

## *Adult Beginners Discover the Organ*

by Ardyth J. Lohuis

Fascination with the organ has no age limit. “I always wanted to play” and “I always wondered about the organ” are comments that most organists have heard from wistful mature persons of varying years. When that verbal ball is tossed, do your recruiting antennae go way up? Do you employ every stratagem to encourage them to “follow their bliss” as Joseph Campbell would have us do? We need no longer be bound by past dicta of requiring moderately advanced piano skills before learning to play the organ, nor is it necessary to use the chord approach or one-footed style with adult beginners.

A retired kindergarten teacher with limited piano study in her early years; a retired school music (harp) teacher who wanted to help her church; choir directors desirous of developing hymn-playing skill; a judge who loves pipe organs and their music; “ear players” who manage service playing with minimal formal training—all have entered my studio doors with a desire to learn.

Adult beginners bring the same teaching challenges as students of any age: some are patient, some impatient; some are dexterous, some are stiff of finger and limb; some are quick studies, others slow; some are naturally coordinated, some are awkward. They may be as outspoken as younger people and their musical tastes as divergent. Crafting a plan of study for each one needs to be based on both immediate objectives and their long-term goals, remaining constantly alert and flexible in approach.

“From the known to the unknown, one step at a time” was ingrained during the first keyboard pedagogy course I took as an undergraduate student. *Discover the Organ*<sup>®</sup> follows that principal especially well since it is not predicated on prior keyboard abilities. With the first availability of *Discover the Organ*<sup>®</sup> in test editions, I have used both repertoire and technique volumes with a number of adult students and supplemented them with additional music with easy pedals. Attractive music on appropriate levels of difficulty, presented clearly but not childish, characterizes the *Discover the Organ*<sup>®</sup> series.

Must you begin at the beginning of the series? Not at all! Students who are functional in a Grade 1 piano method book will be successful with *Basic Organ Repertoire* and *Modern Keyboard Technique*, Level One. Level Two materials are comparable to grade 2 piano methods. With a short assessment of your student’s keyboard competence, you will know where to place that individual in the series.\* Any small knowledge gaps can be easily filled during a lesson, and the suggestions for practice, performance and style that are a special feature of the *Discover* series are likely to be carefully followed by mature students.

New organists of every age want to incorporate pedal playing, yet the challenges of managing new manual techniques, reading three staves, and coordinating feet can be daunting. To grant satisfaction in pedal playing while limiting the challenges, optional pedal points and modest parts for toes only are included for many pieces even in the lower levels. Students ready for greater pedal involvement can extend their technique through several practical collections: *Easiest Hymns* arranged by Wayne Leupold (WL600037); Richard Hudson’s *Hymn Trios for the New Organist* (four volumes of increasing difficulty); and *Trios for Organ* (two volumes, not based on hymn tunes). With *Easiest Hymns* settings usable as congregational accompaniments, the new organist can bring study repertoire into immediate use.

When you next hear a wistful, “I’ve always wanted to play,” capitalize on the opportunity it presents. The future of the organ is in the hands of the mature as well as the young!

\*For additional assistance in placing a keyboard student in a particular level of *Discover the Organ*<sup>®</sup>, see the “Technical Levels Curriculum” page in the catalogue of Wayne Leupold Editions, Inc. and in section 6, *Organ Teaching Methods and Publications*, in this web site.

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