From the Editor’s Perspective…

November/December 2013

Although there are a few of the more familiar carols included in this edition, I thought it would be interesting to explore some lesser-known tunes and to include some unusual settings of the familiar as well. At this point, I suspect your musical library is stuffed with settings of all the commonly heard favorites. So here is an opportunity to intersperse the old and the new, and the common and the less familiar, as you desire. I hope you and your listeners are intrigued by each, and that all will contribute to meaningful and joyous Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas seasons! Let me know what you think by using this email address: larry@lorenz.com.

Thanks! I appreciate your feedback.

Larry Pugh, Editor
The Church Pianist

Let All Things Now Living – John Purifoy

This charming Welsh folk melody has rightfully found its way into many hymnals since the creation of this wonderful Thanksgiving text in 1939 by Kathryn K. Davis. And this slightly simplified John Purifoy setting delightfully portrays the unpretentious attractiveness of both the text and the melody of this newer hymn.

In spite of the basically straightforward presentation of the melody, you might find the consecutive 6ths in mm. 23–28 and mm. 93–101 a bit “clunky” to play. To preserve the preferred lightness of the music, either adjust the tempo slightly to ease playability or simply play the melody in the RH, omitting the lower 6th for the section. The lilting effect is more important than the harmonic mirroring of the melody. With a little work and some deft pedaling, though, this revised setting fits nicely under the hands in spite of the consecutive 6ths. And if you prefer a softer ending, you could stop with the fermata in m. 93. But I do like the festive ending for Thanksgiving services!
**Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated** – Barbara Boertje

Both this text and this arrangement have two hymn tunes: the more well-known **HENDON** and the less-common **YARBROUGH** (entering at the end of m. 12). Both are in the 1991 Baptist Hymnal (#277 & #283) and fit together rather well in the capable hands of arranger Barbara Boertje (Bohrt-chee).

The text is a reflection of the author Frances Havergal’s complete conversion to follow the precepts of being a Christian. As she penned the text, she finished with the words “ever only, ALL to Thee,” being certain to capitalize the word “ALL.” It is a very strong text of commitment to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ, no matter which tune is used!

**Hymn of Grateful Praise** – Paul Taylor

Although this title is included in this issue primarily for Thanksgiving usage, I’ve included a reference to the Epiphany carol, *As with Gladness Men of Old*. With a change of title, this setting would also work well in an Epiphany service. After all, the tune name—**DIX**—is derived from the name of the author of the carol, William Dix!

I really enjoy the detached baroque style of the introduction, interludes, and coda. Besides offering a musical cohesiveness, it presents a nice musical contrast to the more legato hymn presentation in this setting, while adding to the joyful buoyancy of the overall effect.

Although it isn’t indicated in the music (an embarrassing oversight), I would *decrescendo* on beats 3–4 of m. 34 to a *piano* in m. 35. At m. 38, I would insert a *mezzo forte* followed by a *decrescendo* at the end of m. 39, making mm. 40–41 at a *piano* dynamic level. That might be a little fussy to some, though, and playing from m. 33 all at *mezzo forte* as marked certainly wouldn’t be “bad.” As always, let your own ear be your guide. I just like to present the options my ear hears. At this point, please accept either my humble apology or my sincere “you’re welcome,” depending on which is appropriate for you! 😊

**Sing to the Lord a Bright New Song!** – David Paxton

Well, as the title might imply, I must tell you that I find it difficult to play this joyful original without a smile on my face. It’s just fun to play. Be sure to keep it under control so that you can pay special attention to the important intermittent *staccato* markings that provide a nice,
stylistic contrast to the trumpet-like melodic line. This effect also provides musical variety to the more subdued legato B section.

In m. 54 of my digital proof copy of this piece, there remains a stray piano that I would simply ignore if it made it to the printed copy. I’d just let the fun drive to the fortissimo final octave Cs and end with a flourish!

**Fling Wide the Door** – Joseph Prentiss

This is a lesser-known Advent carol with early 18th-century roots. It remains in the 1978 Lutheran Book of Worship (#32) and has a bright, jubilant tune that is worthy of being more widely known. This setting reaches back to those roots stylistically with a stately but joyful organistic approach typical of that era. Since this is not a well-known carol, I included an entire verse under the title in the magazine which might be helpful to include in your church bulletin as well.

One slight editorial detail I would recommend. There is an errant (I believe) rit. indicated in m. 49 that I would move to m. 52, while totally disregarding the (also errant, I believe!) rall. in m. 50! I apologize for the confusion. If we followed as marked, we’d have to add 15-20 seconds to the duration!

**Prepare the Way, O Zion** – Richard Blake

Though this well-known Advent carol first appeared in print around 1700, the tune itself is derived from a Swedish folk tune of the 14th century. The text is found with a variety of similar translations, even in modern hymnals, but all center on the excitement created by the coming of the long-promised Messiah, with each verse ending with a recurring couplet, similar to this in meaning if not exact wording:

> Hosanna to the Lord,
> For He fulfills God’s Word!

So strive to keep the anticipatory excitement reflective of your playing, even in the softer sections, although the tempo should be steady, unrushed and under control, no faster than the metronome marking of 88 for a dotted quarter as indicated.
**Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence** – Craig Curry

Craig Curry offers us a mostly subdued, almost mystical treatment of this beloved Advent hymn. Actually, this hymn is also often found in the Holy Communion sections of hymnals as well (with the same text), though it is most often sung/heard during Advent.

Whichever usage is chosen, this setting is entirely appropriate for each. Pay special attention to the pedaling indications to fully achieve the desired musical effect, especially at the beginning. You might even want to consider experimenting with unusual pedaling techniques at the end as well. For instance, though the printed notation indicates holding the pedal down only in mm. 47–48, you may, depending on your instrument and the acoustics in your sanctuary, want to continue with the pedal depressed through m. 51. Your ear and personal musical preference must make the final judgment. But don’t be afraid to explore the possibilities. This is a very dramatic setting!

**’Twas in the Moon of Wintertime** – Anthony Giamanco

This 16th-century traditional French carol has a 17th-century text written by a Jesuit missionary living among the Huron/Wendat people, Jean de Brebeuf. Although it is very popular and often sung in Canada, the author used language and images more familiar to the Native Americans than to us, such as using *Gitchi Manitou* as the name for God. Although there have been some more recent translations using more familiar language and imagery, the language has remained a barrier to its broader usage. By the way, it does appear in the Presbyterian hymnal (#61), among others. Fortunately, pianists can focus on a wonderful setting of the beautiful melody and not have to deal directly with the text!

I would caution you to not make too much of the LH rhythmic *motif*. A more subtle, gentle feel is preferable. Try to match the lovely mood and flow of the melody. The entire setting is understated and haunting, not to mention very appealing and fresh to the ear.

**The First Nowell** – Craig Curry

Okay. First things first. The name of the tune is THE FIRST NOWELL. The name of the carol is the same. Its roots are English, not French. Thus, *Nowell* is the correct spelling, not *Noel*. The latter has become the preferred spelling for the word in general usage, but that does not change the spelling of the title of the carol. So please spell it correctly in your church bulletin. That would make your editor smile. I’m over it now...
Be that as it may, this is a lovely, surprisingly understated setting of this carol favorite no matter how you spell it, and that makes it all the more musically tasty and refreshing to hear. With that in mind, retain the subdued mood at m. 10, even though the tempo moves ahead slightly. The dynamic remains at *mezzo piano*. Although we become slightly louder at m. 18, the carol doesn’t fully blossom until m. 30, only to return to its opening simplicity from m. 54 to the end. A stunning setting in my book—I hope you agree!

**He Whom Shepherds Once Came Praising** – Lani Smith

This traditional 16th-century German Carol is mostly ignored in current hymn books, but I find it to be a joyful, simple dance-like carol of considerable charm. The archaic 15th-century probably doesn’t help its cause, but again, we pianists may simply delight in the music.

This setting incorporates both the traditional triple meter as well as a chorale-like duple section for contrast. Curiously, there was a brief period in history in which the hymn itself appeared in duple meter. Thankfully, the buoyant triple meter survived for the ages, though the duple section provides an interesting musical and stylistic divergence here, if only for eight measures.

**In the Bleak Midwinter** – Jason W. Krug

The touching Christina Rossetti poem of 1872 found its perfect musical mate in 1906 with the tune *Cranham* by Gustav Holst. Cranham is a village near Cheltenham, England, the birthplace of Holst.

Arranger Jason Krug has added his personal framework around the tune and infuses it with a few fresh harmonies that gently nudge the ear to listen again as if for the first time. I think you and your listeners will enjoy the experience this Christmas season.