

CARSTEN KLOMP

ORGAN PLAYING FROM THE
VERY BEGINNING

ORGAN COURSE FOR BEGINNERS



BU 2990

MUSIKVERLAG • DR. J. BUTZ • BONN

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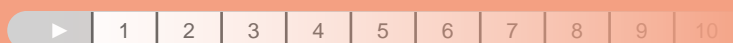
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KEEP ON TRACK THROUGH THE LESSONS AND
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START



A very good place to start

Dear budding organist,

People have always claimed that, to start learning the organ, you need to have had several years of piano lessons. This book doesn't deny that principle, but the reality of organ lessons doesn't always match the ideal learning scenario. Quite a few people starting to learn the organ have never learnt to play the piano, or did so a very long time ago. Perhaps a boy was given a tour of an organ in his confirmation classes and fell in love with the instrument. Or a maths student is looking for something to take her mind off her studies. Or a home-maker had three years of piano lessons when she was little and is looking for a new hobby now that the children have moved out – particularly as the vicar has already asked her several times if she could accompany the odd service on the organ. Or there's Christoph, my son, who started on percussion when he was five, never wanted to learn the piano, but at the age of nine asked his dad to teach him to play the organ. None of these people will want to be put off from learning the organ for three years while they brush up their piano playing, and none of them has enough time to start learning two instruments at once.

In fact, the difference between the piano and the organ is much bigger than you would think, given how similar their keyboards look. Unlike a note played on the piano, which starts getting quieter as soon as it has been played, a note played on the organ will sound exactly the same from the time the key is pressed until the player lets it go. In terms of its sound, therefore, the organ is much closer to a wind instrument than a piano. So even if someone who has learnt the piano will be able to find their way around the organ a bit more quickly, they will still need to learn an entirely new instrument. I therefore welcome you all to *Organ Playing from the Very Beginning*.

Structure and contents

This organ course is not divided up into chapters, but into learning units which, alongside the weekly "music rations", also contain colour-coded texts on various topics. These are:

- ▶ **BASIC MUSIC THEORY** (from page 8),
- ▶ **MUSIC THEORY** with ear training
- ▶ and **ORGAN THEORY**.

Just as in organ lessons, this course may jump from one topic to another. If someone would prefer to focus first on one topic and then

on another, they can find a list at the beginning of the book of all the different topics covered. The solutions to the tasks can be found on page 99.

All of the specialist jargon is translated and/or explained. Apart from at the beginning of a piece, fingering is generally only given when the hand changes position.

The ^ above a pedal note means it is played with the toe of the right foot; if it is beneath the note, it is played with the toe of the left foot. The ∪ means right or left heel.

Before we begin, let's ask the most important question – i.e.:

Are you sitting comfortably?

When we play the organ, we work equally with our hands and our feet. So it is logical that our position must make both equally easy. There are standardised sizes for **console** design (the part of the organ with the **manuals, pedals** and **stops**), but sometimes organ-builders don't adhere to them, and you certainly won't find them on historical instruments. And since not everyone playing the organ will be the same height, the benches on the teaching and practice organs need to be adjustable. If the bench isn't adjustable, perhaps some pieces of wood can be placed under its feet. Pedal boosters are also useful, as small children can reach them easily to operate the pedals, but very few organs are fitted with them.

Because the sitting position depends on the entire height of the body, the length of the legs and the ratio between calf and thigh, and because this organ course is intended for everyone, big and small, no photos or drawings are provided here. Rather, I will try and describe what it feels like if you're sitting properly. In the early days in particular, it is absolutely worth taking the time to work with your teacher to find a position that is right for you. Poor posture is not just uncomfortable, but can also hamper or prevent the movements needed to play the organ.

Finding the right height for the bench

When setting the height of the bench, it is necessary to make sure that your feet can touch enough of the pedals to be able to easily press them by moving the foot up and down at the ankle. So the toe of the foot should not hang down above the pedals: only the heel hangs lightly in the air. At the same

time, it should not cost you any effort to hold your feet in the air in order to avoid accidentally pressing the pedals. If you aren't using the pedals for quite a long time, you'll find that many organ benches have a bar below the seat which provides not only structural stability, but also a handy place to rest your feet.

Position of organ bench and player

Just as important are the position of the bench and the position of the player sitting on it. If you sit too far forward on the bench, you will constantly feel that you are about to slide off. If you sit too far back, your thighs will not be free enough to be able to move easily to the right and left. The pedals must not be used to support the upper body, so it is important that the body is well-balanced on the bench, "at rest", so to speak. A good posture gives the player as much support as necessary while allowing as much freedom of movement as possible.

At the same time, you should sit close enough to the keyboard to reach all the manuals (the rows of keys for the hands) but far enough away to be able to move very freely. The angle between lower and upper arm should be around 110°. To get to the correct angle, it may be necessary to move the bench backwards or forwards.

What I do is to start by finding a good sitting position on the bench and then move the bench itself as far backwards or forwards as I need. Despite the time this takes, I do it every time before I play. And you really must take time for this, no matter whether you are playing in public or "merely" practising. If, as happens on some consoles, you can't find a perfect position, you just have to make a reasonable compromise. But for practice purposes, you should look for an organ bench which you can play from without ruining your posture.

Each of the weekly learning units starts with a piece for pedal solo. For short people and children, it may be necessary to adjust the organ bench before and/or after this piece is played. In the pedal solo pieces, the feet must reach the pedals easily (⇒ "Finding the right height for the bench"). In the other pieces, it is more important to be able to reach the keys of the manuals.

So for children in particular it is important not to forget to keep adjusting the organ bench to the right height – the day will come when you are tall enough to reach both the manuals and the pedals easily at the same time.

Technical words

Like every area of life, music has its own special words. I have therefore included a glossary (⇒ page 104 ff) of many musical terms used in this volume. It contains brief explanations of the words written in bold print throughout the course.

Acknowledgements

My first message of thanks must go to my son Christoph (now fourteen years old). He had to battle through the entire organ course using my handwritten manuscript, and showed me some of the places where my approach was less than ideal.

I would also like to thank Butz-Verlag, and particularly Hans-Peter Bähr, the publisher, for taking the risk and putting in all the hard work to turn this novel organ course into a publication. My thanks also go to Tobias Bauer for proofreading so well and making good suggestions for improvements, and to Benjamin T. Hilger for designing this volume and providing some photos of the interior of an organ.

I would particularly like to thank Jenny Setchell, from whose beautiful book *Organs & Organists. Their Inside Stories* I have been allowed to borrow some photos for this organ course – and which I can recommend to all organ fans (and not just because she kindly let me use them).*

I am grateful to Paul Hönicke for giving his time and using his organ software to record the CD, and to Jiri Zurek for giving permission to use his samples from the Schnittger organ in Zwolle.

The English edition of this organ course must also of course include a note of thanks to Andrew Sims, who combined the work of translating and adapting the German texts with a sense of humour, as well as to Paul Tarling, who kindly checked the accuracy of the translation.

Finally, I would like to thank my many colleagues who have never ceased encouraging me to keep working on my course and to publish it.

Wishing you much joy as you learn to play the most wonderful of instruments,

Carsten Klomp

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*) *Organs & Organists. Their Inside Stories* is available as catalogue number BuB 21 from Butz-Verlag.

Introduction for the teacher

Dear colleague,

Both my own teaching experience and numerous conversations with other organ teachers have clearly and repeatedly highlighted the lack of an organ course for beginners. Many of the existing courses are regarded as over-academic – as though playing (!) the organ shouldn't be fun – or people complain that the early lessons are too hard, or the expected progress too fast.

Further to this, the teaching environment has changed a lot in recent years. Just a few years ago, it was still the norm, indeed the generally expected and required precondition, that several years of piano playing would precede any organ lessons, but that is far from always being the case today. Partly, this is due to the encouraging fact that organ teachers are daring enough (or see the need) to teach younger children. Also, the many options available, coupled with a lack of leisure time for children and young adults, mean that they are not so keen to be fobbed off with the argument that they need to learn the piano before starting on the organ. Not many children today will be willing to shelve their desire to play the organ for three years in order to learn the piano, or to wait until their legs are long enough to reach the pedals.

When it comes to the over-50s – another significant group of people taking organ lessons – who had a few piano lessons when they were young, but have hardly touched a keyboard since then, the same applies. They will also be less than willing to get to grips with the piano first; on the contrary, many of them start learning the organ because their church is desperate for someone to play for services.

***Organ Playing from the Very Beginning* tries to make a virtue of these necessities:**

- ▶ It really does start at the very beginning, and advances quite slowly. The first few pages are designed for pupils who have **no keyboard experience at all** (and can of course be skipped).
- ▶ Almost all the pieces have been produced or reworked for this course. So it is teaching material which should still be fun.
- ▶ *Organ Playing from the Very Beginning* can of course be used by pupils who have some initial experience on the piano – pedal technique, hand-foot coordination and the very different sounds

produced by our instrument will still pose a challenge for them too.

▶ The volume is divided into “**weekly rations**”, each of which begins with a brief piece for the pedals. Each unit covers different aspects of organ playing, and thematic chapters have deliberately been avoided. So *Organ Playing from the Very Beginning* can (!) be worked straight through from front to back. At the same time, the prescribed learning units are of course just a point of reference. If someone wants to do more or less, they are welcome to do so.

▶ Almost every learning unit includes a brief **text** about elementary **MUSIC THEORY** or **ORGAN THEORY**. Here, I have worked from the situation I experience so frequently when giving organ tours and first lessons: sheer curiosity creates questions about the meaning of switches, buttons and pistons which are answered in the first few texts about organ design. The texts in this volume are introductory in nature and easy for the non-organist to understand.

▶ I believe that (basic) musical training must include **ear training**. This volume also contains a few sample exercises; on the CD, these are played not on the organ, but on the piano.

The **title** *Organ Playing from the Very Beginning* is deliberately inclusive. This is not an organ course specifically for children or specifically for adults. A decision to opt for one or the other would inevitably have meant that children might not be able to cope, or would be bored, and/or adults wouldn't feel they were being taken seriously.

Hopefully, though, the course is one that can be used to **teach both child and adult beginners**. I have consciously refrained from providing too many teaching instructions, and have only written down the material that the pupils need. So this organ course only provides the material needed for learning; I leave the teaching method up to you, my fellow organ teacher, trusting that modern methods of teaching the organ are available and known to you.

The idea of starting each lesson with a **pedal solo** originally stemmed from the problem with the pupil's height. My nine-year-old son was too small to be able to reach both the manuals and the pedals with ease. So the organ bench was lowered for the mostly eight-bar pedal pieces,

and raised again for the other pieces. On the other hand, playing the pedals is one of the fascinating aspects of organ playing, and represents unfamiliar territory for the non-organist – children and adults alike. So it seems to me to make sense to start with the basics of this technique from the outset. And even without the need to adjust the height of the bench, this concept has also worked exceedingly well in early lessons for adults. The upshot is a large number of pieces which – at least in my experience – are far more enjoyable than most pedal exercises.

Permit me one comment about teaching methods: when I expect **legato playing** in this organ course, it has nothing to do with stylistic preferences or phrasing. Rather, players starting out sometimes find it very difficult to maintain the pressure on the keys and pedals, resulting in an involuntary and unintended non-legato. In my experience, it is worthwhile starting (!) by insisting on legato, and then gradually also trying out other phrasing possibilities. Pieces designed for this can be found in this volume. Similarly, the fingerings and pedallings I have suggested are pointers to possible phrasings, and can certainly be changed. The accompanying CD highlights possible phrasings, but these are mere suggestions. I have retained original slurs, e.g. in the Bartók arrangements, but do not feel they necessarily signify legato, rather being indicative of phrases.

Finally, a request: please do write to me and tell me how you get on with *Organ Playing from the Very Beginning*, and what improvements could be made. If possible, these contributions will feed into subsequent editions of this volume. The best way to contact me is via Butz-Verlag, who will forward your messages to me.

Heidelberg, Spring 2020,

Carsten Klomp

Grote Kerk, Breda, Netherlands © Jenny Setchell



$\text{♩} + \text{♩} = \text{♩}$ or: two crotchets equal a minim.

The numbers above and below the systems show which fingers to use:
1 = thumb, 2 = index finger, 3 = middle finger, 4 = ring finger, 5 = little finger

PEDAL SOLO

The \wedge beneath a pedal note means it is played with the toe of the left foot.
If the symbol is above the note, it is played with the toe of the right foot.

$\text{♩} + \text{♩} = \text{♩}$ or: two minims equal a semibreve.

The tie between two notes (see the pedals, bars 1 and 2) means that the note is held, rather than played again.

Clap this rhythm and count aloud as you do it.
Make up your own rhythm. It should also consist of eight $\frac{4}{4}$ bars.



Fig. 6: ▼ On this example of a German organ, the Brustwerk, containing the pipes located right in front of the player, is easy to spot – and you can also see it on the front cover of this book!





Some sharp words about flats ①

MUSIC THEORY 3

The distance between each key and its nearest neighbour (which may be a black key between the white keys) is called a **semitone**.

The # symbol isn't a hashtag – it's a **sharp**! If it comes in front of a note it moves that note a semitone higher, i.e. one key to the right on the keyboard. If it comes before a C, we call the altered note C sharp, and the same goes for the other white notes on the keyboard – D sharp, E sharp, F sharp, etc. up to B sharp.

There would appear to be a few notes missing from the keyboard. F becomes F sharp – that makes sense. But how does B become B sharp or E become E sharp? There are no separate keys for those notes. Nevertheless, a sharp in front of a B or E means that they are raised by a semitone. Since the semitone above B (and E) is not a black key, we use instead the next white key, the one we normally call C (or F).

Find out more in [MUSIC THEORY 4](#) on page 27.

Task: Here are some notes with sharps in front of them. Name them and find them on the keyboard.

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(Solution on page 99)



Béla Bartók (1881–1945)
Arrangement: C. K.

In this piece, it makes sense to practise the hands separately first. ||

Joining forces: the couplers

ORGAN THEORY 7

The **couplers** link the keyboards together. For example, the stops of the second manual can be controlled from the first manual (**manual couplers**) and the stops on the manuals can be controlled from the pedals (**pedal couplers**). The score will say something like “II/I” or “I/Ped”, meaning that the second manual is to be coupled to the first, or that the first manual is to be coupled to the pedals. Usually, coupling only works in one direction, i.e. the second manual can be played from the first manual, but not the other way round. The coupling of the manuals to each other or to the pedals results in a significant increase in the potential number of combinations of sounds on the organ.

In many cases, the couplers are controlled by the feet. In this case, pedal couplers (⇒ Fig. 19 on page 50, also Fig. 17 on page 49) or **pistons** (⇒ Fig. 20 on page 50, also Fig. 16 on page 49) are located just above the pedals. Sometimes the couplers are switched on and off by drawstops, rocker tabs, etc. (⇒ Fig. 18 on page 50).

If the couplers are activated, this will often affect the touch – the feeling you get when pressing the keys – of the manuals (you won’t really notice it on the pedals): if the couplers work mechanically, the manuals on most organs become a bit heavier to play.

Task: Find the couplers on your teaching organ and work out which parts of the organ can be coupled and how the touch changes when you activate the couplers.



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Arrangement: C. K.

Musical score for measures 1-6. The piece is in G major (one sharp) and common time. The right hand features a melodic line with a fifth finger (5) on the first note, followed by eighth notes and a quarter note. The left hand provides a bass line with a fifth finger (5) on the first note and sustained notes. A dynamic marking of \wedge (accent) is placed under the first note of the bass line.

Musical score for measures 7-12. The right hand continues the melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes (3) and a quarter note (4). The left hand has a *sim.* (sustained) marking. A dynamic marking of \wedge is placed under the first note of the bass line.

Musical score for measures 13-18. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes (3) and a quarter note (1). The left hand has a dynamic marking of \wedge under the first note. The piece concludes with a first ending (1.) and a second ending (2.).

