. Building harmonies based on this mode. Playing strictly within the mode. Extensive examples.
The Third Mode of Limited Transposition	Its four transpositions. Building harmonies on this mode.
The Chord on the Dominant	As defined by Messiaen.
<b>Part 5</b>	
The Development	True test of the improviser. Deciding melodic, rhythmic and bridge portions of the theme. Modulation formulas. Key center grids.
Climax Chords	Various types throughout music history.
Passacaglia	Defined. Hypothetical plan in text only.
Song Form	Defined. As used by Vierne. Question and answer.

Louis Vierne's Improvisation Structure	Drawn from Rollin Smith's biography. Expanded song form.
Scherzo	Use of rondo form. Typical thematic characteristics. Example themes.
Sonata Allegro	"Balance and contrast." Instability in the development. Hypothetical plan.
Toccata (Prelude)	Similarities between the two forms. Hypothetical plan. Example themes.
Cochereau Style Variations	Importance in French tradition. Characteristics of Cochereau's style.
Free Improvisation	How to find suitable structure. Use of triptych. Hypothetical plans.
Improvising on a Literary Text	Dupré's <i>Les Chemins de la Croix</i> as model. Necessity of understanding the story. Many examples for use.
<b>Part 6</b>	
Claude Debussy	Importance of language in French tradition.
Maurice Ravel	Importance of language in French tradition.

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- <sup>2</sup> Tournemire, Charles. *César Franck*, (translated by Ralph Kneeream). Northwestern University: 1983
- <sup>3</sup> See Albert Lord's, *The Singer of Tales*, for more about ancient epic poetry and the relationship between composition and improvisation.
- <sup>4</sup> Interview in with Bill Porter at Eastman School of Music, February 26, 2013.
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