

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE AT THE ENGLISH ORGAN
CIRCA 1880-1940

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By

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Early 20th-century English organ music is both relatively well known and surprisingly neglected: well-known to organists connected to the Anglican church (for whom it is part of what is often seen as a continuous performance tradition) but neglected as an object of critical performance study. My own research suggests that, in general, performances of this music today are significantly different from those of the early 20th century. My goal is to come closer to understanding how this music sounded at the organ soon after it was composed, and how organists achieved their musical effects.

The strong influence of French organ pedagogy and performance culture in the English-speaking world is a particularly formidable barrier to achieving this goal; recognizing an often-unconscious French influence is a critical first step for the present-day organist who wishes to examine early 20th-century English organ music on its own terms. This influence, combined with more transnational modernist performance aesthetics, often leads to metronomically rigid performances of English repertoire that privilege legato and staccato to the exclusion of more intermediate touches. My analysis of historic recordings, treatises and other texts has led me to believe that a variety of touches and a great deal of rhythmic flexibility are crucial to the performance of early 20th-century English organ music.

This dissertation focuses in particular on the meaning of the multivalent slur symbol in the context of this repertoire. While it can be an indicator of legato, this

symbol is also used liberally to indicate a “phrase,” and the latter context may or may not require a legato performance style. Registration constitutes a crucial aspect of the performance practice of this repertoire, and this dissertation considers some of the ways that registration practices in the period related to issues of timing and touch at the organ. The writings of music historian Donald Tovey (1875-1940), who was closely acquainted with Walter Parratt (1841-1924), organist of St. George’s Chapel, Windsor, provide a particularly useful general view of music-making at the organ in early 20th-century England and are considered in the third chapter. For a detailed analysis of performance practice in the period, the dissertation turns in the final chapter to two historic recordings of Herbert Howells’ *Rhapsody in D-flat, Op. 17, No. 1* and compares these with two more recent recordings. The recordings by Harold Darke (1888-1976) and Herbert Sumsion (1899-1995) are a world apart from the recent renditions and demonstrate that a culture of transcription pervaded all aspects of English organ playing; paradoxically, the modern organist who wishes to perform Howells and his contemporaries with aesthetic conviction must let go of the notion of ‘fidelity to the score.’

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alexander Timothy (“Tim”) Richard Pyper was born in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada in 1980. After early piano and vocal training in the Kitchener area, Tim became a treble chorister at St. James’ Cathedral, Toronto. He received his B.M. and M.M. degrees as well as the Performer's Certificate from the Eastman School of Music as a student of David Higgs. Other significant organ teachers have included Giles Bryant, Jack Mitchener, John Tuttle and William Porter (improvisation). His piano training with Barbara Lister-Sink forms the basis of his technical approach to all keyboard instruments.

An accomplished performer, Tim has won First Prize in numerous regional and national competitions including the Arthur Poister Memorial Competition (2008), the John Rodland Memorial Competition (2002), the A.G.O./Quimby Region II Competition (2001) and the Royal Canadian College of Organists' National Competition (2001). In 2002, he performed at the A.G.O. Convention in Philadelphia as part of the *Rising Stars* series. Later the same year, he was a featured performer at the R.C.C.O. National Convention. His solo recitals have been broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and by National Public Radio's *Pipedreams*.

Since 2010, Tim has served as Director of Music at the Cathedral Church of the Redeemer, Calgary. His previous appointments included tenures as Assistant Organist at St. James' Cathedral, Toronto, Organist of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Rochester and Organist & Choirmaster of the Church of the Ascension (Episcopal), Rochester. He holds the Associate diploma from the American Guild of Organists.

To my grandfather

Dr. Richard Cameron Pearson

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My family has been extraordinarily supportive of my academic and musical career and I could not have completed my doctorate without their words of wisdom, encouragement and love.

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PREFACE

For the sake of consistency, this dissertation uses the term English rather than British. There are differences of opinion in this matter, but most composers and authors from the early 20th century refer to “English organ music” rather than British organ music.

American spelling and musical terminology is used throughout. For example, the term ‘quarter note’ is used instead of ‘crotchet.’ ‘Quarter note’ is very often shortened to ‘q.’

Chapter 1:

French Organ Pedagogy and the Aesthetics of Modernism as Barriers to Interpreting Early 20th-Century English Organ Music

It would be difficult to overstate the extensive reach of French organ pedagogy in England and the United States throughout the 20th century. The 1927 publication of Marcel Dupré's *Méthode d'Orgue* was, in many ways, a watershed moment in organ performance ideology. Printed in a bilingual format, Dupré's *Méthode* made the modern French organ school – as adapted from Lemmens by Widor, Guilmant and Dupré himself – widely accessible to the English-speaking world. Here was the distilled wisdom of a revered organ culture as revealed by one of the top international virtuosos of the day. In addition was the claim of a direct pedagogical link to Bach. How could the *Méthode* have been anything but widely influential?

Perhaps the greatest measure of the *Méthode*'s success may be seen in its many imitations. Precision in the performance of repeated notes is one of the most immediately audible aesthetic 'calling cards' of early- to mid-20th-century French organ playing. In Dupré's words: "...in a rapid or moderate tempo, a note which is repeated in the same voice or is staccato loses half its value."¹ The basic form of the principle is illustrated below with, as always, an example from the organ works of J.S. Bach:

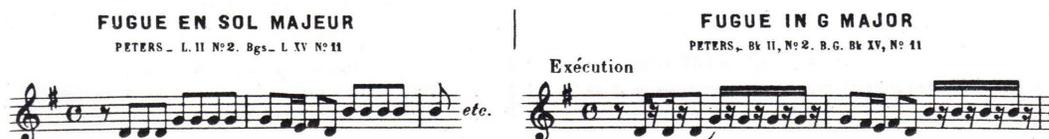


Figure 1.1 J.S. Bach's *Fugue in G*, BWV 541; from Marcel Dupré, *Méthode d'Orgue* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1927), 58. Reproduced with permission.

¹ Marcel Dupré, *Méthode d'Orgue* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1927), 58. All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

The extent of Dupré's influence is demonstrated by the reappearance of this very example in the standard American organ tutor, Harold Gleason's *Method of Organ Playing* (1st ed., 1937). This example, with the same phrasing, continued to appear in Gleason's method as late as the 5th edition of 1962.



Figure 1.2 J.S. Bach's *Fugue in G, BWV 541*; from H. Gleason, *Method of Organ Playing*, 1st ed. (Rochester: Eastman School of Music, 1937), 49.

Gleason and renowned French organist Joseph Bonnet were the first professors of organ at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York upon the institution's opening in 1921. Bonnet only taught at Eastman for two years (1921-1923), being succeeded by fellow Frenchman Abel Decaux, who taught from 1923-37. Gleason remained in his post until 1955 (and lived until 1980), exerting a huge influence over generations of American organists through his teaching and his extremely popular *Method*.²

As late as 1971 the same repeated note convention was included by C. H. Trevor in his *Oxford Organ Method*, though using a different Bach example. Trevor's instructions are remarkably similar to Dupré's: "When the tempo is *moderato* or quicker, repeated notes of equal value in the same part lose half their value...This is particularly important when the repeated notes are in an inner part..."³ Trevor uses Bach's G minor fugue, BWV 535, to make his notions clear (see Figure 1.3).⁴ Note the similarity between Figures 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3.

² Dates of tenure for Bonnet, Decaux and Gleason are to be found in: Vincent A. Lenti, *For the Enrichment of Community Life* (Rochester: Meliora Press, 2004), 178, 247-249.

³ C.H. Trevor, *The Oxford Organ Method* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 68.

⁴ It should be stated that Trevor does include, as alternatives, slightly varied articulations. The 'pure' Dupré/French method is, however, his first default interpretation.

from Fugue in G minor

J. S. BACH



Figure 1.3 J.S. Bach's *Fugue in g*, BWV 535; from C.H. Trevor, *The Oxford Organ Method*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 68. Extract reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.

Trevor cites the importance of the repeated note rule with respect to inner parts. To illustrate this idea, we return to BWV 541 and to Dupré himself; Figure 1.4 may serve as a florid demonstration of the repeated note principle as performed by Dupré and those influenced by his teachings. Note the fastidiousness of Dupré's notation, particularly with respect to the soprano and alto lines in the first measure of Figure 1.4. The strict, almost obsessive adherence to the rule of half-value repeated notes is particularly evident with multiple voices in play.



Figure 1.4 J.S. Bach's *Fugue in G*, BWV 541; from Marcel Dupré, *Méthode d'Orgue* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1927), 58. Reproduced with permission.

The purpose of these opening pages has *not* been to suggest that a majority of performers continue to perform Bach today in the manner of Dupré. Some do, but the enormous influence of the Historically Informed Performance movement (H.I.P.) has led to very different ways of performing Bach and much music written prior to 1900. Nor

has it been my object to criticize the inherent worth of the Dupré method. In fact, the *Méthode d'Orgue* is of invaluable assistance to the present-day organist who seeks to interpret the works of Dupré and his contemporaries (such as Duruflé and, to a great extent, Dupré's student Messiaen) with aesthetic conviction; the examples by Bach are not, after all, in a section on how to play repeated notes in Bach, but in a section on how to play repeated notes in *general*. It is in this role – as a key to understanding the performance practice of the stricter side of the late-Romantic/early-Modernist French organ school – that the *Méthode* still has currency today.

My principal interest here is not, however, the performance of French music. What I aim to do is to explore performance practice in the much less well-known repertoire of early 20th-century English music. This widely-performed body of music (which includes composers such as Elgar, Stanford, Bairstow and Howells) is rich for exploration through the availability of various materials, including historical recordings and method books geared towards advanced organists. What makes this repertoire especially challenging is the prevailing myth among performers today that an unbroken performance tradition links them to the organists and organist-composers of the early 20th century. In fact, the interpretation of English music from this era today tends to be strongly influenced by the performance aesthetics of France. The tremendous impact of French organ pedagogy in both England and America,⁵ especially since the Second World War, has obscured the fact that the French style was not important to organ performance in England in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This is not to say that

⁵ In addition to the influences already cited, Alexandre Guilmant helped found the Guilmant Organ School in New York in 1899. The school flourished until the mid-1960s, closing in the early 1970s. See William Enriken's article on the school at organfocus.com, available through the following link, accessed March 21, 2010: http://www.organfocus.com/members/w_enriken/guilmant_school.php3 Orpha Ochse also discusses the Guilmant School of New York, though in less detail, in *Organists and Organ Playing in Nineteenth-Century France and Belgium* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 112.

the French school has been exported and maintained abroad in some kind of 'pure form,' but vestiges of the French style do make their way into a generalized 'Romantic' performance practice that is widely heard today in the interpretation of English organ music.

What I have found from my analysis of historic recordings and treatises is that, contrary to the aesthetics of Dupré, many early 20th-century English organists displayed a great deal of rhythmic flexibility and a variety of touch that provides aural interest beyond a legato-verses-staccato opposition. On pages 18 through 23, I will compare Harold Darke's 1957 recording of Herbert Howells' *Fugue, Chorale and Epilogue* to two recent recordings that, in my view, show a strong French influence. A much more extended analysis of recordings is to be found in Chapter 4. Before undertaking this analysis, however, I think it is important to discuss Dupré's aesthetics in more detail, and to take advantage of his many recordings to aid our understanding of his musical ideals. By better understanding Dupré's aesthetic system, we can appreciate just how different it is from the musical concept of most early 20th-century English organists.

That Dupré performed in a manner consistent with his *Méthode* is well documented in his many recordings. The repeated-note principle was not his invention but was performed by him and his followers with amazing consistency and meticulous precision.⁶ Turning briefly to Dupré's recording of his own *Le Chemin de la Croix* (composed 1931, recorded 1958 at Saint-Sulpice, Paris) we see on page 11 (3rd Station: *Jésus tombe sous le poids de sa Croix*) a descending sigh pattern printed as follows:⁷

⁶ Widor's ideas about repeated notes were very similar to those of Dupré. See: Orpha Ochse, *Organists*, 186. Additionally, Louis Vierne's unfinished, posthumously published method demonstrates the repeated-note principle in meticulous detail using examples from Bach. See: Louis Vierne, *Méthode d'Orgue* (Paris: l'Association des Amis de l'Orgue, 1987), 37-39.

⁷ Marcel Dupré, *Le Chemin de la Croix*. (Paris: Durand, 1932), 11. [converted to Sibelius notation software].

Moderato assai (60 = ♩)

R. Sw.

P.R. Ch.Sw.

Ped. R. Sw. to Ped.

Figure 1.5 from Marcel Dupré *Le Chemin de la Croix, Troisième Station* (Paris: Durand, 1932), 11. [converted to Sibelius notation software].

This passage is executed by Dupré, as prescribed in his *Méthode*, in the following way:⁸

Moderato assai (60 = ♩)

R. Sw.

P.R. Ch.Sw.

Ped. R. Sw. to Ped.

Figure 1.6 represents Figure 1.5 as executed by Dupré in his 1958 recording at Saint-Sulpice.

In this recording and others, Dupré's note releases always occur in an extremely rhythmic fashion *at the precise onset of the rest*. Given the sustaining nature of the organ, this has the effect of the rest itself giving off a kind of accent. These extraordinarily rhythmic releases in repeated and staccato notes, combined with the absolute legato practiced in most other musical contexts, are very distinctive aspects of Dupré's organ playing sound. The score of *Le Chemin de la Croix* could in fact be viewed as quite bare-looking; in general, phrasing and slur marks appear very seldom as absolute legato is

⁸ Marcel Dupré, perf. *Le Chemin de la Croix*, recorded 1958. Westminster, mono LP.

assumed unless otherwise directed. This nearly-continuous legato makes the repeated and staccato notes, when they do occur, sound all the more 'sharp' and biting.

There is a sense in which an organist who had internalized all the principles of Dupré's *Méthode* and was in possession of a score of his *Chemin* could replicate a performance very like the composer's own. The methodological system and the musical aesthetic are encoded in the score; mastery of the technical principles set out in the *Méthode* provides the key. While it is generally dangerous to make broad aesthetic proclamations based on a treatise, I believe the recordings attest to the fact that Dupré's own practice in advanced repertoire does in fact line up closely with his principles as outlined in his method. The final three measures of the 4th Station (*Jésus rencontre sa mère*) come at the end of a section of highly dissonant melodic and contrapuntal writing full of minor ninth sonorities; it is a harmonically bittersweet depiction of Jesus' encounter with his mother. Regardless of this context, Dupré's performance of the variation is rhythmically rigid right to the end, and includes a very 'sharp' repeated note in the penultimate measure, without a hint of a *rallentando*.

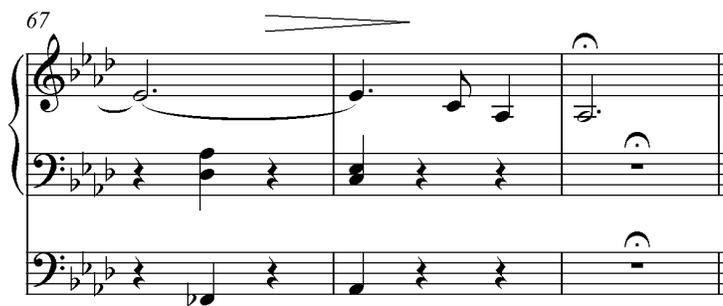


Figure 1.7 from *Le Chemin de la Croix, Quatrième Station* (Paris: Durand, 1932), 18.

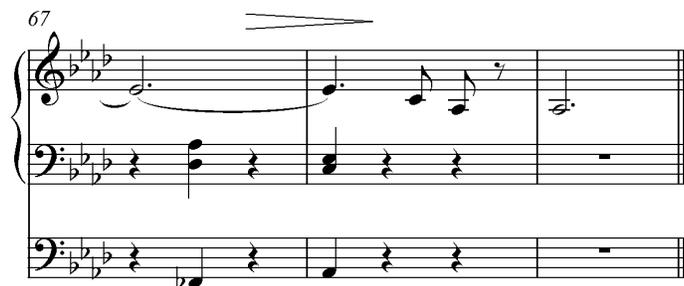


Figure 1.8 represents Figure 1.7 as performed by Dupré in his recording.⁹

While one does admire Dupré for his ability to execute sometimes-dense textures with a very smooth and clean legato (not to mention his jaw-dropping virtuosity demonstrated in other sections of his recording of *Chemin*), he created a score that allows for his own aesthetic system to be realized; where absolute legato is assumed, it is possible to achieve it. But it is precisely here that one starts to see marked differences between French and English ways of writing for the organ in the first half of the 20th century. Such differences were noted by organist and editor Harvey Grace in a 1918 article entitled “Modern French Organ Music.” Grace compliments the French for the texture of their organ music which is, to his way of thinking, more organ-idiomatic:

The modern French organ composer is above all neat and polished in workmanship, and economical in his use of material. Too much English organ music is decidedly untidy in its laying out. This is partly due to the fact that many of our composers regard the organ as a kind of compressed orchestra, with the result that their music looks like a full score boiled down and served up in a rather indigestible and messy way. The same difference is to be seen in the matter of organ arranging. A French transcriber appears to aim at producing, not so much a reduction of the score, as an effective piece of organ music. An Englishman is keen on seeing how many of the orchestral features of the original he can retain.¹⁰

The thick textures alluded to by Harvey Grace require decision-making on the part of the performer that cannot be neatly codified in a system along the lines of Dupré's. Such textures are to be found in Herbert Howells' *Rhapsodies, Op.17* (1915-1918). These pieces

⁹ Marcel Dupré, perf. *Le Chemin de la Croix*, recorded 1958. Westminster, mono LP.

¹⁰ Harvey Grace, “Modern French Organ Music,” *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 44th Session (1917-1918), 155.

were written by a composer who played the organ, but the dense nature of the writing leads one to believe that he conceived of the interpreter's role in a different way from Dupré. The stark differentiation between legato and staccato in the Dupré school makes interpretation of much early 20th-century French music relatively straightforward. But while the importance of legato is certainly spelled out in English organ tutors from John Stainer (1877) to Percy Buck (1912) the dense textures exemplified in the following passage render absolute legato impossible. In Herbert Howells' *Rhapsody No. 2* (Figure 1.9), absolute legato in all voices cannot be attained where long slurs would, at least initially, seem to imply it as an ideal;¹¹ even achieving legato in the top voice of m. 51 would come at the cost of releasing the lower two notes of the RH chord on beat 1 very early. It is in situations such as these where we see that the 'cleanliness' of French organ performance aesthetics are somewhat at odds with English organ music from the same era.

I am not juxtaposing the two national styles to suggest they are polar opposites, nor to suggest that all French organists played in the manner of Dupré (though many did). Rather, it is my intention to point out that Dupré's style of performance, which was so pervasive in its pedagogical reach in the mid- (and even late-) 20th century, is deeply problematic when applied to most English Romantic organ music of the same era. The interpretation of 'problem' textures, such as those in Figure 1.9, will be dealt with in Chapters 2 and 4. For now, though, we need to understand the reasons for the absence of a unified, and codified, performance tradition in England.

¹¹ The long slur in early 20th-century English organ music (and its tangential relationship with legato) will be discussed in subsequent chapters. The long slur (or phrase mark) is encountered far less frequently in French organ music of this era. This is particularly true in the case of Dupré, where legato is assumed unless repeated notes, staccato dots, or other markings indicate otherwise.



Figure 1.9 from Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No. 2* (London: Augener, 1919), mm. 50-51.

While the French playing tradition did change over time from César Franck (1822-1890) to Charles-Marie Widor (1844-1937) to Marcel Dupré (1886-1971), their pedagogy – at least at the highest level of artistry – was conservatory-based and somewhat unified in its ideals. The importance of absolute legato as prescribed by the Belgian Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens (1823-1881) was influential at the Paris Conservatoire, the Niedermeyer School for church music and the Schola Cantorum.¹² While not all French organists played alike, this stricter school, as mentioned earlier, was the one marketed for export, and had a strong worldwide influence. In England, a conservatory-like system at institutions such as the Royal College of Music was beginning to emerge at the turn of the 20th century. Some organists, such as RCM teacher Walter Alcock (in *The Organ* of 1913) professed a strictness of contrast in terms of staccato and legato that could be viewed as similar to the French approach. Yet this was but one strand of pedagogy (albeit one that would become increasingly important). And although Alcock states the following: “... on the organ two touches only are possible –

¹² See: Ochse, *Organists*, especially 174–223.

legato and *staccato*,”¹³ he does not systematize these touches as Dupré did in conjunction with repeated notes. Rather, he takes pains to point out that there are differing “degrees of staccato.”¹⁴ Perhaps the most important reason, however, for a much less systematic approach to organ performance in England than in France, had to do with the very different training system for organists in England. While some organists attended the conservatory, most did not take the route of this kind of systematic training. Instead, they learnt their trade at cathedrals and collegiate chapels through the Articled Pupil apprentice system. Such instruction necessarily varied from location to location and thus the English style of performance was not so unified as the French nor as closely wedded to the conventions of published scores.

The orchestral ideals alluded to by Harvey Grace constituted another major influence on the English performance style. There remained in England well into the 20th century an active tradition of transcribing orchestral works for the organ. The concept of ‘organ-as-orchestra’ existed in France in its own way (as in, for example, Charles-Marie Widor's Organ Symphonies) but in that country it was truly adapted to the organ in the score itself. In England, dense orchestral textures often remained in transcriptions and, frequently, in original compositions for the organ as well. Many of the resultant interpretive ambiguities, particularly with regard to touch in dense textures, can to a large extent be resolved, or at the least a number of viable possibilities presented (more on this in later chapters). But for the moment, suffice it to say that the scores of many English organ pieces from the late 19th and early 20th centuries tread the line between an orchestral reduction and an organ composition, and more significant decision-making – certainly decision-making falling outside the confines of an organ

¹³ Walter Alcock, *The Organ* (Borough Green, Kent: Novello, 1913), 35.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 33.

treatise – is often required of the executant.

It should not be inferred that there was widespread anti-French sentiment in English organ circles in the early 20th century, only that the approach to the instrument was different. The Harvey Grace article presents the French organ score in an unabashedly positive light. Similarly, J. Stuart-Archer, writing in *The Organ* speaks in glowing terms of Dupré's virtuosity and improvisational prowess in British concert appearances in the 1920s. But, perhaps comparing Dupré's registration practice to that commonly heard in England, Archer says: "Of his playing of set pieces the distinguishing quality is a certain note of austerity in his treatment of the organ. There is no pose, there are no tricks."¹⁵ Dupré's somewhat rigid performance style may not have been frowned upon in Britain, but it was noticed – even by one of his strongest supporters.

In Sverker Jullander's 2004 article *Timeless Interpretations? Observations on Tempo Fluctuation in Early Organ Recordings*, the author compares French and English organ-playing styles of the early 20th century.¹⁶ Jullander takes pains to point out that individual personalities formed a large part of the organ performance culture of the era. Nonetheless, his exhaustive comparison of recordings allows for meaningful generalizations about national playing style which succinctly sum up the issues at hand. Jullander found that English organists "prefer large-scale tempo variations to the use of *tempo rubato* on a more detailed level; they also tend to take more liberties with composer's indications than the French" and concluded that this "may reflect a stronger secular element in the organ culture of Britain ... as compared to France, where the

¹⁵ J. Stuart-Archer, "Marcel Dupré: an Appreciation," *The Organ* 2, no. 5 (July, 1922): 45.

¹⁶ Sverker Jullander, "Timeless Interpretations? Observations on Tempo Fluctuation in Early Organ Recordings," ed. Andrew McCrea, *Journal of the British Institute of Organ Studies* 28 (2004): 117-147.

concept of 'virtuoso' was foreign to the ethics of the Lemmens/Widor school..."¹⁷ While there was a certain amount of secular organ playing in France – Franck's *Trois Pièces* were written for the Cavallé-Coll organ built at the Trocadéro in 1878 (and starting with Alexandre Guilmant, many French organists undertook concert tours to the U.S.) – Jullander is correct to assert that concert-hall performances were much more common in Britain. By the end of Widor's tenure as organ professor at the *Conservatoire* (he was organ professor there from 1890 to 1896), the French organ school did indeed attain a strictness that could be seen as having quasi-ethical overtones. To quote Widor: "Every illogical variation in the intensity of the sound, every nuance which, graphically, cannot be represented by a right line, is a crime."¹⁸ This becomes even more pronounced in Dupré, who stated that: "The interpreter must never allow his own personality to appear. As soon as it penetrates the work has been betrayed."¹⁹ This is in contrast to the English players (broadly defined) who, as Jullander puts it "took the issue of faithfulness to the composition quite as seriously as did the champions of 'objective' performance, although in a different sense, using agogic fluctuations as one means ... to bring out the expressive content of the music – what might be termed its spirit or soul."²⁰ Thus the early 20th-century English organist may well have seen no inconsistency in subtly changing the score to be faithful to the spirit of the composition as he saw it. Whatever the reasons (influence of transcriptions, or the culture of virtuosity as Jullander asserts), the recordings bear out that a 'spirit of arrangement' was practiced by English organists when playing set repertoire in the early 20th century.

In a 1968 interview of Healey Willan (1880-1968) by Alec Wyton (1921-2007), the

¹⁷ Jullander, "Timeless Interpretations?": 139.

¹⁸ Ochse, *Organists*, 187.

¹⁹ Marcel Dupré, *Philosophie de Musique* (Tourani: Collegium Musicum, 1984), 43; quoted in Jullander, 140.

²⁰ Jullander, "Timeless Interpretations?": 140.

following exchange takes place [Willan and Wyton were both born in Britain; Willan moved to Canada, Wyton to the United States]:

Wyton: Speaking of Elgar, you must have played his organ sonata.
Do you think it is a good work?

Willan: Yes, to a certain extent, but it doesn't altogether fit the organ.

Wyton: Did you know George D. Cunningham [1878-1948]? I *worshipped* at his shrine, and he used to say that the Elgar Sonata reminded him of an organ transcription of a violin sonata. He used to thin it out.

Willan: That's quite right. I heard Cunningham play several times. He was jolly good. I always admired his sensitivity..²¹

It is difficult to assess, based on Cunningham's 1930 recording of the first movement of the Elgar *Sonata*, whether or not the sometimes-massive textures are thinned out. If so, this is done rather discreetly. But if Wyton's assertion is true, it raises a broader question. It could suggest that Cunningham, in seeing this work as not "altogether fit[ting] the organ," decided to make certain adaptations in the manner of a transcription. The thinning of textures is a very sensible (and necessary) option when transcribing an orchestral work for the organ. But what is immediately noticeable to the listener of Cunningham's recording, however, are alterations (interpretations?) of a different kind.²² From mm. 4 through 7 (see Figure 1.10), Cunningham rapidly accelerates, and then 'uses' the staccato marks in mm. 7 and 8 to assist in an unnotated *ritardando* to the marked *tenuto* on the 3rd beat of m. 8.

²¹ Healey Willan "Healey Willan's Musical London," interview by Alec Wyton, *Music: The A.G.O. Magazine* 2, no. 1 (January, 1968), 33, 52-53.

²² All references are to the 1896 Breitkopf edition. There was no English edition at the time of Cunningham's performance.



Figure 1.10 Edward Elgar, *Sonata in G Major* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Haertel, 1896), mm. 1-13.

He settles in to a tempo of quarter = circa 126, slowing down to q. = 104 in mm. 22-25 (see Figure 1.11), then abruptly shifts back to q. = 126 at the onset of the second theme in m. 26 (possibly the entrance of the 'violin'). While none of these tempo variations is marked in the score, the tempo switch in m. 26 in particular builds excitement at the onset of the new material and marks a clear formal seam.



Figure 1.11 Edward Elgar, *Sonata in G Major*. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Haertel, 1896), mm. 22-27.

These unnotated rhythmic alterations may not have anything to do with the orchestral overtones of the piece. Regardless, these personal choices (possible changes in texture, unprescribed tempo shifts) are absolutely at odds with the strict decrees of

Widor and Dupré and go against more general trends in score interpretation that gained widespread currency later in the 20th century.

Indeed, the influence of the French organ school cannot fully explain why English organ scores from the early 20th century are challenging to interpret today. The French methodology I have outlined has its origins in the late 19th century and was codified by Dupré in 1927. But I would argue that the strictness of this school of organ playing (including ultra-prescribed articulation rules and a sharp differentiation between staccato and legato), dovetails quite fluidly with more generalized transnational musical aesthetics of the mid-20th century. The second movement of Igor Stravinsky's 1924 *Piano Sonata* seems deeply reminiscent of Dupré's sharp legato/staccato opposition, and the stark smooth/sharp contrast is extraordinarily apparent in the composer's own recording.²³

With composers such as Stravinsky as standard-bearers of the cause, “fidelity to the score” became an almost moral imperative in the mid-20th century concurrent with the rise of Urtext editions. Unfortunately, such an obsession with “authenticity” can lead to myopic, excessively dry interpretations that privilege the dots on the page over an understanding of the performance culture from which a given score originated. As is pointed out in Bruce Haynes's *The End of Early Music*, even Romantic historicists can succumb to rather “straight” interpretations, to use his term. The author points to a 1999 release of Stokowski's orchestral transcriptions of Bach organ works as recorded by the Los Angeles Philharmonic under the direction of Esa-Pekka Salonen. One would think that such a self-conscious homage to one of the masters of the late-Romantic orchestra

²³ See: Igor Stravinsky, *Sonate* (London: Hawkes & Son, 1925), 9. See also Igor Stravinsky, perf. *Sonate, Mvt. II*, recording accessed March 20, 2010: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTGoqle4m34>

would take Stokowski's performance style into strong consideration (Stokowski was of course also an English organist). But Haynes notes that while Stokowski's orchestration is meticulously observed, the passionate rhythmic flexibility – one might even say irregularity – that is so immediately audible in Stokowski's own recordings is not to be found in Salonen's rendering.²⁴ This leads to a central problem. As Laurence Dreyfus points out in describing a very different musical era (18th-century Germany), it is pointless to enforce the 'objectivity of the score' when dealing with a musical culture that did not value this ideal.²⁵ Such an imposition is certainly not the goal of this dissertation; rather, I assert that it is crucial to step away from a modernist mentality when interpreting English Romantic organ scores. This is not a blind surrender to an "anything goes" performance style. But I believe that recognizing the pervasiveness of French organ pedagogy and modernist approaches to the score constitutes a critical first step if we are to look at this music on its own terms. In the interpretation of English Romantic organ music, "authentic" (if we are to even use that charged word) would, in most cases, involve presenting a number of possibilities for interpretation, rather than one 'logical' outcome. Why? Because, as Cunningham's recording and countless other sources prove, the vast majority of English organists educated in the late- 19th and early-20th centuries remained unabashedly old-fashioned in their performance style; there is nothing in their performances that suggests "score objectivity" as that term might have been understood by Dupré or Stravinsky. In *A Manual of English Church Music*, George Gardner and Sydney H. Nicholson state that "Mechanical exactitude is the curse of

²⁴ Bruce Haynes, *The End of Early Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 50-51.

²⁵ Laurence Dreyfus, "Early Music Defended against Its Devotees: A Theory of Historical Performance in the Twentieth Century," *The Musical Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (Summer, 1983): 301.

modern architecture. There is no need for its blight to pass across church music."²⁶ Indeed, from the first recordings of English organ music by English organists in the 1920s to recordings by Harold Darke and Herbert Sumsion (both born before 1900) made as late as the 1960s, the older generation displayed a rhythmic flexibility, and a variety of touch that is seldom heard in recordings and performances of early 20th-century English organ music today.

To conclude this introductory discussion, let us look at a particularly striking example of a recorded performance that departs significantly from the published score. In 1957, Herbert Howells' friend and close contemporary Harold Darke (1888-1976, dedicatee of Howells' 1915 *Rhapsody in D-flat*) recorded Howells' 1940 *Fugue, Chorale and Epilogue* from *Six Pieces* (Figure 1.12).²⁷ The recording was made live at St. Michael's, Cornhill at the 1957 International Congress of Organists. One can suppose, therefore, that Darke took some care in the preparation of the piece and that he meant what he played; at the age of 68, he was still very active as a recitalist. The first thing one notices about Darke's recording is his extraordinary rhythmic flexibility. While his mean tempo at the outset is quarter = circa 46, slower than the marked quarter = 54, there is often a considerable amount of fluctuation within each four-measure phrase. For example, Darke dwells quite noticeably on the downbeat of measure 2, treating the 'c' as a kind of appoggiatura to the 'b.' Likewise, Darke very frequently performs a subtle *accelerando* through the descending four-note group of sixteenth notes first heard in measure 2. He does this most prominently at measure 8. In performing this recurring group of 16th notes, Darke generally dwells on the first note before speeding up, which has the effect

²⁶ George Gardner and Sydney H. Nicholson, *A Manual of English Cathedral Music* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1923, rev. 1936), 77-78.

²⁷ Harold Darke, perf. *Organists of the 1950s, Vol. II. Live recital performances from the First [1957] International Congress of Organists*. Amphion, PHI CD 201, 2004, compact disc.

of 'grounding' the acceleration. Still, due to the metrical placement of the grouping, he often reaches the downbeat 'early' and to reestablish the tempo, frequently compensates by holding the downbeat a bit longer than notated.

By contrast, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Graham Barber's 1996 recording of the same passage is metronomically rigid.²⁸ He takes a tempo of quarter = 44, and with very few exceptions sticks with this beat for the first two pages of the work. The dotted figure in the first measure is played with a Dupré-style repeated note (dot is removed) and Barber performs the gesture in this manner almost every time the dotted figure recurs (by contrast, Darke's repetition of the note in the first measure is barely perceptible and extremely gentle). Additionally, Barber interprets Howells' dynamic and hairpin markings with great subtlety; so much so that *crescendi* and *decrescendi* are often barely noticeable (this is particularly true in measures 9 through 11). Darke, on the other hand often adds stops where a louder dynamic is notated and makes very noticeable use of the swell box throughout. And while Howells marks a *decrescendo* beginning in measure 17, Darke doesn't begin his (extremely noticeable) *decrescendo* until measure 18. Clearly Darke, like Cunningham, wasn't opposed to a bit of reinterpretation.

Paul Derrett's 2004 recording of the same piece is less rigid than Barber's.²⁹ He, like Barber, takes a quarter-note tempo of approximately 44, and while he isn't afraid to push and pull the beat in a very subtle way (for example, he subtly delays the 'd' following the eighth rest in the top voice in measure 8, and holds the downbeat of measure 10 for a split-second longer than notated), he is nowhere near as flexible as Darke. Derrett's repeated notes are in general quite gentle and unrhythmic, but in

²⁸ Graham Barber, perf. *The Organ Music of Herbert Howells, vol. 2*, Priory, 1996, compact disc.

²⁹ Paul Derrett, perf. *English Organ Music from St. Mary Redcliffe*, Amphion, PHI CD 222, 2008, compact disc.

Quasi lento, serio ed espressivo $\text{♩} = 54$

mp sw. *mp*

mf

f

dim. *mp*

mf 8' only

f

Figure 1.12 Herbert Howells. *Fugue, Chorale and Epilogue* from *Six Pieces* (London: Novello, 1953, copyright renewed 1981), mm. 1-17. All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured. Reprinted by Permission.

measure 7 he switches to a rhythmically 'sharp' repetition (dot is removed). Derrett's overall tempo switches to quarter = circa 40 around measure 16 and remains at this speed until the tempo change at measure 27. So, he *changes* tempo, but does not have a truly flexible tempo in the first 26 measures of the piece. Like Barber, Derrett's dynamic shadings are also extraordinarily subtle.

Far from making the listener seasick, the rhythmic malleability of Darke's recording lends the opening pages of Howells' work a great deal of tenderness. Darke's timing isn't erratic. Rather, he responds to poignant dissonance (usually by slowing down), melodic profile (such as the previously-mentioned *accelerando* through the group of four 16th notes), *crescendi* (often speeding up) and *decrescendi* (often slowing down). Further, Darke slows down to 'prepare' a new voice entrance; while Barber slows down infinitesimally before the pedal entrance in measure 13, Darke begins his *rallentando* at the m. 12 *diminuendo*, slows down more to 'enjoy' the dissonance between the soprano and alto 'e' and 'd' in m. 13 and finally settles onto beat 3. Darke's version has the effect of making the pedal entrance seem special (and it is; after four measures of a codetta, the pedal entrance marks the start of the counter exposition). If Darke doesn't do *exactly* what is on the page, he is far truer to the spirit of the piece as prescribed by Howells than are Barber and Derrett; the latter two seem to have left out the last word of the following directive: *Quasi lento, serio ed espressivo*.

In his article *What do we perform?* Roy Howat says: "A musical score has two basic ways of indicating the recipe for a performance: either by the method 'add 50 grams of flour' or by the method 'add enough flour to achieve a smooth consistency'."³⁰ Dupré's method, in combination with his music, could be seen as belonging to the former

³⁰ Roy Howat, "What do we perform?" in *The Practice of Performance: Studies in Musical Interpretation*, ed. John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7.

category: in his style of playing, most, if not all, the information required for a 'correct' performance is embedded in the score. By contrast, Darke's performance of Howells' *Fugue, Chorale and Epilogue* suggests to me that Darke – a close contemporary and friend of Howells – could not have seen the score in such prescriptive terms. If we view Howat's categories as legitimate, I would have to place the bulk of Howells' organ music, as well as much other late 19th and early 20th century English organ music – especially that with a relatively dense texture that precludes absolute legato (and suggests some kind of orchestral influence) – in the latter category. The “indigestible and messy” textures to which Grace alluded could in fact signify a compositional philosophy that gives much greater responsibility (and therefore much more freedom) to the performer. The 'lack of respect for the score,' so apparent in many early- to mid-20th-century recordings of English organ music by English organists, should, I hope give license to today's performers to experiment with flexible approaches to touch (though not forgetting that legato was important) and to be rhythmically free, even wild. In Chapters 2 and 4, more specific interpretive possibilities for what I call this 'spirit of arrangement' will be suggested.

I contend that the far reach of late-Romantic French pedagogy and modernist fidelity-to-the-score aesthetics from the mid 20th century compromise our ability to interpret early 20th-century English organ music. In the English organ loft, less rigid performance aesthetics lasted well into the 20th century; the surviving printed and recorded evidence suggests that English organists were often extremely free in their sense of timing, rather flexible in terms of touch, and perfectly comfortable in making substantial changes to the printed score. In short, the English culture of transcription was difficult to dissociate from the composition and performance of 'legitimate' organ music, and a 'spirit of arrangement' remained important to many of the performers who

were born before 1900 (and some born after). Much of this chapter has necessarily dealt with what late 19th and early 20th-century English organ music *isn't*. In the following chapters, through analysis of recordings and other source materials, I will attempt to assess the performance practice of this music on its own terms and in Chapter 4, I shall continue to focus special attention on the remarkable, and challenging, music of Herbert Howells.

Chapter 2:

Touch, Slurs and Phrasing at the English Organ in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries

Four Accounts:

James Turpin (1840-1896)

A. Eaglefield Hull (1876-1928)

Lindsay Lafford (b.1913)

Francis Jackson (b.1917)

As discussed in Chapter 1, the absolute legato practiced in many contemporary performances of post-1800 organ music seems historically incongruous when applied broadly to English organ music from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This becomes especially apparent when examining source materials that deal with organ playing at an advanced level. While legato was undeniably a usual touch, even the “normal” touch for the organ, it was readily dispensed with in a variety of musical and textural contexts.

Though it might initially seem clearer to deal with touch, slurs and phrasing as discrete subjects treated by various sources, in reality these categories are so interrelated that such a course of action would be highly artificial. I will therefore treat each *source* discretely, offering the author’s (or interviewee’s) insights and conclusions. I will also provide my own analysis with respect to each author and will make broader generalizations at the conclusion of the chapter. These sources are little-known today, but they are vital documents with respect to early 20th-century performance practice at the organ.

James Turpin (1840-1896)

James Turpin’s lecture delivered to the College of Organists on June 1st, 1880 reveals much of his thinking in terms of organ touch, slurs, phrasing and expression.

Turpin (not to be confused with his brother Edmund Turpin) was sometime organist of St. Andrew's Church, Watford and was a highly regarded performer at the time of his death in 1896. While Turpin was not an incumbent of a prestigious cathedral or chapel post, his dense 22-page lecture entitled "Phrasing and Expression on the Organ" is the work of a sophisticated thinker and performer. And if the published responses are to be believed, the more famous organists in attendance at the lecture's delivery (such as James Higgs, co-editor of the Novello edition of Bach's organ works) received it warmly. It is an important source primarily because it deals with issues of touch and articulation in a direct and exhaustive way.

Turpin attempts to debunk the notion that the organ, because of its sustaining nature, is not well suited to wide-ranging musical expression:

It is frequently urged that the absence of control over the sound production of the organ, from the commencement of a note until the finger is lifted from the key, precludes any attempts even at giving different modes of expression to notes; or, to use a definition applied to wind instruments in France, articulation.³¹

He then urges the reader to let go of any "conventionalities or prejudices that may stand in the way during the progress of [this] enquiry" and alludes to the fact that a fondness for continuous legato may be one of those biases.³² He asks the reader to consider the expressive power of orchestral instruments, especially in terms of bowing (string instruments) and tonguing (wind instruments):

All who are acquainted with the effects of expression upon [orchestral] instruments are familiar with the power of detaching from each other or binding together the notes into phrases, and the immense variety of modes of expression obtained by the skilful use of the bow on the string, or the breathing and tonguing on wind instruments.³³

Through the conscientious shortening of the final phrase notes, Turpin maintains that

³¹ James Turpin, "Phrasing and Expression on the Organ," *College of Organists Lectures* (1880): 53.

³² *Ibid*, 53.

³³ *Ibid*, 61.

the organist can increase musical interest in a manner analogous to bowing and tonguing in orchestral music. What Turpin defines as a phrase will be discussed shortly. For now, let us consider exactly how he believes organists should shorten these final phrase notes.

Turpin begins by considering a dotted half note followed by a quarter rest. According to his musical aesthetics, it is critical that in playing such a note on the organ (which has no decay), the note be shortened so it does not obtrude into the fourth beat “which should be a complete crotchet [quarter note] rest.”³⁴ For him, releasing the dotted half note at the precise onset of the fourth beat would create an undesirable accent but moreover is unnecessary; for Turpin, releasing a dotted half note “simultaneously with the occurrence of the third beat, it will be seen that the effect to the hearer is that the note is of three beats in length, and the remaining or unaccented portion of the third beat may be cut away as of no value ...”³⁵ Therefore, in the case of a three-beat note, carrying it to the onset of the third beat creates a sufficient accent to give the impression of a three-beat note to a listener. So, in the scenario where a given note is followed by a rest, Turpin specifies the following:

1. For a note that is longer than one beat, one should shave off one beat. For example, a half note followed by a rest “would be ended with the occurrence of the second beat.”³⁶ A dotted half note, as described previously, would be released with the occurrence of the third beat.³⁷
2. Notes of a single beat are held for three quarters of their value. For example a quarter note would become a dotted eighth, released at the occurrence of its 3rd 16th note.³⁸

For Turpin, the situation is similar, but not identical, for the ends of phrases. At the end

³⁴ Turpin, 55.

³⁵ Ibid, 55.

³⁶ Ibid, 55.

³⁷ Ibid, 55-56.

³⁸ Ibid, 55-56.

of a phrase mark where the music continues not with a rest but the beginning of a new phrase mark, the guidelines are as follows. For notes longer than one beat, the situation is identical to #1 above. For notes of a single beat, however, they should be reduced to half (not three-quarter) value: “To reduce this to simple practical language, the ending-note of a phrase of one beat would be played as if of only half a beat in value, followed by a half beat rest, to preserve the even measure of time.”³⁹ In setting out these principles, Turpin is writing in terms of long phrase marks. But he makes clear that they can and should also be applied to “smaller divisions of phrases, such as groups of two or more notes that may be bound together by a slur.”⁴⁰

Turpin appears to be setting up two distinct classes of phrase: large and small, the smaller ones being more closely allied with the word “slur.” Interestingly, though, he seems to recommend treating the conclusion of these different areas, which use the same symbol, in the same way. This suggests that under a large phrasing mark, smaller phrases, or slurred areas, can also exist. And these smaller areas can be detached from one another through the note shortening method described above. Perhaps one could say that for Turpin, while the phrase and the slur are different ideas, they are acknowledged, both typographically and aurally, in the same way.

A legitimate criticism of Turpin’s ideas thus far could be that he seems to have a “one size fits all” approach to the conclusion of phrases and slurs (while at the same time railing against the monotony of unyielding legato). While there can be an overlapping and therefore aurally complex nature to the large and small phrases, there is a great uniformity of treatment: If a note is in context A, do X. If it is in context B, do Y. This idea will be taken up later in this chapter.

³⁹ Turpin, 63.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 63.

Though he doesn't tie it explicitly to his phrasing argument, Turpin does discuss different kinds of touch elsewhere in his paper. These thoughts on touch are informative in and of themselves, but they are also related to the phrasing ideals discussed above. While the following discussion will concern non-legato touch, it is important to acknowledge the importance Turpin placed upon legato: "Unquestionably, the great strength and glory of the organ in the ways of expression, is in the legato style. That will be admitted by all."⁴¹ But he goes on to say that "The value of everything is by comparison. A monotonous unvarying level legato style of playing loses its value, by reason of its lack of contrast."⁴² Thus Turpin did think of legato as the default touch in organ playing but by the same token found its continuous use objectionable.

The importance of acoustics with respect to touch is not lost on Turpin, and he ties one of his main arguments in favor of an open touch to the resonant spaces in which organs normally reside:

Organs are mostly used in large resonant spaces, and the ability to give a clear and well-defined style to any passages when desired under those circumstances—also, to hold a choir, or a large body of voices, in subjection—are urgent requirements, which may be accomplished by the decisive distinctness got from the proper use of this manner of playing.⁴³

For Turpin, the "decisive distinctness" refers to the space between notes. As is clear from the above passage, the accompanimental role of the organ is closely tied to this distinctness, and should give the present-day accompanist of English choral music and hymns from the late 19th century pause for thought. But his first sentence hints at the importance of distinctness in other passages, too. Unfortunately, in the text quoted above, Turpin does not cite particular solo organ works or composers, so it is not

⁴¹ Turpin, 69.

⁴² Ibid, 69.

⁴³ Ibid, 66.

possible to definitively tie his views on touch to solo English organ music of that era.⁴⁴ What seems clearer, though is the importance that Turpin places on open touch in the organ music of J.S. Bach.

Turpin quotes more than a page of F. C. Griepenkerl's 1844 preface to the Peters edition of J.S. Bach's organ works. The passages that Turpin quotes have to do with the importance of "distinct" and "elastic touch." Here, as elsewhere in his essay, Turpin warns against *overlegato*, which can be caused by a building's acoustics or through smearing on the part of the player. According to Griepenkerl (quoted by Turpin), the player must, in order to attain the desired "distinctness" have "An elastic touch, which, in the single passages, hinders the blending of the tones which follow each other, but yet does not tear them asunder."⁴⁵

We shall now turn to Turpin's recommendations for the various signs seen in organ scores. His focus is on the so-called mezzo-staccato symbol (staccato dot with a slur over it), but the spirit of his comments goes beyond the particular sign at hand:

After a careful search through a number of authorities, the student who desires to know the meaning of these signs will probably be in some confusion as to which explanation to adopt: the combination of the slur-mark or bind with a dot placed over each note under it, called the mezzo-staccato mark, is almost peculiar to instrumentation ... Nearly all authorities speak of it in such a dubious and hesitating manner as tends to greater confusion rather than to any elucidation of the matter. The mark suggests what appears at first a slight paradox—a combination of two opposite modes of expression, the staccato and legato.⁴⁶

This idea of paradox or opposition is heartening for the modern reader to hear and does suggest that at least some of the present-day confusion with regard to such symbols is not new. I will return to the idea of these notational paradoxes in due course in relation to specific pieces and with regard to other authors' writings as well. For now, it may be

⁴⁴ Turpin, 66.

⁴⁵ *Johann Sebastian Bach's Kompositionen für die Orgel* (Leipzig: Peters, 1844), ed. F. Griepenkerl and F. Roitzsch, Preface, quoted in Turpin, 71.

⁴⁶ Turpin, 66-67.

more useful to summarize Turpin's concrete thoughts on how to interpret various symbols, including the one discussed above. With regard to the mezzo-staccato mark, (staccato dot with a slur over it), Turpin discusses its origins as a bowing symbol. In practical terms, he says that any mezzo-staccato note should be played for three quarters of its value. A regular staccato mark should be played for half-value. He also talks about the "dash or pointed-shaped mark placed over the note."⁴⁷ While it is not utterly clear which symbol(s) he means by this (possibly the wedge symbol), he is clear about his desired interpretation: one quarter of its value. He calls this *staccatissimo*.

A final word from Turpin in terms of expression on the organ: this falls slightly outside the topic of this chapter but is worth noting since it is an important aspect of the performance practice of the era. He speaks of the "organ end" wherein a final chord is rolled down. While Turpin feels that this effect can be used sparingly, he rails against its overuse. He says that in the transcription of orchestral music to the organ, this "organ end" should be avoided because it is not an effect performed by orchestras. Turpin states that when the organ end is performed, "let it be a complete chord at its last extremity, possessing the third and fifth with the bass when it ceases to exist, however much of it may have been thinned out and reduced in volume of sound."⁴⁸ Turpin finds it harsh when "a bare fifth is the last harmonic impression left for the mind to dwell upon."⁴⁹ So this effect may be used, but not overused, and some measure of skill in terms of the voicing of the chord must come into play.

James Turpin's lecture is valuable for a number of reasons. He states that a note followed by a rest must be reduced in value to avoid an accent caused by releasing at the onset of the rest. This is very different from the more modernist mode of score

⁴⁷ Turpin, 68.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 57-58.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 57.

interpretation where rests are often indeed accented (as I have discussed in Chapter 1). He seems to imply that notes need space at the ends of phrases and also, at times, more open touches are required. The open touches seem most valuable to him in resonant spaces to prevent blurring and to keep a choir and congregation in check. But they may also have great artistic value, as in the performance of Bach's organ works. His distinction between long and short phrases, and his use of the word 'slur' in reference to the latter is of great help to the present-day interpreter of late 19th-century English organ scores. While he does not speak at length on the difference between these two types of phrase, the fact that he acknowledges a distinction is useful, as it is a concept that is also discussed by other sources.⁵⁰ At the same time, he does advocate treating the ends of long and short phrases in the same manner, with a lift as prescribed earlier. It is not fully clear, however, if Turpin intends for his phrasing principles to be applied to 'phrases' that are not so marked. Does the performer play a significant role in determining the phrase if none is marked? My study of other authors and historical recordings would suggest 'yes.'

As stated before, the straightforwardness of some of his directives may seem a touch simplistic; one could read into Turpin's comments that one must always treat the end of a phrase in the same way. His tone is often matter-of-fact, and it is indeed possible that he intended a certain rigidity in the application of the principles he set out. On the other hand, this is an important document from 1880 that gives specific "how to" information on phrasing and expression marks. Taking the long view, though, I think the purpose of Turpin's lecture was to encourage variety over uniformity. He

⁵⁰ In a conversation I had on this topic with Dr. Giles Bryant (b.1934, Surrey, UK), Bryant stated, independent from any discussion of Turpin, that the idea of long phrase marks with shorter sub-phrases underneath (acknowledged through articulation) was concordant with his early musical training.

concludes his paper by stating that one of his main intentions was to “increase the capability of appealing to the emotions, as well as to the musical intelligence of the hearer.”⁵¹

A. Eaglefield Hull (1876-1928)

One of the most comprehensive published sources on touch, phrasing and expression at the early 20th-century English organ must be Eaglefield Hull’s little-known *Organ Playing: Its Technique and Expression* (London: Augener, 1911).⁵² Hull was an accomplished organist, composer and also a prolific author. He wrote extensively on matters pertaining to his own instrument (most notably as a regular contributor to *The Organ*) but was also well known for his writings on other musical matters. His 1916 book *A Great Russian Tone-Poet: Scriabin* was the first comprehensive study of the Russian composer in English.

While I maintain that *Organ Playing: Its Technique and Expression* is an extremely valuable document, one cannot approach the book without at least considering the events of Hull’s final year. At the time of his death by suicide in 1928, his reputation was in tatters. He was accused of plagiarism, and threw himself under a train at Huddersfield.⁵³ The accusations were well-founded and applied most specifically to his 1927 book *Music: Classical, Romantic and Modern*.⁵⁴ To a more limited extent, it appears that he plagiarized in other works as well.⁵⁵ Naturally, these serious accusations have

⁵¹ Turpin, 74.

⁵² A recent article by Anne Page [*Journal of the BIOS* 32 (2008): 84-99] discusses Hull’s classification of touches at some length. Her excellent article takes Hull as a springboard for looking backward to 19th-century (and earlier) English organ music, organs, and organ playing. It is my hope to look at Hull more in terms of the organ-playing style of his own time in the early 20th century.

⁵³ See obituary in *Musical Times* (1 December 1928): 1135. See also Nicolas Slonimsky, “Lexicographis secundus post Herculem labor,” *Notes [Second Series]* 33, no. 4 (June 1977): 764.

⁵⁴ See the following discussions in *Musical Times* (1 June 1928): 534-535, (1 July 1928): 640-641 and (1 August 1928): 735.

⁵⁵ See Gerald Abraham, review of *Skryabin* by Hugh Macdonald, *Music & Letters* 61, no. 1 (January 1980): 81-83.

likely led to a general lack of interest in his writings, and his dishonesty must be acknowledged. However, for the purposes of this study – trying to understand English aesthetics with regard to organ touch, phrasing and expression in the early 20th century – Hull’s 1911 work is far too comprehensive and pertinent to ignore. The detail with which he wrote about these matters is of immense help to the present-day organist who wishes to understand the performing culture of the time. The content of the book must come close to Hull’s own opinions on these matters even if there is a chance that not all of it is completely original. To the best of my knowledge, however, no charges of plagiarism were set against the work at hand.

Touch

Hull writes forty pages on touch in *Organ Playing: Its Technique and Expression*; twenty-eight pages are dedicated to Manual Touch and twelve to Pedal Touch. The sheer length of this section of the book should suggest the importance the author placed on the subject. The length is also indicative of the vast number of touches Hull considers integral to expressive organ playing. Obviously, I will not in any sense regurgitate Hull’s work, though I strongly recommend this section to any interested readers (pp. 24-64 of the book cited above). However, it may be of use to outline Hull’s thinking vis-à-vis the importance of variety of touch, to briefly list the touches indicated, and to consider a few of them in some detail.

Though his thesis comes in the midst of his enumeration of the various touches, it is worth reprinting since it strongly suggests that (a) certain players known to Hull used legato nearly exclusively and (b) Hull had numerous valid artistic reasons for objecting to this style of playing:

The above classification of touches may be a matter of surprise to some readers, especially to those who use the legato-touch to the exclusion of all others. Such a course is lamentable, inasmuch as the ear imperatively demands relief, whilst

phrasing and rhythm are necessary to satisfy the requirements of the intelligence. The rhythmical feeling is too often totally absent from much so-called organ-playing, and in place of it a shapeless flow of sound is offered ... However, since rhythm, variety, contrast, brightness, symmetry and meaning are now looked for as important requisites in organ-playing, the failure of the followers of the legato-cult is inevitable.⁵⁶

Hull's comments deal primarily with the releases of notes by which he means "the relative length of sound and the varying amount of separation in the flow of sound."⁵⁷

He professes that the actual release of the finger itself should be prompt – not a slow release in the Baroque sense.⁵⁸

He outlines eight basic touches; three are connected touches and four are disconnected touches. These eight touches are then discussed and demonstrated at length through printed examples. They appear on p. 28 of Hull's book as follows:

A. *Connected*

- 1) Legato.
- 2) Legatissimo or Portamento.
- 3) Glissando.

B. *Disconnected*

- 4) Staccatissimo.
- 5) Brillante or Mezzo-staccato (semi-detached).
- 6) Marcato (3/4 length).
- 7) Non-legato
- 8) The action of the hand and arm used for rapid changes of manuals, or of the body in releasing long final chords on heavy organs.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ A. Eaglefield Hull, *Organ Playing: Its Technique and Expression* (London: Augener, 1911), 34-35.

⁵⁷ Ibid, footnote on page 28.

⁵⁸ An organ's action greatly influences the possibilities of touch. When Hull's book was published in 1911, most large English organs employed tubular pneumatic action. Smaller organs were still often built with tracker action, which Hull described as the "most perfect." See Hull, 20-22.

⁵⁹ Hull, 28.

Critically, regarding these touches, Hull makes the following statements:

“Independently of these classes, there are innumerable grades betwixt and between; in fact there are as many intermediate ways of touching a note on the organ as there are notes in the Indian scale.”⁶⁰ And elsewhere, but complementary to the foregoing statement: “As a rule, matters of touch are generally left entirely to the player. However, printed touch indications are by no means uncommon and the following examples will show a few of the ways in which the various touches are marked.”⁶¹

So we have from Hull a basic premise that all-legato playing is dull and fundamentally inartistic and that variety of touch is an absolute requirement of expressive organ playing. He provides eight general touches but makes clear that an almost infinite number of touches are to be found (and should be explored) between the basic eight set forth. Before exploring the specific signs and symbols outlined by Hull, I wish to briefly dwell on his assertion that the performer has a great deal of license to choose his or her desired touch. It is a very revealing statement because it moves the author far away from the mid 20th-century concept of score-fidelity. It strongly suggests a spirit of arrangement, classifying the score as a guide and imbuing the performer with considerable interpretive powers, even suggesting that the performer has an obligation to make decisions in terms of the touch. When considering the many signs and symbols below, then, it is important to remember the following: While understanding the symbols’ meaning (at least so far as Hull perceived them) is very useful when looking at period scores, the absence of such marks should not mean an organist must refrain from performing the many touches outlined by Hull.

Before discussing these touches at more length, a critical component of Hull’s

⁶⁰ Hull, 34.

⁶¹ Ibid, 29.

approach must be mentioned: he associates many touches with specific stops and sounds. This can have to do with the speech characteristics of individual pipes or ranks or even, at times, extra-musical associations. Hull uses as examples a wide variety of pieces (both transcribed and original), from varying nationalities representing the Baroque to the early 20th century. While my primary interest is in English music from the era, the period sources (such as Hull) do not have so narrow a focus; on the contrary, our contemporary idea of performance practice is foreign to Hull, who would seem to apply the various touches to many periods and styles, if not on a whim, then by using far less strict criteria than we might do today. But I feel it is fair to apply 'Hull's touches' to English organ music of the early 20th century, even if a particular example is demonstrated using music from another period. This is due to the fact that, elsewhere in his book, such touches are applied to English repertoire and further, outside the confines of his book, identical signs and symbols are used widely by early 20th-century English organ composers.

In all of this discussion of variety of touch it could almost be tempting to think of legato as an exception. I find the documentary evidence that points in the direction of many touches to be musically liberating. But Hull, Turpin and other authors to be discussed, while certainly advocating variety, are quite clear in their assertion that what we might call the 'normal' or 'default' touch of the organ is indeed legato (even if there are good, and frequent reasons to depart from it). In Hull's words: "By no means let the student be tempted to undervalue *the legato touch*, or to neglect its cultivation, for it is the main touch of the organ."⁶² In reference to legato, Hull strongly encourages the simplest possible fingering and laments the fact that finger substitution is so often the mainstay of an organist's early training. He feels that basic piano fingering and

⁶² Hull, 35.

'extended' devices such as finger-crossing should be used before substitution is to come into play.⁶³ This closely echoes the thoughts of Edwin Evans (1844-1923), who, in his posthumously-published *Technics of the Organ*, divulged all sorts of ingenious fingerings to avoid substitution wherever possible.⁶⁴

We shall now return to the touches as listed in the order above (p. 34). Perhaps since it is the "main" touch, Hull spends comparatively little time discussing legato and does not make extended comments on appropriate moments for its use. However, elsewhere in his book, he mentions specifically that "Gamba-tone," with its slow speech "most favors the legato style."⁶⁵ While Hull's work is exhaustive, it is not by any means rigidly prescriptive, and assumes much decision-making on the part of the player.

With regard to the other connected touches: Hull defines the *Legatissimo* or *Portamento* touch as an overlapped legato. He does caution that this effect must be used judiciously. The following (Figure 2.1) is one of his musical examples:

Ex. XXVII. *
Sehr langsam. **WAGNER,**
Prelude to "Parsifal."
pp.
Sw. (String tone).

* Or the upper note may be held its exact value, whilst the lower one slightly anticipates its beat.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in 4/4 time, with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). It begins with a piano (*pp.*) dynamic and a tempo marking of *Sehr langsam.* The melody consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, some beamed together. The bottom staff is also in 4/4 time and features a string tone effect, indicated by the marking 'Sw. (String tone)'. It shows a similar melodic line with some notes marked with a fermata or a long note value. A footnote at the bottom explains that the upper note can be held for its full value while the lower note anticipates its beat.

Figure 2.1 Richard Wagner's *Prelude to Parsifal*; from A. Eaglefield Hull, *Organ Playing: Its Technique and Expression* (London: Augener, 1911), 47.

⁶³ Hull, 35-36, 70-78.

⁶⁴ Edwin Evans, Sr. *Technics of the Organ* (London: Wm. Reeves, 1937), 28 and elsewhere.

⁶⁵ Hull, 133.

Note the slur under the phrase at the point of *legatissimo* (Figure 2.1, m. 3). Obviously, the slur mark is not some kind of universal figure for over legato. But the combination of the slur under the large phrase mark, in the context of a relatively large descending leap (here a perfect fifth, in another example provided by Hull a minor seventh) might strike the present author as a context in which this touch could be effectively employed.

By *glissando*, Hull means the use of a given finger – normally, but not always the thumb – in a scale like passage while maintaining a legato touch.⁶⁶ Perhaps it is more meaningful to think of this as a technique rather than a touch. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Hull acknowledges the value of this method of playing.

Moving to the detached touches, Hull states that a “moderate [tempo] may be assumed for the purpose of classification” and that adjustments would naturally be necessary for exceedingly fast or slow tempi.⁶⁷ He gives no precise length for the *staccatissimo* touch, but certainly from the context he does mean, as expected, a very short staccato. Hull finds this touch particularly effective “in the upper part of the keyboard, and it is generally applied to the final note of a brilliant running figure.”⁶⁸ Here he gives as an example a flourish from Stanford’s *Fantasia and Toccata*, Op. 57:



Figure 2.2 Charles V. Stanford’s *Fantasia and Toccata*; from A. Eaglefield Hull, *Organ Playing: Its Technique and Expression* (London: Augener, 1911), 45.

⁶⁶ Hull, 49.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 39.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 45.

He further specifies that for “quick and running passages [staccatissimo] can only be applied on the softest stops, preferably of a Flute or Gedackt type.”⁶⁹ Here, as elsewhere, Hull implies that ‘short’ touches must be applied to those stops that have quick speech characteristics.

Hull describes the “brillante” touch as the second most common to legato.⁷⁰ While he does not give an approximate duration of this touch, he gives this description which aids in the aesthetic understanding: “On tracker-actions, the result is much more distinguished even than on pneumatic; for then the unusually sudden opening of the pallet gives a curious “ping” to the attack.”⁷¹ He further qualifies our understanding of the touch by stating that it is “frequently made too short and crisp.”⁷² It is notable that in the example he gives, perfectly normal staccato marks appear – yet he wishes for the “brillante” touch, which he also defines in his main list of touches as “mezzo-staccato” (Figure 2.3). Context seems to be the key, since Hull describes this touch as appropriate to toccatas and the full organ. He perhaps found the ‘yippy’ effect of a true half-value staccato on full organ to be distasteful. He considers the following example appropriate for mezzo-staccato touch:



Figure 2.3 J.N. Lemmens' Fanfare in D; from A. Eaglefield Hull, *Organ Playing: Its Technique and Expression* (London: Augener, 1911), 40.

⁶⁹ Hull, 47.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 39.

⁷¹ Ibid, 39.

⁷² Ibid, 40.

Regarding the *marcato* touch of approximately three quarters in length, Hull states that it is particularly effective with the Great Trumpet and even more so with the Solo Tuba.⁷³ It seems appropriate here to mention that he finds reeds of the trumpet family to be much better suited to non-legato touches (the tuba is included here).⁷⁴ Interesting is the way in which Hull marks the *marcato* touch. He does not discuss the nomenclature at all, but his three different examples, intended to point out different contexts for the touch, exhibit three different symbols. They are as follows:



Figure 2.4 The three symbols above are all used by A. Eaglefield Hull to indicate *marcato*.

As was mentioned with the *staccato* marks in the *staccatissimo* section, there does not always appear to be, even within a single musical culture (or in the views of a single author) a uniform interpretation of these marks. But it is certainly worth noting that Hull does provide all three of the above symbols as indicators of *marcato*, without ever mentioning the fact that he is using three different symbols.

With the *non-legato* touch, we are again confronted with the issue of nomenclature. As with the *staccatissimo*, Hull uses the dot. But here, in the example by Dubois (Figure 2.5), the dots are under a measure-long phrase mark. I wonder if here we could say that the phrase mark is somehow tempering the staccato dots. Is the phrase mark doing more than merely indicating a kind of sequence and communicating to the performer that he should connect the notes under the phrase more closely? Here, as elsewhere, the phrase may indeed have a tempering effect on the local-level

⁷³ Hull, 41.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 129-130.



Figure 2.5 Théodore Dubois's *Prelude & Fugue in D Minor*; from A. Eaglefield Hull, *Organ Playing: Its Technique and Expression* (London: Augener, 1911), 43.

articulation. This thought will be continued in my comments on Hull's phrasing section of his book, and in my discussion of subsequent authors toward the end of this chapter.

To conclude my commentary on Hull's classification of touches, we come to the 'manual-changing' touch, which is quite simply the natural gap in sound that occurs when one changes manuals. I would only point out the contrast to Dupré, who urged performers to avoid a cessation in legato when changing manuals.⁷⁵

Finally, while it falls outside Hull's listed classification of touches, his discussion of octave playing elsewhere in his book is extremely valuable to the present-day interpreter of English organ music of the early 20th century. Much of this music (by Howells and Bairstow, for example) is full of octave doublings and it is often difficult to know if one should go to the trouble of making the octaves legato. For Hull, it seems to be mostly a matter of tempo and style. He says: "Finger-changing is required for smooth octaves at a moderate rate, but if they are to be played quickly, the semi-detached touch should be applied."⁷⁶

Consider the passage below from Edward Bairstow's 1937 *Sonata for Organ*. According to the above quote, this right-hand octave passage, which is quite quick,

⁷⁵ Marcel Dupré, *Méthode d'Orgue* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1927), 68.

⁷⁶ Hull, 75.

should be played semi-detached, and I believe this to be the case; attempting to make the passage legato would be unduly cumbersome and could well result in haphazard articulation:



Figure 2.6 Edward C. Bairstow, *Sonata in E Flat for Organ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 4. Extract reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.

But what about the phrase mark above this passage from Bairstow? As I will discuss in the next section, this phrase mark does not necessarily indicate (or forbid) detached octaves. In certain cases, the phrase mark can be unrelated to articulation, but have more to do with timing.

Phrasing

Hull devotes a long chapter to the complexities of phrasing at the organ. After studying it, the reader certainly doesn't come away with a clear idea of 'how to phrase' in the manner of Eaglefield Hull, but with many different possibilities for phrasing. In a similar manner to his chapter on touch, Hull acknowledges the challenges inherent in interpreting phrasing marks. He cites the organ works of Mendelssohn, whose slurs in his organ works remain contentious matters with respect to interpretation even to this day.⁷⁷

There are two important ideas that one can take away from Hull's phrasing

⁷⁷ See: William Little, *Mendelssohn and the Organ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 284-288.

chapter. First, in Hull's words: "The absence of any indication of [phrasing marks] in much printed music has given many students the impression that phrasing is not necessary – even improper."⁷⁸ Hull goes on to give the organist license to make use of variety of touch, timing, and stop/swell box manipulation to effect phrasing, even while reading a bare-looking score. In other words, a bare-looking score is not a license to only play the notes. Second, Hull makes clear in this chapter that one can interpret a phrase mark in various ways; the end of a phrase mark may be acknowledged (as Turpin notes) by lifting the final note early. However, it is certainly possible, at least in the case of shorter phrases under a long phrase, that the short phrases be connected completely legato and acknowledged through different means. These alternative modes of phrasing include (as mentioned above) timing and stop/swell box manipulation. With respect to the latter, Hull specifically mentions that "the usual break in the sound-flow is rendered unnecessary."⁷⁹ However, his discussion of timing with respect to phrasing is much more exhaustive, and in it he strongly implies that timing can substitute for the usual end-phrase 'articulation.' For Hull, there seem to be two main modes of acknowledging a phrase mark with timing:

- 1) By holding the first or last note under a phrase mark slightly longer than printed.
- 2) By effecting an *accelerando* and *ritardando* (subtle or otherwise) under a phrase mark.

With respect to 1) above, he provides, among others, the example found in Figure 2.7. Hull doesn't say *not* to articulate at the end of each smaller phrase, but he doesn't say to do so; thus it seems more musically plausible, based on his statement underneath the example that the entire pedal line is to be played legato, but 'phrased' – as Hull states –

⁷⁸ Hull,103.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*,108.

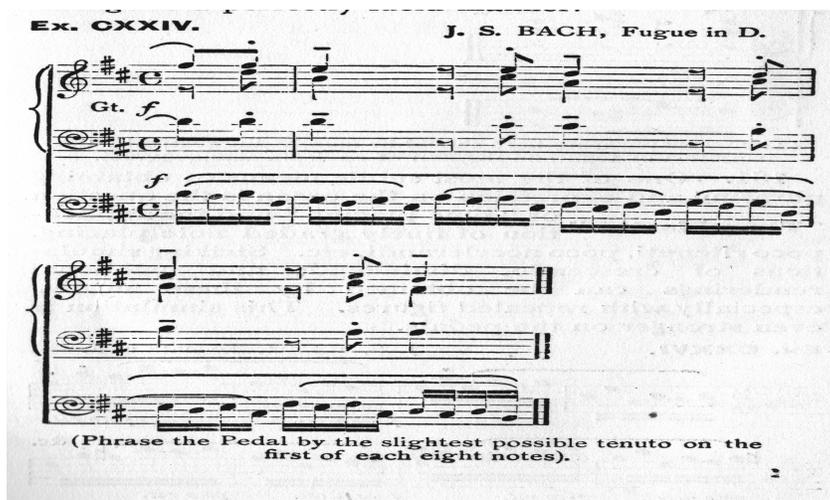


Figure 2.7 J.S. Bach's *Fugue in D*, BWV 532; from A. Eaglefield Hull, *Organ Playing: Its Technique and Expression* (London: Augener, 1911), 113.



Figure 2.8 J.S. Bach's *Toccata in F*, BWV 540; from A. Eaglefield Hull, *Organ Playing: Its Technique and Expression* (London: Augener, 1911), 114.

by subtly holding out the first note under each of the smaller slur marks. Once again, Hull uses a Bach pedal line to indicate point 2) from above (see Figure 2.8).

While he uses Bach, as so many authors do, to make his point, the phrasing ideas say more about Hull's own musical culture than about the repertoire at hand. In this light, I find that 'accelerando/ritardando' phrasing is a useful tool when looking at English organ music of the period. Consider, for example, the following passage from Parry's 1915 *Chorale Fantasia on an Old English Tune*:

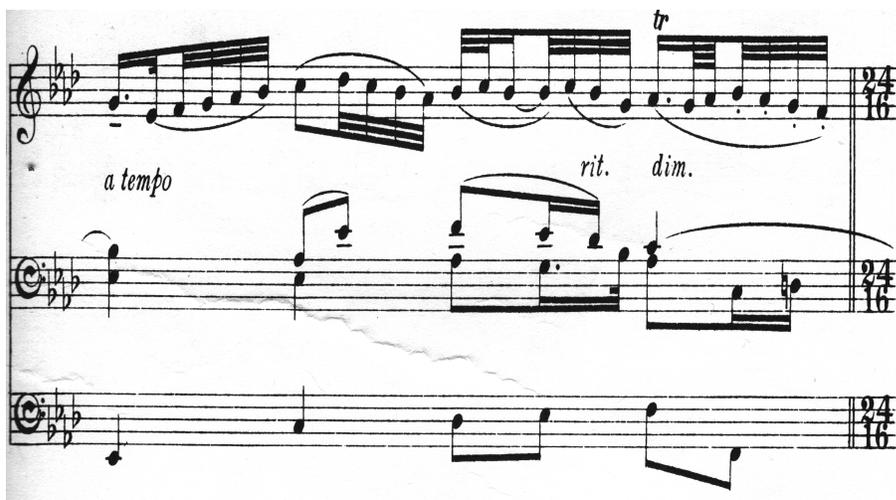


Figure 2.9 C.H.H. Parry, *Chorale Fantasia on an Old English Tune* (London: Novello, 1915), measure 2.

In measure 2 (Figure 2.9), the connection between beats 1 and 2 (right hand) sounds choppy if separated even by subtle articulation. However, if beats 1 and 2 are played legato, with a subtle accelerando/ritardando within each beat (as indicated by the phrase mark), a more convincing musical picture seems to emerge. In this context, using these marks in Parry for timing rather than articulation seems a good hypothesis.

Eaglefield Hull's book represents but one voice in the matter of touch and phrasing at the English organ in the early 20th century. However, the exhaustive nature of his work provides a valuable series of possibilities for the interpretation of organ music from that era. It should be a primary resource for those organists seriously interested in the interpretation of early 20th-century English organ music (or those wishing to perform in the style of such players, regardless of repertoire). It is important to state that while opinion in the matter of touch, phrasing and expression was by no means uniform, Hull's views certainly cannot be seen as outlandish or radical. To reinforce this, I will conclude this section on Hull with a quotation from another English author (also published in 1911). In his *The Organ Accompaniment of the Church Services*, H.

W. Richards (Professor of Organ and Choir Training at the Royal Academy of Music) states: “A word must be added upon phrasing, the neglect of which is a sure sign of defective musicianship. Good phrasing should on no account, be absent from any performance, for it imparts meaning and sense to the music ... young players are warned not to mistake *legato* marks for phrasing marks. It is unfortunate that the slur is used to indicate both, but no musical person ought to confuse the two things.”⁸⁰ I wish it were as easy as this author implies to distinguish between slurs implying legato and those indicating phrasing; perhaps we in the early 21st century are as ignorant as the ‘young players’ of the early 20th century. Fortunately, Turpin and Hull give us clues about the distinction and the multitudinous possibilities for effecting proper phrasing. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the valuable information on this subject that I have learned from a number of “living links” to the musical culture of the early 20th-century English organ loft.

Lindsay Lafford (b.1913)

Lindsay Lafford was an Articled Pupil under Sir Percy Hull at Hereford Cathedral during the period 1929-1935. He later served as Organist and Choirmaster at St. John’s Cathedral, Hong Kong and was subsequently Professor of Music at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. He is now retired to Tempe, Arizona. Professor Lafford was kind enough to provide exhaustive responses to numerous questions posed via e-mail and what follows is based on that correspondence.

Ever modest regarding his insights, Lafford was at pains to point out that “Hereford was a sort of independent backwater in the provinces ... one heard of new organ methods—Ellingford was one, possibly one by Alcock—but we were not

⁸⁰ H.W. Richards, *The Accompaniment of the Church Services A Practical Guide for the Student* (London: Joseph Williams Ltd., 1911), 98.

enterprising enough to stretch out. What had always gone on continued. A good deal of my further information should be viewed in this light.”⁸¹ Lafford began his studies using Sir John Stainer’s *The Organ* (Novello, 1877) and while he had no complaints about the method, he recalled that even in the late 1920s he was aware from the illustrations (showing Victorian-style trousers and old-looking keyboards), that the method was dated. He was more significantly influenced by his teacher Percy Hull than by *The Organ*. Lafford was justifiably fond of the practicality (and efficacy) of the Articled Pupil system and its simple premise: “to learn from a master by observing how he did things.”⁸²

Lafford was, like the authors previously discussed, clear in his assertion that legato was the default organ touch, going much further than Hull in defending it as an ideal: “Fingering acrobatics were employed where necessary; legato was law. This in itself was somewhat incongruous given the reverberant buildings in which we were playing. We’d hear an occasional performer (from outside our little circle, obviously), who’d play in a detached manner, and it would make us wonder. But we didn’t copy it.”⁸³ Lafford specifically noted the “aggressive accentuation” of G. D. Cunningham in a performance he witnessed at Gloucester Cathedral.⁸⁴ Thus while acknowledging that it was not a universal English practice, Lafford is very clear in asserting that strict legato was vitally important in his own early training.

When Professor Lafford and I discussed the issue of phrasing, phrase marks and score-fidelity, however, a much more complex, even paradoxical picture began to emerge. That picture, while not in opposition to the ‘legato law’ ideal mentioned above,

⁸¹ Lindsay Lafford, e-mail to the author, 14 September 2009.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Lindsay Lafford, e-mail to the author, 31 October 2009.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

certainly problematizes it. Like other authors, Lafford noted that phrasing was vitally important, but he was reluctant to pin down what he meant by the term. Certainly, explaining such matters over e-mail (or even in print) is never easy. So while Lafford did not provide many details of the art of phrasing, he provided an invaluable account of his *attitude* toward the score as he was trained to approach it in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This attitude can give the present-day organist pause for thought and even lead, indirectly, to ideas for interpretation. The most specific phrasing directives that he gave were as follows. As you will note, the practical and the philosophical seem intertwined:

Slurs and phrase marks have always been a sort of black area. I'm sure we put over-arching slurs over passages that also contained shorter phrase marks. One assumed that this was meant to convey some sort of superior atmosphere. In the same spirit we organ composers don't hesitate to place accents over individual notes, things like *sfz* which, of course, can't really be done for a single note or chord. I do it myself, right now. But the hope is that it will convey the composer's intent and [it] will then be the responsibility of the performer to figure out, and can be loftily ignored by the composer. Obviously, a slight tenuto is about all we can do for accents, and this will lead to a certain amount of plasticity in rhythm instead of metronomic rigidity. An accent is, after all, designed to draw attention to a note. On some instruments by making it louder; on others by drawing it out.⁸⁵

A great deal is embedded in the above paragraph. Lafford's idea of "over-arching slurs" conveying a "superior atmosphere" reinforces the intangible nature that such marks can have. It is my belief (which I will discuss in Chapter 4) that the local-level accents and slurs (those covering no more than, say, three or four notes) provide much more valuable and practical information with respect to touch and articulation than the long "superior atmosphere" marks mentioned by Lafford above.

Lafford's idea for the interpretation of *sfz* marks in organ music (lengthening the note(s) in question) is certainly useful and its result – "plasticity in rhythm" – is an

⁸⁵ Lindsay Lafford, e-mail to the author, 31 October 2009.

equally important characteristic of the style. One necessarily leads to the other, but the latter may be broadly applied. [In another, more modernist?, musical culture, an accent could be accomplished by shortening the note while maintaining a strict tempo].

In the passage that follows, Lafford also touches on the relationship between the “composer’s intent” and the “responsibility of the performer to figure it out.” He implies here, and expands upon elsewhere, the idea that the performer has a responsibility but also freedom and leeway in realizing the composer’s intentions. The paradoxical nature of this idea comes to the fore in the following comment by Lafford: “We were expected to observe the phrasing meticulously, ignoring, however, anything that seemed incongruous.”⁸⁶ In other words: Try to follow the composer’s intent as you understand it. But if it doesn’t work, change it. Such a philosophy, Lafford explains, is particularly well-suited to the organ, an unstandardized instrument; certainly it was a common attitude in his circle:

I think we were instructed to reproduce the wishes of the composer, as expressed in the score as faithfully as possible. But in fact we knew that a good deal of personal interpretation would be necessary ... a good deal of local latitude was called for, and this led to much loosening of the concept of precise representation of the score.⁸⁷

Lafford concluded his correspondence with me with a comment that brought together the seemingly disparate realms of transcription and ‘legitimate’ organ repertoire. More specifically, Lafford implies that the strong culture of transcription in early 20th-century Britain influenced the attitude of organists toward ‘legitimate’ repertoire. The necessity in his early cathedral training of learning music rapidly further reinforced a more casual attitude towards the score:

The organist gets saddled with adapting to the organ music for all sorts of instrumental combinations: piano accompaniments to solo songs and choruses;

⁸⁶ Lindsay Lafford, e-mail to the author, 31 October 2009.

⁸⁷ Lindsay Lafford, e-mail to the author, 1 November 2009.

orchestral accompaniments to oratorios and things like the Brahms Requiem etc. He has to acquire a ready facility for doing this, and in the process devise on the spur of the moment a multitude of solutions. He's then forced into ignoring the precise dictates of the score: they wouldn't work. Surely, this must have some influence on his interpreting attitude to music in general?⁸⁸

A final thought on Lindsay Lafford: after moving to the United States in 1939, he took several organ lessons with Harold Gleason at the Eastman School of Music (Gleason is mentioned in Chapter 1). Gleason forced all his students to copy and use his own fingerings and metronome markings for Bach's organ works.⁸⁹ Lafford recalled that this sort of time-consuming process was quite foreign to him; back in England, he normally had to do "credible ... sight-reading, with no pre-digested fingerings available."⁹⁰ It seems to me that upon meeting Gleason in the United States, Lafford came in contact with strongly French-influenced organ pedagogy (Gleason had studied with Bonnet) that valued an aesthetic of precision.⁹¹

Francis Jackson (b.1917)

On May 5th, 2008, I traveled to East Aclam, Yorkshire, U.K. to speak with Francis Jackson, C.B.E., Organist Emeritus of York Minster and renowned international recitalist. Jackson was a protégé of Sir Edward Bairstow (1874-1946) and succeeded Bairstow at York Minster. As a living link to the musical culture of the early 20th century, Jackson was the perfect person to consult. His music room was an ideal location as it is equipped with a small house organ.

We began by discussing Herbert Howells' *Psalm Prelude, Set 1, Number 1* (composed in 1915). I have often wondered in this piece (and in others of the same style) about the issue of common notes and whether or not they should be repeated. In

⁸⁸ Lindsay Lafford, e-mail to the author, 1 November 2009.

⁸⁹ Lindsay Lafford, e-mail to the author, 31 October 2009.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Recall Marcel Dupré's Bach edition with complete fingerings.

measure 4 of this piece, we see the following:



Figure 2.10 Herbert Howells, *Three Psalm Preludes for Organ, Set One, No. 1* (London: Novello, 1921), p. 2, m. 4.

Jackson stated that the soprano ‘d’ must “certainly” be repeated (not tied to the preceding alto ‘d’).⁹² This is, incidentally, in contrast to the common French practice of the early 20th century. See, for example, a similar passage by Vierne from his *Symphonie II, Choral*, m. 15. According to Rollin Smith, the soprano ‘f’ must, in this instance, be tied to the preceding alto ‘f’:⁹³



Figure 2.11 Louis Vierne, *Symphony No. 2, Op. 20, Chorale* (Paris: J. Hamelle, 1903), m.15.

This is but one example and it is not for me to say that Jackson’s desire to repeat the common note in this instance can be universally applied. But English sources tend to be relatively unstrict about rules for articulation with respect to inner voices and the

⁹² Francis Jackson, interview by Tim Pyper, 5 May 2008.

⁹³ Rollin Smith, *Louis Vierne, Organist of Notre Dame Cathedral* (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 1999), 572-73.

interplay between voices.⁹⁴ Jackson, for instance, said with respect to fudging the legato of inner voices (while keeping outer voices legato) that “there’s a lot of deceit, isn’t there?”⁹⁵ which seems to affirm a more casual attitude to such matters than is to be found in French sources. The French common note ‘rule’ (which of course has its exceptions, too) is a very organ-specific principle. Repeating the ‘d’ in the Howells example above seems to me a much more instinctual, less ‘overthought’ method of interpreting the score.

Jackson and I next examined measures 14 and 15 of the same Howells Psalm-Prelude:



Figure 2.12 Herbert Howells, *Three Psalm Preludes for Organ, Set One, No. 1* (London: Novello, 1921), 3, mm.14-15.

Here we came to the ambiguous dashes above the 16th notes in the soprano and bass. In the case of measure 15, Jackson said that there should be a definite, perceptible break between each chord (as indicated by the dash symbol). He felt that I should not slow down here. However, in the preceding measure, the ‘g’ with a dash symbol above it should not, according to Jackson, be detached from the f-natural preceding it. According

⁹⁴ See, for example, Percy C. Buck, *Organ Playing* (London: Stainer and Bell, 1912) page 71, fingering for scales in 3rds and 6ths; there are often repeated fingers on inner and even outer voices, making legato impossible.

⁹⁵ Francis Jackson, interview by Tim Pyper, 5 May 2008.

to Jackson, that 'g' "belongs to" the preceding phrase and should be connected to it. Perhaps foolishly, I did not press Jackson for further details on that 'g.' But it seems to me that if the 'g' is not to be detached then the "--" symbol here indicates something different: one must draw attention to the 'g' in a different way through timing (lengthening) or use of the swell box.

Note that while the dash symbols in measure 15 occur under a slur mark, Jackson indicated that they should be detached. This certainly accords with numerous instances in Hull's book where detached articulations occur under a slur, more properly a phrase mark in such circumstances. Again, the idea of the detached marks being 'tempered' by the phrase mark could well apply.

I spoke with Jackson about slur marks at some length but one particular instance comes to mind, the first two measures of Percy Whitlock's 'Folk Tune,' from *Five Pieces*:



Figure 2.13 Percy Whitlock, *Five Short Pieces for Organ, No. 2, Folk Tune* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), mm.1-2. Extract reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.

My question had to do with the left-hand slur in measure one, and whether or not one should make a noticeable lift at the end of it before measure 2. It had always seemed to me a strange place to lift, but the slur was there, and I wondered about its meaning. Jackson was very firm in saying that one should not lift the left hand after the first

measure; the first two measures should be connected – legato – in all voices.⁹⁶ Having now read Eaglefield Hull, I believe one could make a case for the left-hand slur as an indicator of timing (a *poco ritard* into measure 2). This could well be so; however, Jackson’s follow-up comment took our conversation in a new direction: “He wasn’t, I think, very particular about what he wrote.”⁹⁷ This idea opens the door to a whole side of the notation issue that is crucial but goes beyond the scope of my research at the present time: the possibility that many of the markings are not thought through by the composer in a serious way, and the connected (and more challenging) possibility that many markings are not the composer’s own. Beyond Jackson’s comment above, I have other anecdotal comments that would support this claim. Derek Holman (b. 1931), former Warden of the Royal School of Church music and Organist of Croydon Parish Church, said that in his youth it was a poorly-kept secret that many English publishing houses got the “office boy” to put in the slurs and phrase marks.⁹⁸ I will further explore the idea of the phrasing mark as an afterthought in Chapter 4. Of course it is well known that early 20th-century publishing houses added gratuitous slurs to newly-edited works of older composers. However, the possibility of unauthorized editorial intervention in the works of English composers *living* in the early 20th century remains for now a largely unexplored realm of research.

The four main authors discussed in this chapter were born between 1840 and 1917 and therefore represent a rather wide band of history. And while they offer but four points of view, I believe that there are enough common areas to make some

⁹⁶ Of course, since the C# is repeated between measures 1 and 2, a miniscule lift in the upper part of the left hand is necessary; however, it is possible to connect the B and A between measures 1 and 2 legato. Therefore it is possible to make, as Jackson urges, the overall effect of the L.H. connection between measures 1 and 2 legato.

⁹⁷ Francis Jackson, interview by Tim Pyper, 5 May 2008.

⁹⁸ Derek Holman, interview by Tim Pyper, 18 August 2009.

meaningful conclusions that could be valuable to modern-day organists wishing to perform English organ music from the turn of the 20th century. Naturally, my own reading has gone far beyond these four authors; my conclusions are based in part on the fact that the voices presented in this chapter echo (with a certain amount of clarity) opinions and trends that I have seen elsewhere as well.

Certainly, by the last two decades of the 19th century the main, or default touch at the English organ was legato. Almost all of the sources from basic organ tutors to works such as Turpin's dealing with advanced playing state this fact. The degree to which players departed from legato varied widely. The fact that Hull condemns those playing legato continuously means that there were players that played legato continuously. However, most of the articles and methods I have read dealing with advanced playing lament the monotony of constant legato. Even Walter Alcock, who states that "on the organ two touches only are possible – *legato* and *staccato*" concedes that there are "some degrees of staccato."⁹⁹ Hull seems to go the furthest in advocating the widest possible variety of touch, based on the context of the music and the speech characteristics of the stops selected. A related issue having to do with the legato touch is finger substitution. Authors like Edwin Evans in his *Technics of the Organ* (William Reeves, 1937) condemn the overuse of substitution in the attainment of legato, since it can damage the rhythmic vitality of the music. Evans states that it is the "*legato which reaches the listener, and not that of the player's mechanics*" that matters.¹⁰⁰ Evans and Hull much prefer other means, such as finger crossing and sliding, to attain legato and only substitution when absolutely necessary. From this one can conclude that if difficult substitution is the only way in which a passage may be rendered legato, it is probably not intended to be

⁹⁹ Walter Alcock, *The Organ* (London: Novello, 1913), 33, 35.

¹⁰⁰ Edwin Evans, Sr., *Technics of the Organ* (London: William Reeves, 1937), 60.

played legato, at least not in all voices. Fudging the inner voices, using the “deceit” advocated by Jackson, is perfectly acceptable in dense textures. Detached touches are also possible.

With respect to phrasing and phrase marks, my conclusions need to be made with more qualifications. Derek Holman confirmed what my research has led me to believe: that there is “no clear custom” for slur and phrase marks in early 20th-century Britain.¹⁰¹ However, there are certain tendencies that can be useful for the present-day performer to note.

The end of a slur or phrase mark *can*, as Turpin attests, mean the cessation of legato. The shorter the slur, the higher the probability that it will have this kind of meaning. However, this cannot be taken as a universal truth. The slur in the first measure of Percy Whitlock’s ‘Folk Tune’ is not, according to Jackson, an indicator of legato. Date is an important factor. If we are considering the date range of, say 1880-1940, the later the date of composition (‘Folk Tune’ was published in 1930), the less reliably the slur may be seen as an indicator of legato; this may be the case even if that slur covers only a few notes. If the slur does not indicate legato, it may be more properly called a phrase mark and it can have a number of meanings. The end of a phrase mark, which is generally, but not always longer than a slur, may be acknowledged with a lift (cessation of legato). The end of a phrase mark may also be indicated with a subtle *ritardando*. The phrase mark as a whole may indicate a subtle *accelerando* and *ritardando*. Also, the phrase mark may be seen as having a tempering effect for detached touches occurring underneath (such as in Howells’ *Psalm-Prelude Set 1, No. 1, measure 15*, Figure 2.12). In such a context, the slur ‘says’: “these notes are detached, but there should be some sense of continuity and connection between them.”

¹⁰¹ Derek Holman, interview by Tim Pyper, 18 August 2009.

As has become clear in this chapter, there is no strong sense of cultural uniformity with regard to touch and phrasing at the English organ in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Turpin advocates open touch because of resonant spaces and Lafford insists on legato despite resonant spaces. It is important to bear in mind that the sources presented here cover a range of time (birthdates ranging from 1840-1917) and the opinions presented likely represent, however incompletely, changing tastes. Recall that Turpin has much more straightforward ideas about slur / phrase marks (they indicate articulation); the interpretation of these symbols certainly becomes less clear-cut by the early 20th century. It is hoped that the exploration of these various sources has made a range of possibilities as well as probabilities available to the present-day organist. In concluding, I would state that this chapter has dealt primarily with printed sources. While these sources are valuable, there are an increasing number of historic recordings available which, taken in conjunction with printed records, help complete the picture of touch and phrasing in this era. Chapter 4 will be a case study focusing on one piece in the context of two such recordings.

Chapter 3:

Donald Tovey and the Organ

J.S. Bach is a common link to all four chapters of the present work. To understand the musical culture of early 20th-century Britain, one must analyze the way in which that era's musicians discuss the works of Bach; the authors explored in this dissertation analyze their own music comparatively rarely, so the present-day reader must often consider (for example) Howells performance practice through the prism of Bach performance practice. The following chapter deals primarily with performance of the music of Bach as discussed by the great musicologist Sir Donald Tovey (1875-1940), and it offers a wider perspective on the culture in which early 20th-century English organ music was created.

In Donald Tovey's extensive writings on music, the organ is considered comparatively rarely. Yet his passing references to organ works – invariably Bach's – reveal an intimate familiarity with the instrument and its repertoire. Sir Walter Parratt, Organist of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, had a profound influence on the way in which Tovey conceived of organ music and organ playing. One could even go so far as to say that Tovey's ideas on Bach playing more generally were informed by Parratt's style at the organ – a style imprinted on Tovey at an extremely young age. Towards the end of his life, Tovey was also close friends with the physician, theologian and organist Albert Schweitzer. So Tovey's career was bookended by significant associations with two famed organists.

Parratt was a relative conservative in English organ playing who did not subscribe to the *fully* orchestral performance style. Albert Schweitzer was a 20th-century pioneer in the performance of Bach on unaltered 18th-century instruments. One could

almost say that in these two associations, Tovey bypassed the highest Romantic playing style on the organ; indeed he made disparaging comments on the encumbering complexity of English organs towards the end of his life.¹⁰² Certainly, his friendship with Schweitzer must have informed, or at least reinforced his interest in historical performance conditions. Here we come to a central issue for Tovey: his unconventional ideas (at least for their time) concerning performance practice. While he certainly wasn't opposed to transcription – indeed, he included transcriptions of organ works in his concerts as a solo pianist – he makes it clear in numerous essays that transcription should take place more out of practical necessity than for its own sake, and only with knowledge of – and respect for – the original conditions of performance. I will begin this essay by looking at Tovey's writings on Walter Parratt and will then examine his ideas on performance practice more generally. In concluding, I will see if his references to and analyses of organ music can be connected to his ideas about historic instruments and performance practice.

Tovey was born at Eton in 1875, the son of a classics teacher. His piano instructor and lifelong musical mentor Sophie Weisse guided the early stages of his musical training, and at the age of nine sent the young Donald to study counterpoint with Walter Parratt, organist at Windsor Chapel.¹⁰³ Only a few years later, Tovey went on to study counterpoint with James Higgs – editor of the Novello edition of Bach's organ music – at the R.C.M.¹⁰⁴ Thus at an early age, Tovey had a close working association with two leading English organists – both of whom had a strong affinity for the organ works of Bach. Strangely, perhaps, he never studied the organ: “The one great lost

¹⁰² “I do not foresee that the gigantic instruments of the future will develop into any such chaotic menagerie as the modern organ.” Donald Francis Tovey, *The Classics of Music*, ed. Michael Tilmouth, David Kimbell & Roger Savage (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 779-80.

¹⁰³ Mary Grierson, *Donald Francis Tovey: A Biography Based on Letters* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 10.

opportunity of my early years was that, under the mistaken idea that organ playing would be bad for my pianoforte touch, I never learnt the organ from Parratt."¹⁰⁵

Nonetheless, we can be almost sure that in their teaching, Parratt and Higgs would have presented Bach's organ works as examples of contrapuntal mastery. What is certain is that Tovey spent many hours listening to Parratt play, and even watched Queen Victoria's funeral from the organ loft of St. George's chapel.¹⁰⁶ Tovey said: "I *did* form all my notions of [the organ] from hearing and watching [Parratt] every Sunday... and I grew up in the happy and stimulating delusion that the organ was a rhythmic instrument, and that the use of its stops was analogous to good orchestration. In Parratt's hands, both these propositions were true."¹⁰⁷

More needs to be explained about Parratt's ideas on organ playing, and the complex concept of "orchestration" at the organ must be addressed. What Tovey wrote about "good orchestration" in the above paragraph is not in conflict with the following statement by Parratt himself: "...the organ suffers from the constant attempt to make it imitate the orchestra."¹⁰⁸ Parratt did play the organ with what we might call Romantic coloristic stops, soloing out melodies in the works of J.S. Bach. However, he considered the organ "a grave and dignified instrument" and complained about organists who kept the swell-to-great coupler on at all times, thereby preventing "the diapasons – the glory of the organ – to be heard alone."¹⁰⁹ While he did advocate frequent registration changes, Parratt seems to be railing against the kind of organ playing wherein the tone is in constant flux, growing and decreasing as easily as that of an orchestra with the

¹⁰⁵ Grierson, 5.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 93.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 5-6.

¹⁰⁸ Donald Tovey and Geoffrey Parratt, *Walter Parratt: Master of the Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 179.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 180.

help of the swell-to-great coupler and the swell shoe. The above comments by Parratt shed some light on the following account by Tovey on Parratt's Bach playing:

At the end of Bach's D minor Toccata, the top part of the final chain of suspensions was played on the solo organ with the trumpet stop glowing through the harmonic flute which was powerful enough to veil it considerably. Unfortunately I once had the indiscretion to express my admiration of this coloring: and the next time I heard Sir Walter play the D minor Toccata, the solo trumpet and flute remained unused."¹¹⁰

Perhaps the young Tovey's admiration for the solo trumpet led Parratt to reconsider this colorful flight of fancy and he decided to set a more sober example to his young pupil in subsequent performances. In a lecture in the 1930s, Tovey spoke about Parratt giving his students the ability to play "a Bach toccata perfectly in a noble style."¹¹¹ This seems to define Parratt's playing: coloristic, as befitting a large English organ from the 1880s – yet not extravagantly orchestral. This kind of rational acceptance of a modern instrument, and the desire to make it sound good without doing violence to the composer's concept, is an idea that Tovey perhaps intuited at a young age. Certainly, as an adult Tovey did take historic instruments into account in his writings. Indeed, Tovey confronts head-on the problematic, yet necessary (in the early 20th century) reality of transcription of Bach's keyboard music to the piano:

...when we take the early eighteenth century, we may expect the maximum amount of difficulty and the maximum failure to attain a scholarly, satisfactory standard of performance from the circumstance that early eighteenth-century clavier music is not pianoforte music at all. The instruments, except for recent exceedingly highly cultivated and exceptional revivals, are obsolete, and the art of playing Bach or Handel and Scarlatti on the pianoforte implies the art of translation.¹¹²

Tovey strikes down the simplified duality of pianistic opinion, finding "both error and truth" in two camps, the first believing that one should play Bach at the piano

¹¹⁰ Tovey, Parratt, 30.

¹¹¹ Donald Francis Tovey, *A Musician Talks*, vol. 1, *The Integrity of Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 13.

¹¹² Tovey, *The Classics of Music*, 504-5.

with “all the expression the pianoforte can give” and others who, believing the harpsichord to be quiet and expressionless, conclude that on the piano one must play Bach with a “small and unmodulated tone.”¹¹³ Addressing the numerous registrational possibilities – including 16' and lute stops – available on 18th-century harpsichords, Tovey debunks the fallacy that harpsichord music is dull, and criticizes pianists who think they are correct in performing Bach on a piano with a monotonous tone.¹¹⁴ Speaking specifically of Bach's 'Italian' Harpsichord Concerto [BWV 971] he states that a pianist must imitate the harpsichord's quiet expressivity by using a tone with “a good deal of light and shade within very small limits.”¹¹⁵ Tovey also shows considerable interest in the clavichord:

What becomes perfectly clear to anyone who has played Bach upon the original instruments is that the Chromatic Fantasia is much more likely to be a clavichord work than a harpsichord work. That was borne in upon me very early by the late A.J. Hipkins, who was head of the firm Broadwood's when I was a boy, and was one of the greatest authorities on old instruments who ever lived. And he always played Bach on the clavichord.¹¹⁶

For our purposes, Tovey's interest in the clavichord as one of Bach's preferred keyboard instruments has a considerable impact on the way he viewed performance practice. Tovey felt that, when transcribed, clavichord music ought to be played differently than harpsichord music. Of course Tovey's ideas about a specific piece's identity as harpsichord or clavichord music were subjective, and to us such a distinction may seem outdated. Nonetheless, for Tovey, the clavichord's wide (yet soft) dynamic range gives the modern pianist more license to fully explore the soft and loud extremes of his instrument. Tovey felt that the actual volume was not as important as the impression on the listener. While harpsichord music needed “light and shade within very small

¹¹³ Tovey, *The Classics of Music*, 506.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 505-7.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 508.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 510.

limits," he believed that "what sounds big on the clavichord ought to sound big on the pianoforte."¹¹⁷ Tovey was clearly not so radical as to say that Bach's keyboard works should be played on original instruments. He was of the belief that music "exists only in performance" and to suggest in the 1920s or 30s that Bach should only be performed on the clavichord or harpsichord would be tantamount to saying that it should rarely be performed at all.¹¹⁸ But he was – needless to say – a very scholarly pianist and said that "...if you want to perform the clavier works of Bach, you must know what Bach's aesthetic system really was."¹¹⁹

Fascinatingly – even paradoxically – Tovey regularly performed the organist's pedal showpiece – J.S. Bach's Toccata in F [BWV 540] – in his own arrangement for piano.¹²⁰ The pedal solo would seem to lose some of its impact when played by the hands. But Tovey appeared more fascinated by raw compositional elements in this piece than by its instrumentation: "...immensely powerful works, such as Bach's Toccata in F, produce much of their cumulative effect by their refusal to change texture."¹²¹ He gives us a surprisingly specific amount of information regarding the piece's tempo and character: "Bach's great Organ Toccata in F ought to take eight minutes if it is not played ridiculously fast. It can be played surprisingly slowly with rather a gain than a loss to its impression of a momentum that nothing can stop."¹²² Unfortunately I have been unable to determine Tovey's ideas about – or justification for – playing organ works on the piano. Given the specificity with which he set out guidelines for

¹¹⁷ Tovey, *The Classics of Music*, 508, 510.

¹¹⁸ Tovey, *A Musician Talks*, 1:12.

¹¹⁹ Tovey, *The Classics of Music*, 506.

¹²⁰ Tovey, *The Classics of Music*, footnote #4, p. 321 and footnote #74, p. 524. Also on pp. 523-24 there is a somewhat extended harmonic/textural description of F Major Toccata [BWV 540].

¹²¹ Donald Francis Tovey, *A Musician Talks*, vol. 2, *Musical Textures* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 44.

¹²² Tovey, *A Musician Talks*, 1:133.

harpsichord and clavichord transcription, one wonders what he would have written concerning the aesthetics of playing baroque organ music on the piano.

It is in Tovey's promotion of a new, vaguely organ-like instrument that we find him as a performer of more Bach organ music. Tovey wrote a long article in the early 1920s promoting a two-manual piano invented by Emmanuel Moor. The lower manual was exactly like a standard piano, but the upper manual played at 4' pitch and the manuals could be coupled together. By coupling and / or by playing on both keyboards simultaneously, expansive textures could be rendered with ease, or so it was reasoned. There was also a *cembalo* stop in which, to quote Tovey "a kind of sordine intervene[d] between the hammers and the strings" creating "a surprisingly good kind of generalized harpsichord tone."¹²³ While, needless to say, the instrument proved a genetic dead-end, it is here that we see Tovey playing the Toccata in D Minor [BWV 565?]. Perhaps he tried to make up for the organ lessons he never took from Walter Parratt. It is also in his promotion of the Moor duplex piano that he makes a highly nuanced, generalized statement about historic instruments:

A finished work of art is a sensitive thing, and much set in its ways. It has been delicately adapted to the conditions under which, and for which, it was made, and when you try to acclimatize it to new and apparently better conditions, you may display a mistaken sympathy for what you conceive to be its sufferings in its original state. No player can do justice to his instrument unless he is disposed by instinct and by training to treat all its limitations as qualities rather than as defects.¹²⁴

This is a bold statement to make as an introduction to an article which promotes a new instrument. Tovey does not call a traditional piano defective, but draws attention to a new invention which could open up new and different (not better) avenues for interpretation and composition.

¹²³ Tovey, *The Classics of Music*, 775-76.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 762.

Still, Tovey does make contradictory statements concerning the idea of 'progress' as applied to music and instruments. While he finds the term dangerous when used outside the world of science,¹²⁵ he has this to say about the late 17th- and early 18th- century toccata:

The toccata is an interesting and amusing case of an art-form arising out of human trial and error in the construction and playing of an instrument. The touch of the old organs was unequal and unpunctual. You must run your fingers over all parts of the keyboard and walk all over the pedal-board to find out the holes in the road. This done, you could then ... settle down to music in its most solid and brilliant form: a fugue...¹²⁶

As stated above Tovey did not like to use the word 'progress' in reference to music; but he seems to make an exception for art in an "immature" state.¹²⁷ Tovey clearly admired the sound world created by old instruments, but he perhaps considered their mechanical realities as separate, inadequate systems.

I will now turn to some of Tovey's specific references to Bach organ works in his writings. It is refreshing to find that Tovey does not cite them as a separate species of music. He quite casually compares the 'Wedge' fugue, from BWV 548 (which has "the appalling effrontery to be in da capo form")¹²⁸ with Beethoven's 'Eroica' symphony; both, he says, break stereotyped formal barriers in their own right. While these passing references – he regularly cites the wild modulations of the Fantasia in G Minor, BWV 542¹²⁹ – reveal a thorough knowledge of Bach's organ repertoire, I can find only one instance of an extended analysis. It would at first appear an obscure choice: the smaller of the two settings of *Aus Tiefer Noth*, from the Clavierübung III (BWV 687). Perhaps Tovey felt more comfortable approaching a *manualiter* piece - something he could play

¹²⁵ See: Tovey, *A Musician Talks*, 1:4.

¹²⁶ Donald Francis Tovey, *The Main Stream of Music and Other Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949; repr. New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 340-1. Pagination refers to the Meridian edition.

¹²⁷ Tovey, *A Musician Talks*, 1:70.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 1:119.

¹²⁹ Tovey, *The Main Stream of Music and Other Essays*, 341.

at the piano (I have already mentioned the importance that Tovey placed on the performance of music). Tovey addresses this piece's intricate counterpoint, close entries of the subject, and use of augmentation. In sum, he marvels at the compositional virtuosity of the work. Then he compares it to the kind of musical exercise expected of an English music student: "The academic exercise will be thought meritorious if it achieves impeccable grammar, whereas the Bach chorales are consummate examples of musical rhetoric."¹³⁰ He goes on to wonder if Bach could have conceived of the musical rhetoric first, and "that this crystalline quasi-mathematical form was a by-product of the rhetoric."¹³¹ While he acknowledges the impracticality of such a suggestion, he feels that there must be some truth to it, since the work seems a perfect expression of the "Psalms' cry from the deep."¹³² Tovey engages with the compositional process and seeks to decipher Bach's thoughts when creating something both mathematically pure and rhetorically satisfying. He implies that the science of counterpoint, by this late stage in Bach's career, was fully subsumed in his expression of emotion.

In *A Musician Talks*, Tovey cites the importance of Albert Schweitzer in "revealing to us some of Bach's deepest intentions, as well as his more mechanical associations of ideas."¹³³ He tells the story of one of the "greatest of French organists" who was perturbed by Bach's "abstruse" harmonies, until Schweitzer pointed out to him that they correspond to the words of the chorale in question.¹³⁴ Unfortunately, thus far, I have not been able to unearth direct correspondence between Schweitzer and Tovey concerning historical keyboards, though it is tempting to believe that Tovey's professed respect for such instruments (at least their sound) would naturally line up

¹³⁰ Tovey, *The Main Stream of Music and Other Essays*, 179.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 179-80.

¹³² *Ibid*, 180.

¹³³ Tovey, *A Musician Talks*, 2:73.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 2:74.

with Schweitzer's. They were certainly friendly with one another: in asking that they switch from 'Sie' to 'Du' in their correspondence, Schweizer wrote to Tovey: "It seems to me so unnatural, when we understand each other so well about music and other matters, to continue to use the formal style."¹³⁵ So there is evidence of a close relationship between Tovey and Schweitzer. Schweitzer stayed with the Toveys in Edinburgh when giving lectures there. Tovey dedicated his edition of *The Art of Fugue* to Schweitzer.

To conclude, one cannot go so far as to say that the organ played a central role in Donald Tovey's musical thought. But he had a close association with two of Britain's leading organists (Parratt and Higgs), giving him a great respect for and knowledge of Bach's organ works. He clearly considered this repertoire to be a mainstream part of the classical canon and even played it at the piano. His accounts of Parratt's style give us some idea of his early impressions of Bach performance practice at the organ at the end of the 19th century. His scattered writings on the organ and close association with Schweitzer indicate that his interest in the organ – however peripheral – continued to the end of his life. More significant, though, are his comments on the nature of transcription. Though he is occasionally self-contradictory, Tovey clearly believed that old aesthetic systems and instruments must be considered when performing on the modern piano. We too are often obliged to play old music on new instruments. When these occasions arise, we would do well to consult Tovey, a practical, modern musician who took his cues from performative realities of the past.

¹³⁵ Grierson, 285-86, including footnotes. Translation is from Grierson.

Chapter 4:

Case Study: Herbert Howells' Rhapsody No. 1 in D-flat (Op. 17, No. 1)

Early 20th-century English organ music is both relatively well known and surprisingly neglected: well-known to organists connected to the Anglican church (for whom it is part of what is often seen as a continuous performance tradition) but neglected as an object of critical performance study. My own research suggests that, in general, performances of this music today are significantly different from those of the early 20th century. My goal is to come closer to understanding how this music sounded at the organ soon after it was composed, and how organists achieved their musical effects. Herbert Howells' organ works are among the most important from this era and, thankfully, there are two important historic recordings of his 1915 *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No. 1*.

My desire to delve into issues of performance practice surrounding this music arose, initially, from very practical questions of score interpretation. The opening measures of the *Rhapsody* immediately raise at least two questions about touch (Figure 4.1, p. 80; figures are placed at the end of Chapter 4 in order to avoid blank spaces in the text). What does *assai legato* really mean? And what do the 'tenuto' marks mean? Do they have to do with timing, touch, or both? Similar, but slightly more complex issues are to be confronted in mm. 26-27 (Figure 4.2, p. 80), where the 'tenuto' marks return, along with a few sharper accents, such as the one in measure 27. But now they occur in the context of widely spread right-hand chords with octave doublings, all under a long slur – or is it a phrase? If a slur, connoting some kind of legato, is it in conflict with local-level articulation markings above the individual notes? These concerns may seem at first overly fastidious, although it is important to remember that the organist does not

have a damper pedal to assist in connecting notes together. If legato is the desired result, it must be secured through fingering or finger substitution. And the denser the textures – and they are often quite dense in this piece – the more challenging it is to secure legato on the organ. For an organist trained in the exported Dupré tradition (as discussed in Chapter 1) absolute legato would be the ideal in a piece such as the *Rhapsody*; the modern recordings of this piece seem to cling to a powerful legato aesthetic. Indeed, before I began research into this music, I used to have ‘legato anxiety’ when examining scores such as the one under discussion here. However, a closer look at the score, with the assistance of historic recordings, calls the legato ideal into question.

The first *Rhapsody* is dedicated to Howells' friend and close contemporary Harold Darke, himself one of the best-known English organ recitalists and teachers of the early-to mid-20th century. Remarkably, one of the two recordings that are the focus of this chapter was made by Darke himself, the piece's dedicatee. Darke was born just four years before Howells, in 1888. He served two institutions for fifty years: he was Organist and Choirmaster at St. Michael's, Cornhill from 1916-1966 and was a teacher at the Royal College of Music from 1919 to 1969. Numerous recordings from the 1920s through the 1960s attest to the fact that Darke's playing ability did not appear to diminish with age and that his dedication to the rhythmically free, lushly orchestral performance conventions of his youth (as documented in recordings he made in the 1920s) never waned.

This second point is particularly important in light of the fact that Darke made his recording of the *Rhapsody* very late in life, at the age of 77 in 1965 when performance styles had become markedly different from those of the early 20th century. But Darke was a staunch defender of the performance conventions of his youth, railing against

new trends in organ building and baroque performance practice as they began to be adopted in England in the 1950s. Commenting on new developments in Bach performance in a 1953 article in the *Musical Times* he stated disdainfully that “they give us the bare bones of the notes with little (if any) variety of registration, phrasing or rhythmic freedom.”¹³⁶ Though addressed to the performance of Bach, not Howells, this statement provides a sense of Darke’s sensibilities, affirming his commitment to the kinds of freedoms we hear in his playing of Howells, and grounding his musical aesthetics much more in the 1910s than in the 1960s.

There are two main aspects of Darke's performance that distinguish it from much playing of this piece heard today. The first, subtler aspect has to do with touch. As Howells' indication states, Darke's playing is *assai legato*, not absolute legato. Beyond this dry, even slightly casual legato in the moving chords, however, Darke frequently makes many intentional-sounding breaks to the top voice in places where there is no indication to do so. But this phrasing adds much melodic interest to an otherwise endless stream of densely moving ‘organ texture.’ And Darke does observe the ‘tenuto’ marks seen in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 as indications of articulation, not timing. In Figure 4.3 (p. 81), I have annotated the first eleven measures of the *Rhapsody* as performed by Darke on the 1925 Rushworth & Dreaper organ at his home church of St. Michael’s, Cornhill. I have indicated Darke's lifts in three ways. A long vertical line indicates an extremely subtle break, a bracketed check mark a more noticeable break and a full check mark denotes a very obvious lift. In addition to these ‘articulations,’ there is a subtle but eminently noticeable tempo shift from quarter = 60 to quarter = 54 at the *espressivo molto* in measure 8.

This second aspect of Darke’s recording – great rhythmic freedom –

¹³⁶ Harold Darke, “In Defence of Tradition,” *Musical Times* (February 1953): 65.

distinguishes his interpretation from many modern ones. More than the variety in touch noted above, this rhythmic freedom is very noticeable to the first-time hearer. In addition to subtle local-level timing, Darke's outright tempo shifts are extremely frequent. At Figure 4.4. (p. 82), an *accelerando* is indicated at m. 32, but Darke begins to speed up in m. 29. His tempo in measure 28 is $q. = 52$, and he steadies out at $q. = 84$ by m. 35; this is an extremely pronounced and decidedly unsubtle acceleration. As a secondary consideration, there is a noticeable openness of his touch in the right hand in measures 26-29; we shall return to this aspect later.

Darke ends the piece in a quintessentially Romantic fashion by rolling down the final chord, the low D-flat of the pedal being the last thing that the listener hears. This technique was described in numerous English journals of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹³⁷ He also effectively turns measure 68 to 2/4, changing the half note to a quarter. See Figure 4.5 (p. 83).

A second recording of the Howells *Rhapsody*, made like Darke's in 1965, provides a very interesting point of comparison. Born in 1899, Herbert Sumsion, like Darke, was a friend of Howells'; seven years younger than the composer, he was the dedicatee of his *Six Pieces for Organ* of 1940. In Sumsion's recording of the *Rhapsody*, his legato, like Darke's, also sounds casual, as if he is playing fairly smoothly on the piano with little or no finger substitution. He makes less frequent, though certainly noticeable and intentional-sounding phrasings in the top line. There is rhythmic freedom, to be sure, but the tempo variation is less pronounced than Darke's. Figures 4.6 & 4.7 (pp. 84-85) notate some of the distinctive features of Sumsion's performance. In m. 6, the challenging LH stretch is evidently a problem for him, so he rewrites it as I have

¹³⁷See, for example, James Turpin, "Phrasing and Expression on the Organ," *College of Organists Lectures* (1880): 57-58.

indicated. Also, the syncopated rhythms in Figure 4.7 (p. 85) are acknowledged by a subtle but sudden opening and closing of the swell box. These and similar syncopations were also brought out by Darke using articulation. Sumsion, like Darke, does a 'rolldown' to the low D-flat in the last measure of the piece.

The main difference between the Darke and Sumsion recordings has to do with tempo variation. The swing of Darke's tempo variation is more extreme. Whether or not these rhythmic differences are generational or personal is not possible for me to know with absolute certainty, though more rigid tempi became the norm for performers of all stripes by the mid-20th century. While both organists were admired by Howells and received dedications from him, the dedication of the *Rhapsody* to Darke would perhaps give his performance a certain authority – though this is not to discredit Sumsion's interpretation. Both performances have in common the use of legato as the generalized touch, but not a slavish obedience to it – there is a lot of lifting, and there is little attempt to make thick, moving chords such as those in Figure 4.8 (p. 85) smooth-sounding. In both cases, dynamic indications and hairpin markings are observed and not in particularly subtle ways. These performers never gloss over any expressive indications, with the result that local events appear to be privileged. In both cases, *Espressivo* and *Tranquillo* have a noticeable effect: the tempo gets very perceptibly slower (though more is made of this in Darke's case).

I will now turn to two recent recordings that demonstrate what might be seen as mainstream approaches to the performance of this piece today. The first, made in 1993, is by Stephen Cleobury, Director of Music at King's College, Cambridge. Cleobury's opening tempo is noticeably slower than Sumsion's and Darke's at $q. = 52$. [It is worth pointing out that both Darke and Sumsion had almost identical opening tempi of $q. = 60$]. Aside from local-level *rubato* and some broadening in m. 25, Cleobury sticks with $q.$

= 52 for the first three pages of the piece. In measure 32 (Figure 4.9, p. 86), the marked *accelerando* elicits an extraordinarily subtle tempo change from Cleobury. You will recall Darke's tempo changes from Figure 4.4 (p. 82). By contrast, Cleobury is playing at $q. = 52$ at measure 30 and reaches only $q. = 58$ at the peak of his acceleration.

In general, Cleobury plays quite legato, lifting only when there are *tenuto* or *marcato* marks or at the beginning or ending of phrase marks. In mm. 25-30 (see Figure 4.9, p. 86), the thick octaves in the right hand are played in a noticeably more connected way than by either Darke or Sumsion. Cleobury's playing is not inexpressive – he does use some *rubato*. But in the narrow focus of this piece, and especially considering Darke's performance, the band of Cleobury's tempo variation is very narrow indeed. There is nothing 'incorrect' about what Cleobury does, but he interprets the score more literally than the two men who have a closer connection to the composer and to the musical culture of the 1910s. His *accelerando* is present but undramatic. Later in the piece, at the return of the opening material, where *Tempo Primo* is marked, he returns to his precise opening tempo of $q. = 52$. By the dictates of the score, he is doing the right thing. But neither Darke nor Sumsion do this.

Let us turn for the moment to another recent interpretation of this piece. Ian Sadler was born and trained in England but now lives in Canada. His 1994 recording has an opening tempo of $q. = 69$. Sadler uses more local-level *rubato* than Cleobury, but like Cleobury he also sticks with his basic opening tempo over the first three pages of music. At the *accelerando* (see Figure 4.10, p. 87), Sadler does speed up more than Cleobury, accelerating from $q. = 72$ to $q. = 88$. Sadler uses *rubato*, but as is indicated by the fermatas in Figure 4.11 (p. 88), his timing is extremely predictable; he very often dwells on the last quarter of every measure as an expressive device, a technique used much more sparingly by Darke and Sumsion who just as frequently move through the

fourth beat and take time on the downbeat. Sadler's touch is noticeably more open than Cleobury's, but he has a mannerism that is particularly worthy of note. This phenomenon can be heard most clearly in Figure 4.10, measures 25 through 30. Here, in the right-hand octaves, Sadler seems to indiscriminately slur some notes together and detach others. While Darke and Sumsion did, as noted before, detach certain notes that were not marked as such, as in the phrasings in Figure 4.3 (p. 81), they were both remarkably consistent about detaching notes that had a *tenuto* or *marcato* marking above them. Certainly, chords with octave doublings were never slurred: Darke and Sumsion do not seem to go to great lengths to make unwieldy textures legato. Sadler, it seems, tries to make many of the octaves in Figure 4.10 legato, but then detaches them when it's not feasible to do so. The resulting sound is to my ear a bit haphazard.

What I notice in Darke's performance is a privileging of local events over any kind of large scale 'architecture'. Darke seems to proceed from event to event, perhaps even enjoying himself along the way. In reference again to Figure 4.3 (p. 81), Darke really makes something of the *espressivo molto*. He slows down and luxuriates in the shifting chords. In measure 9, there are small lifts in the pedal line. Darke was operating the swell pedal with his right foot to bring out the hairpin and so could not smoothly connect the G-flat and the B-flat. The cessation of the legato line in the pedal to execute the crescendo was an acceptable casualty in the name of dynamic expression. Likewise, in the same few measures Darke makes subtle breaks along the way, particularly before large leaps such as the ascending 7ths. A long stream of 8th notes with a phrase above does not mean, to Darke, continuous, absolute legato. Throughout the piece, the *tenuto* and *marcato* indications are interpreted by Darke and Sumsion as lifts with remarkable consistency – and this is absolutely the case even when there is a phrase mark overhead such as in mm. 25-28 (Figure 4.4, p. 82).

Darke would have perhaps won the approval of Eaglefield Hull. It is worth here restating the following quote from his 1911 *Organ Playing, its Technique and Expression*:

The above classification of touches may be a matter of surprise to some readers, who use the legato-touch to the exclusion of all others...the ear imperatively demands relief, whilst phrasing and rhythm are necessary to satisfy the requirements of the intelligence. The rhythmical feeling is too often totally absent from much so-called organ playing, and in place of it a shapeless flow of sound is offered.¹³⁸

Hull's comments might seem to weaken my argument that an obsession with legato comes from the French school. Legato was in fact important to the English school as well, and Hull reveals that some used legato with greater-than-desirable consistency. What I contend, though, is the following: The textures and markings in Howells' music demand a great variety of touch (as demonstrated by Darke). And while I allow that continuous legato was not an exclusively French phenomenon, I maintain that the French pedagogical system of the 20th century was largely responsible for engraining the importance of continuous legato (and beyond this a sharp demarcation of legato verses a very rhythmic staccato) in a widespread way and without regard for period or style.

For a better understanding of how slurs in Howells' published score relate to legato in performance, the autograph manuscript, as submitted to Augener for publication in 1919, is a vital source. When I examined it at the British Library in 2008, I saw some interesting differences between it and the score as seen in Figure 4.4. (p. 82). A number of phrase marks that are present in the published score were not in the autograph presented to Augener. Notable among these are the three right-hand slurs between measures 26 through to the downbeat of measure 31. It is entirely possible that Howells added the phrase marks at a proofing stage – it's equally possible that an editor

¹³⁸ A. Eaglefield Hull, *Organ Playing*, 34.

at Augener added them. Regardless, I believe that a meaningful conclusion can be made from the absence of these slurs in Howells' autograph: The local-level *tenuto* and *marcato* markings were added before the large phrasings, and this gives us some license to treat those markings at face value and not be afraid to play in a detached way. Slurs can lead organists to attempt to connect as much as possible, as I believe Ian Sadler tried to do in this very place. But such a course of action is in conflict with the autograph and with the recorded evidence from Dark and Sumsion.

Cleobury's recording represents the sharpest contrast to Darke's. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that Cleobury's performance is basically slow and smooth throughout, and similarly he smoothly builds the sound up and brings it down. And as a result, the piece seems to have one kind of *affect*, at most two: It is slow and meditative, perhaps changing to grand and majestic in the louder section. Of course Darke effects a large-scale crescendo and decrescendo as well, but in the midst of this overarching idea there is a huge amount of rhythmic and tactile variation. As a result, I think Darke expresses a far greater range of emotion: the *tranquillos* really sound tranquil. Further, at mm. 35-37 (Figure 4.12, p. 89), which continues on from the *accelerando* previously discussed, Darke's speed builds up a huge amount of anxiety and excitement, allowing for a great contrast and shock at the *Allargando* and *Largando* starting in measure 38. In Darke's case there is still an arc to this piece, but if you zoom in, the flexibility just discussed provides an added layer of interest. Cleobury does observe the *tenuto* and *marcato* markings as lifts, but in a rather more subtle way and he consistently lifts at the beginning and end of phrase marks and at notes marked with *tenuto* and *marcato*. While his performance is not absolutely rigid, nor in any way expressionless, he seems reluctant to make changes to the score as Darke and Sumsion arguably do. An interesting aspect of this can also be seen in Figure 4.12 at measure 42

where Darke, Sumsion and Sadler all speed up, while Cleobury remains at a constant $q = 60$. I'm not singling Cleobury out for disdain: according to the score he is well within his rights to maintain a constant tempo at measure 42, but Darke and Sumsion do speed up there, and I would be intrigued to know why Sadler does as well – perhaps intuition, or perhaps he heard players from an older generation do this. It must be allowed that Cleobury's recording was made in the extremely resonant chapel of King's College, Cambridge, which could have to do with his choice of tempo. But I also wonder – and I admit this is supposition – if a desire to play more *legato* could have informed his tempo choice. It is far easier to effect finger substitutions when the tempo is slow. Either way, the consistency of tempo is what makes Cleobury's recording most different from Darke's.

Swedish musicologist and organist Sverker Jullander has suggested in a recent article that English organists of the 1920s “took the issue of faithfulness to the composition quite as seriously as did the champions of 'objective' performance, although in a different sense, using agogic fluctuations as one means in their endeavors to bring out the expressive content of the music – what might be termed its spirit or soul. In relation to this overall goal, adherence to the letter of the score became a matter of secondary importance.”¹³⁹ For the reasons already discussed, I think it is clear from Darke's recording that an adherence to the spirit of the music – as he saw it – took precedence over, to borrow from Jullander “the letter of the score.” In Sumsion's case, his rewriting of measure 6 (in Figure 4.6, p. 84) could be seen as an aspect of this same phenomenon, as well as the rolling down of the final chord.

¹³⁹ Sverker Jullander, “Timeless Interpretations? Observations on Tempo Fluctuation in Early Organ Recordings,” ed. Andrew McCrea, *Journal of the British Institute of Organ Studies* 28 (2004): 140.

A number of generalizations can be made from Sumsion's and Darke's recordings. Both players show:

- a) A flexibility of touch that adds a dimension of melodic interest not indicated by the score. Related to this (which I have not discussed here) is the registration practice, where stops are added at times in a much less discreet way than is common of performers today.
- b) A great deal of *rubato* – but also outright unmarked tempo shifts. This is considerably more pronounced in the case of Darke.
- c) By modern standards, overdoing of local-level expression: The hairpin markings, particularly on the first page of music are *very* noticeable. Notably, both Darke and Sumsion consistently observe marks such as *tenuto* and *marcato* as indicators of a break in the legato line.

In a 1967 radio broadcast recorded prior to an on-air performance by Herbert Sumsion of his *Paeon*, Howells spoke about his former aspirations of becoming an organist – and of then shifting focus and deciding to write for his organist friends whom he held in high esteem. In the same broadcast, Howells is quite modest about his own abilities as a player. But while he was certainly never a concert organist, he did attain the Fellowship diploma from the Royal College of Organists, the exam for which has an extremely demanding practical component. He also received a R.C.M. award for organ improvisation – which perhaps says something about the compositional style of this piece. It is a shame that there are no recordings of Howells' own organ playing. But if we take the composer's enthusiasm for his colleagues' abilities as sincere, and if we give some credit to the dedication of the *Rhapsody*, we can learn much about the performance practice of Howells' early organ works from Harold Darke's recording of this piece.

The evidence and observations I have assembled here suggest that phrasing marks in this particular piece are just that – phrases, not slurs – and are only tangentially connected with articulation. The local-level markings seem to have much

more to do with articulation than the phrases. Darke's phrasing, such as that in measures 8-10 of Figure 4.3 (p. 81) also affirms that even when no explicit tempo or articulation markings are present, tempo changes and occasional breaks in the legato line can be used as expressive devices in the interpretation of this music. Howells' other organ music from the 1910s, including *Rhapsodies* 2 and 3 and the first set of *Psalm-Preludes*, also have textures and markings very similar to those in this piece, and I think it would be safe to apply some of my conclusions to those works as well. The strict legato-verses-staccato aesthetics of Marcel Dupré which in my opinion still have a certain amount of currency in contemporary performances of this music, would appear to be a world apart from a desirable interpretation of this *Rhapsody*. Due to the dedication, the fact that Darke was an active concert organist at the time of the piece's composition in 1915, and frankly due to the fact that Darke's interpretation is so markedly, even radically different from contemporary interpretations, it is his rendition that I will use as a reference for my future performances of this piece.

Moderato, tranquillo

Sw. *mp*

assai legato

16 ft. to Sw.

Figure 4.1 Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No.1* (London: Augener, 1919), mm 1-3.

con anima

ff a tempo

Figure 4.2 Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No.1* (London: Augener, 1919), mm. 26-27.

To Dr Harold Darke.

Herbert Howells, Op. 17, No. 1

$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 60$ **Moderato, tranquillo**

MANUAL

Sw. *ppp*

assai legato *poco rit.*

16 ft. to Sw.

4/ *poco rit.* *very legato* *ppp* *pp* *broaden --- rit...*

$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 54$ *+4'*

espressivo molto *ppp*

Figure 4.3 Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody*, Op. 17, No.1 (London: Augener, 1919), mm. 1-11, as performed by Harold Darke at St. Michael's Cornhill in 1965, Delta Disc 12017, LP.

Handwritten annotations and musical score for Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No. 1*, measures 25-34.

Measure 25: $\text{♩} = 46$, $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 52$, *con anima*, *no attempt at legato in RH 8ves.*

Measure 26: *allarg.*, *rit.*, *ff a tempo*

Measure 28: *speeding up.*, $\text{♩} = 60$, $\text{♩} = 63$

Measure 31: $\text{♩} = 69$, $\text{♩} = 84$, $\text{♩} = 88$, *accel. (molto)*, *accel.*

Figure 4.4 Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No. 1* (London: Augener, 1919), mm. 25-34, as performed by Harold Darke at St. Michael's Cornhill in 1965, Delta Disc 12017, LP.

67/

♩ = ca. 36

"2"

(short)

mp

roll's last chord

mp

down to low D⁵

Churchdown, Aug. 1915

Figure 4.5 Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No.1* (London: Augener, 1919), mm. 67-71, as performed by Harold Darke at St. Michael's Cornhill in 1965, Delta Disc 12017, LP.

To Dr Harold Darke.

Herbert Howells, Op. 17, No 1

$\text{♩} = 58-60$ Moderato, tranquillo

MANUAL

Sw. *pp*

assai legato

PEDAL

16 ft. to Sw.

poco rit (\leq accel. \rightarrow)

pp *pp*

molto rall.

Figure 4.6 Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No.1* (London: Augener, 1919), mm.1-7, as performed by Herbert Sumsion at Gloucester Cathedral in 1965, *EMI Great Cathedral Organ Series. Volume One. Recorded 1963-1970*, reissued by Amphion Recordings, PHI CD 160, 1999.

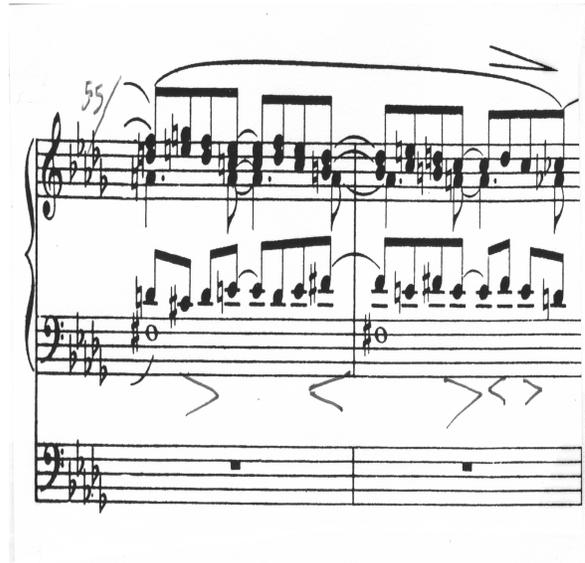


Figure 4.7 Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No.1* (London: Augener, 1919), mm. 55-56, as performed by Herbert Sumsion at Gloucester Cathedral in 1965, *EMI Great Cathedral Organ Series. Volume One. Recorded 1963-1970*, reissued by Amphion Recordings, PHI CD 160, 1999.



Figure 4.8 Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No.1* (London: Augener, 1919), measure 20.

Handwritten musical score for Herbert Howells' *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No. 1*, measures 25-34. The score is written on three systems of staves. The first system (measures 25-27) includes markings: "very sl. detached", "♩ = 52", "con anima", "allarg.", and "ff a tempo". The second system (measures 28-30) includes "v. smooth". The third system (measures 31-34) includes "poco. to ca. 58 = ♩", "sl. faster", "accel.", and "no accel." at the bottom. The score features complex rhythmic patterns with many beamed notes and dynamic markings.

Figure 4.9 Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No.1* (London: Augener, 1919), mm. 25-34, as performed by Stephen Cleobury at King's College Chapel, Cambridge in 1993, *Organ Music of Herbert Howells, Vol. 1*, Priory Records, CD.

Handwritten musical score for Herbert Howells' *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No. 1*, measures 25-34. The score is written for piano and consists of three systems of three staves each. The first system (measures 25-27) is marked with a tempo of quarter note = 72 and the instruction "con anima". The second system (measures 28-30) includes the instruction "allarg." followed by "ff a tempo". The third system (measures 31-34) includes the instruction "ca 80 = ♩" followed by "poco accel." and "accel. (no accel.)". The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, and dynamic markings such as "ff".

Figure 4.10 Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No.1* (London: Augener, 1919), mm. 25-34, as performed by Ian Sadler at St James' Cathedral Toronto in 1994, *British & Canadian Music for Organ*, CBC Records, MVCD 1068.

To Dr Harold Darke.

Herbert Howells, Op. 17, No. 1

$\text{♩} = 69$ Moderato, tranquillo

MANUAL

Sw. *pp*

assai legato

PEDAL

16 ft. to Sw.

Figure 4.11 Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No.1* (London: Augener, 1919), mm. 1-7, as performed by Ian Sadler at St James' Cathedral Toronto in 1994, *British & Canadian Music for Organ*, CBC Records, MVCD 1068.

Handwritten musical score for Rhapsody, Op. 17, No. 1 by Herbert Howells, showing measures 35-42. The score includes tempo markings like "driving fwd.", "appassionata e marc.", "allarg.", "Largando", and "subito", along with dynamic markings like "ff" and "marc.". It features complex rhythmic patterns, triplets, and a section marked "+ reeds".

Figure 4.12 Herbert Howells, *Rhapsody, Op. 17, No.1* (London: Augener, 1919), mm. 35-42, as performed by Harold Darke at St. Michael's Cornhill in 1965, Delta Disc 12017, LP.

CONCLUSION

Central to this dissertation is my belief that English organ scores from the early 20th century are guides; they cannot be properly interpreted if one approaches them with a modernist “objectivity of the score” mentality. While Lindsay Lafford stated that “a good deal of personal interpretation would be necessary” in order to realize the wishes of the composer,¹⁴⁰ Marcel Dupré believed that “the interpreter must never allow his own personality to appear. As soon as it penetrates the work has been betrayed.”¹⁴¹ It would be hard to imagine a starker contrast.

Because of their less prescriptive nature, interpretive ambiguities are inherent to scores created by composers such as Herbert Howells. This dissertation cannot provide simple ‘correct answers,’ but I have attempted to present a number of possible solutions to some of the more common interpretive problems. Central here is the slur / phrase mark, which has a multivalent nature in this musical culture, particularly at the organ. Legato is but one musical effect the slur seeks to convey.

In addition to the printed evidence, this less strict approach to score interpretation is, critically, reflected in the recordings made by English organists born before 1900. Such organists frequently show a great deal of rhythmic freedom and are not afraid to ‘overdo’ (by modern standards) local-level expression. The result is as surprising as it is musically satisfying.

It may at first seem a paradox to state that we must distance ourselves from the idea of “fidelity to the score” if we are to interpret these works in a way that is aesthetically convincing. But I do not advocate a blind surrender to an ‘anything goes’ mode of performance practice. Rather, it is hoped that the sources presented in this

¹⁴⁰ Lindsay Lafford, e-mail to the author, 1 November 2009.

¹⁴¹ Marcel Dupré, *Philosophie de Musique* (Tourani: Collegium Musicum, 1984), 43; quoted in Jullander, 140.

dissertation will open up new interpretive possibilities that will assist performers in being truer to the spirit of this remarkable body of music.

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