In The Shadows
But Still in the Spotlight

An introductory guide to
Piano Accompanying

JamesGilbertMusic.com

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James Gilbert

Preface

Why this book?

Over the years I've had the opportunity (and sometimes misfortune) of trying to help amateur pianists accompany a choir or soloist. This was frequently in the public school system with choirs. I also remember the first few years after I started accompanying. In both cases, whether it was me helping students or my choir director helping me to learn accompanying, there was never enough time in class to learn and there simply weren't any 'accompanying' lessons available. Yes, some piano teachers include accompanying as part of their lessons, but by the very nature of piano lessons, it has to be a supplement to lessons. I also could not find any books focused on accompanying. Whether you are interested in learning to accompany as a teenager or an adult, the traditional way, and arguably the best way to learn is on the job training. Just start accompanying. However, that is slow, full of lots of trial and error, potentially embarrassing and just not as good as having some help. My research has found a significant lack of books on the subject of accompanying. So, based on my experience, both as an accompanist and someone who has helped pianists become accompanists, I decided to write this book. I hope it is useful to all who read it.

How I got started in accompanying

I vaguely remember in 4th or 5th grade desperately wanting to play piano for one song that our elementary choir was singing. The music teacher told me in a very delicate way that I wasn't ready to be playing for the choir. I may have been given the opportunity to play a solo or something, but I really wanted to play for the choir. Why, I was never sure, but I wanted to play for the choir. I remember fairly

well a few years later at my first day of 8th grade in a brand new school building. I was anxious to get to chorus class a bit early so I could talk to the teacher. I nervously approached the chorus teacher and said "I play the piano and I want to play the piano for the choir." (I didn't know then that you called such a person an 'accompanist.') He told me that would be good and he would teach me all I needed to know to be a great accompanist. For the rest of the school year, my seat was up front at the piano where I became the first accompanist of the choir at that new Junior High.

About a year and a half later I was sitting in a Sunday School class at a church my family had only recently started attending. The music minister came in pulled me out of the class. He had a problem. His pianist had called and said she wasn't going to be able to make it. He had heard that I played piano and wanted to know if I could play the hymns for the Sunday church service due to start in about 15 minutes? I was a bit hesitant, but I said sure, I'd try. Although there was an organist at the church, the pianist was the 'lead' instrument. I don't remember the service itself, but within a few months I started playing the piano for two church services and fairly soon after that I was accompanying the two choirs at the church. One nice bonus I wasn't expecting was that I was also getting paid to do it.

At the start of 11th grade I was at my first day at a brand new high school. Unlike 8th grade, I had the opportunity to meet my teachers and tour the school prior to its opening. Similar to the 8th grade, I went up to the choir director at the pre-school tour and told him I wanted to play piano for the choir. I started playing for the choir and became the first accompanist at that High School. (I think that fact is commemorated with my name on a plaque in the office or something like that). In addition to the main choir, I also accompanied many vocal and instrumental soloists, played piano in musical orchestra pits and was accompanist for two other school choirs, one of them a show choir. By the end of my senior year I was accompanying 2 church choirs, 2 church services (one of which sometimes on organ), 3 school choirs and playing piano for funerals and weddings.

Ever since then I have remained an accompanist in one form or another. In many ways, being an accompanist has been the steadiest gig I've had as a musician. Not quite 20 years after that first day of 8th grade when I first started accompanying, I was playing for a vocal solo competition in a small classroom at a local university. The group of middle school students I was playing for happened to be students at a performing arts magnet school where my former High School choir director was now teaching. (I was employed as a 'consultant' for the magnet school). The judge, whom I had the opportunity to meet before the competition started, listened to the soloist with a blank face as many judges do. The room was crowded with the parents, family and classmates who all gave great support to the soloist. After the song was over he briefly commented her on a good job and offered the usual suggestions that judges offer. Then with a proud smile on his face pointed to me and spent some time telling the soloist and everyone in the room that she was fortunate to have me as her accompanist. The judge said that he knew this to be true as he had taught me everything I'd ever need to know to be a good accompanist. The judge was my chorus teacher from 8th grade choir (who, until that morning, I had not seen since 8th grade).

Whether you've always wanted to play the piano for the choir or for a vocal or instrumental soloist or you're just curious about accompanying, this book has something that can help you become an accompanist or become a better accompanist.

About The Author

James Gilbert has been accompanying choirs since 1976 and has accompanied (on piano or organ) a variety of solo instrumentalists, vocalists and church congregations over the years. He has also accompanied civic groups and at both vocal and instrumental solo competitions. He graduated from Stetson University, DeLand, Florida with a Bachelor's degree in music with an emphasis in theory/composition. His primary instrument was piano. He did Graduate studies in Studio Writing and

Production at the University of Miami. He has worked for many years in church music. He has also worked in the public school system and has been a private piano instructor. In addition to his performing and teaching, he has also had several pieces of music published by national publishers. He is now an online publisher of sheet music and mp3 files at JamesGilbertMusic.com. He has 2 self-produced CD's available and has been accompanist and co-producer on 4 other CD's.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

What is an accompanist?

For our purposes, an accompanist is someone who plays the piano (or organ or other keyboard instrument) while someone else sings or plays an instrument. That is, when a soloist, choir or large group performs a piece of music, the person playing the piano is the accompanist. More often than not, it is a background role. But, without the accompanist, the performer would often sound rather silly, which makes the accompanist an essential part to the performance.

The Oxford Dictionary of Music defines the modern use of the word *accompaniment* in a similar way. However, it also mentions that the original meaning of the word did not imply a subservient or background role, but rather that of an almost equal. In many pieces the accompaniment will not be subservient. An *accompanist* often finds themselves in that dual role – one of a subservient musical background source and one of an equal prominent musical source. In either case, without the accompanist, what the audience hears would not sound as good. *In the shadows, but still in the spotlight.*

Intended audience

This book is intended for the pianist that has never accompanied or has done very little accompanying. If you have never accompanied a choir, vocalist or instrumentalist on a regular basis, and are interested in doing so, this book is for you. Maybe you've never accompanied and have never considered it but are curious, this book is also for you. If you've accompanied some but feel you need to learn some tips to improve your accompanying, this book is for you. If you've been accompanying for

years and everyone, including professional colleagues tell you how terrific you are, this book may not be for you, but even so, you may find some tips helpful.

Just because you can learn and perform a solo piano piece does not automatically make you an accompanist. There is more to accompanying than a typical solo pianist learns. I would encourage pianists that have no accompanying experience to use this as a guide to becoming an accompanist. Piano teachers may also find this useful as a supplement. Too often piano teachers, who may have never accompanied themselves, focus on solo performing and neglect the accompanying side of being a pianist.

What you need to already know

You should already know how to play the piano and should have been playing for a few years to get the most out of this book. If you are still using a graded/numbered piano method/lesson book (like the Alfred Adult or Alfred Basic Piano Library), then you might not be ready for everything in this book, but you will certainly grow into it. It will be helpful if you learned some basic music theory while taking lessons. It will come in handy. A familiarity with different styles of music, from classical to popular, will help. Since it helps to practice what you are learning, it would also be great if you already know someone who needs an accompanist and who would be willing to be your guinea pig.

What you should learn

By reading this book and putting the material in it to practice, you should gain the following insights: how to accompany; what you might expect to experience as an accompanist and learning how to improve your accompanying skills beyond what this book teaches. We hope this book also helps you to get people to keep asking you to be their accompanist. Finally, we hope it serves as a good introduction to the world of accompanying.

Chapter 2 – What You'll Find In This Book

This book is organized into the following sections:

- Basic musicianship tips
- Rehearsals
- Performances
- Accompanying large groups
- Dealing with personalities
- Practical tips, including business tips and a word about coaching

We'll start first with a basic musicianship section covering items you'll need to know to be a good accompanist, including sight reading and page turning. We'll cover the different types of accompanying you're likely to run across – choral, vocal and instrumental – and what you can expect at those type of rehearsals. We will talk about performances and the differences between rehearsals and performances, including a section on etiquette for the accompanist. We will also discuss accompanying large groups – such as church services, school assemblies and the like. Finally, we'll have sections dealing with the practical side of being an accompanist: dealing with difficult personalities, logistical and business tips and some comments on coaching.

If you don't read anything else, read the basic musicianship section and the sections that discuss the type of accompanying you anticipate doing the most. While you will benefit the most from reading the whole book, those two sections will at least give you a good start and introduction to the world of accompanying. The terms 'soloist,' 'instrumentalist,' and 'choir' will be used interchangeably throughout this book unless otherwise indicated. I might say 'when accompanying a soloist' which could also refer to 'accompanying a choir' or 'accompanying an instrumentalist.'

Chapter 3 – Know Your Music (Basic Musicianship and more)

Knowing your music

So, you spent many years learning to master your piano lesson books to the satisfaction of your piano teacher(s) and you're thinking that you're tired of learning, you just want to start accompanying? Not so fast. As I tell my piano students: Unfortunately, there are some aspects of playing the piano that you have to do whether you particularly like doing them or whether you think you need to. So too with being an accompanist, there are some basics that you need to know. If you were like me in piano lessons, you may have drifted off when your piano teacher was teaching something that you need to know to be an accompanist or you may have never been taught them.

One major aspect of being an accompanist is being very familiar with your part of the equation. *"You have to learn to walk before you can run."* If you don't have a good grasp of the fundamentals, being an effective accompanist will be difficult. It is not as simple as being able to play your part flawlessly. For example, you need to listen to what the choir or soloist is doing – are they on the same measure as you, are they slowing down – and adjust your playing accordingly.

Assuming you are given the music ahead of the 1st rehearsal, the first thing you need to do is learn your part. (Later on we'll talk about sight reading). It may sound obvious, but the first thing you need to know is your part. But what does that mean? Learning your part is more than just being able to play through a piece so that it sounds good to you. You need to learn the part with almost machine-like precision and be very familiar with the form of the piece. Some tips for learning your music:

- Play through the piece with a metronome 5 beats higher than marked.

- Keep practicing until you can play through it without stopping, without missing too many notes and without feeling stressed out by the end
- Play the piece with the metronome as much as 20 beats slower. You may be surprised that it is harder to play slower.
- Many choral directors like to go faster than the marked tempo. Try practicing with the metronome set 15 or 20 beats higher. You may miss some notes and have trouble in harder passages, but you should be able to get through it in a convincing manner.
- If possible, do all of the above prior to rehearsing with the choir or soloist.

The reason for using the metronome when you practice by yourself is to insure precision. Yes, the music may speed up or slow down or the choir director may not keep as steady a tempo as the metronome does but you still should be able to play to a metronome. If you cannot play through the accompaniment with the metronome, then you are almost guaranteed to run into problems when you are actually accompanying. If spending this much time with the metronome seems like a lot of work, I will admit that once you've been doing this for a while, the less and less you need to use a metronome, but to start with, I highly recommend it. Eventually you will develop an *internal* metronome and be able to keep a steady pace.

Once you've done all of the above prior to the first rehearsal, here are some other tips:

- Record yourself playing the accompaniment by yourself. Listen for problems you didn't hear while playing.
- Record a rehearsal (with the soloist). Listen for problems you didn't hear before.
- If working with a choir, you should learn each of the choral parts individually and in all the possible combinations of choral parts.
- If working with soloists, you should be able to play through the soloist's part.

- If there is a recording available of the *exact* same music you are accompanying, listen to it. (It needs to be exactly the same edition, notes, etc).

Playing the music

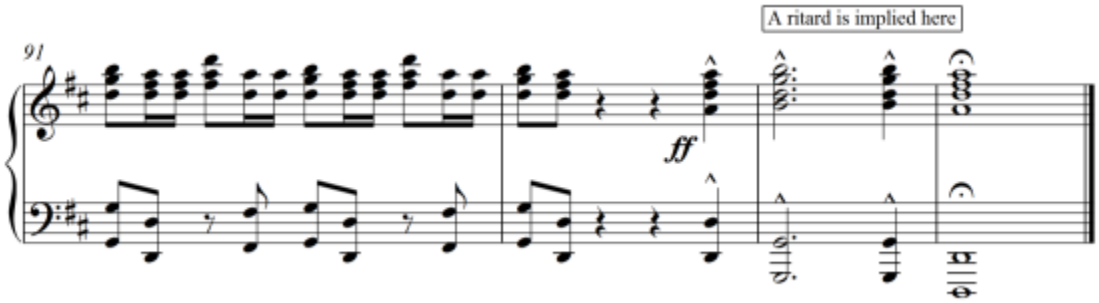
Now that you've learned your music and can play it forward and backwards (figuratively speaking, of course), there are a few more fundamentals to get a grasp on.

First and foremost, remember that an accompanist is not a soloist. Typically, your part can be compared to the background music in films or TV shows. You often aren't aware that there is music going on in a film but when it isn't there or it's used inappropriately, you notice it. The action, drama or whatever that is occurring visually is more important and is the focus of your attention. Likewise in accompanying, your part is not what people are listening to, but without it, the music sounds a bit silly. If you have a personality that wants attention, you need to suppress that urge while you are accompanying. You may even find that people in the audience have no idea you were even there. Be prepared for being in the background and not out in front like the soloist.

As an accompanist, you must remember that you are, for the most part, subservient. When the soloist is playing or choir singing, that's what people are listening to. They could pretty much care less about your part. When you play, you have to be sure to play softer than the soloist. Their part is more important. You need to follow the choir director, even if her tempos are crazy. Remember, you don't set the tempo, she does. You also need to be aware of where the soloist is in the music and be listening to what they do. I can't tell you the number of times that I've started an introduction only to have the vocalist come in one or two bars early or to have them skip a few measures here and there. For some reason vocal soloists seem to be worse at this than instrumentalists or choir directors. Although, you will encounter this with everyone you accompany at some point. You need to anticipate the soloist or

director. If you know the form of a piece of music and you've fully learned how to play the piece, you will have a good idea of where the vocalist jumped to and can catch up to them.

This is a good spot for a brief word on musical styles and musical interpretation. Part of knowing your music is not only learning the notes and rhythm, but also knowing the musical style and interpreting that style. If you are accompanying a vocal solo from Handel's *Messiah*, do you slow down in the last two or three measures from the end? If you know that *Messiah* is a Baroque style piece, and know that in the Baroque era one usually slows down in the last couple of measures, then you know that you should indeed slow down at the end. If you're accompanying a high-school girl's show choir that's doing some Andrew Sisters music, what do you do different than say a Mozart chamber work? You may need to look up who the Andrew Sisters were and listen to a recording. I find the free 30 or so second samples that are available at many commercial sites on the internet offer enough to give me a taste of what the style is. Most Andrew Sisters music would be in a 'swing' style. I may be wrong, but I don't think any Mozart was ever written in a swing style. You may need to look up what 'swing' is and how to play it.



The ending of Handel's Messiah pictured above.

Not only knowing basics like the above examples, but also learning more specific information about a style is sometimes necessary. You don't have to know everything about every piece of music or style in

order to accompany, but the more you do know, the better you'll be. With popular music, it may be desired to improvise some of your part. If you've not done that before, studying improvisation would be called for. But, playing just the written part will suffice. In classical literature, you almost never improvise your part. (A note to purists: I know if you're reading figured bass while accompanying, say Vivaldi on the harpsichord, you do improvise, but if you're doing that, you're probably a good accompanist already. But it does reinforce my point: Know your styles). In all styles of music, if the soloist or choir rests for a few measures and you are the only one making music, then your part is the focus. In those cases, which are rare, you need to play as though you are a soloist, but perhaps not as flamboyant as you would if you were the only one playing. If you're playing for a choir, you still have to follow the director's tempo, even in the solo passages.

Page Turning

One of the things an accompanist has to do is turn the page. That sounds easy: Reach up, turn the page and go from there. But, as you probably know, it is not always so easy. My experience is that most of the time you turn the page, you are going to have to leave out something in one hand or the other. If there are rests in one hand in the last measure, the solution is to turn the page with that hand. If necessary, look back a measure or two for a measure that has a rest and turn the page there. This does require memorizing those few measures. Likewise, you can also memorize the first measure or two of the next page if it makes a more convenient spot to turn the page.

As to the actual physical act of turning the page, you'll need to practice what works best for you. Sometimes folding a corner to give you something to grab works, but be careful that the fold on one page doesn't accidentally latch another page resulting in you turning two or more pages. Sometimes the music is put together in such a way that you can allow the page to curve a bit so that there is something to grab when turning. Some people like turning from the top corner, others like turning from the bottom

corner. You should practice turning from both locations until you decide what works best for you. You should also practice turning with both the left and right hands as some passages will require the left to turn the page and others the right. Know the thickness of your music and how much energy your hand is exerting when you go to turn the pages. There have been a few times when I've ripped the page and other times when I've turned with such force that the music has flown across the piano and ended up near my feet on the floor. One time the return air vent was beneath the grand piano (without a grated covering) and the loose page of music from a choral anthem got sucked into the vent and down two stories to the air conditioning unit in a sub-basement. It was fun retrieving that music. (Fortunately, I had already played the page that ended up in the basement).

Depending on your situation and if the owner of the music will allow it, there is always the option of a 3-ring binder. This is my preference. Punch holes in the music and insert into a 3-ring binder. Make sure the binder will fit on the piano stands you may encounter. The 3-ring binder method of viewing your music will do a few good things. It will give the music a better backing support and keep it from sliding around on the stand. Because it isn't sliding around (or likely to fly off the piano) when you try to turn the page, overall turning will be easier. If you have multiple pieces to accompany, having all your music in one folder helps you keep track of it. Be sure to ask permission before punching holes if you don't own the music. If you do decide to punch holes in the music, you will need to make sure that any potential holes do not punch holes through any element of the notation that you need to see (like clef changes, key changes, notes, etc.).

I have had the fortune to have a page turner with one choir I accompanied. Although I've never met any, I've been told that there are people who make their living turning pages for accompanists. If you do use a page turner, you will need to rehearse some with them. Some page turners like to turn the page quickly, others at a gentle pace. Do you want the page turner to turn from the top corner or bottom

corner? Do they stand or sit? Will you nod your head when you want the page turned or have pre-determined spot for turning? (Don't forget to nod or they may never turn the page). Rehearsing with your page turner will address these issues. I highly recommend that if you do use a page turner that they be able to read the piano part.

A modern option to turning pages that I've been using exclusively since 2003 (this book is being written in 2011), is an electronic music display device. I use the MusicPadPro to help me turn pages and manage all of my music. I have over 3,000 titles available at my fingertips. This particular device has a touch-screen where I can touch the lower right of the screen and the page turns to the right, touch the lower left and it turns to the left. You can also plug in a sustain pedal like used on an electronic keyboard. When you press the pedal, the page turns to the right. Repeats and jumps can be programmed in so that when you press the next page button (either the touch screen or the pedal), it does the repeat or jump. There are other music dedicated devices available besides the MusicPadPro. Of course there are the iPad, Kindle, Nook and various Android devices but I find their screen sizes are not big enough for anything more than 3 staves per system. (With the exception of solo instrumental music, which has 3 staves, most music you will accompany has 4 or more staves.). I've heard of people using laptops, but with upright and console pianos, there is no place to put the laptop so that you can view the screen adequately. I lean toward favoring these electronic display devices having used the one for around 8 years with never a problem, never. Of course, whomever you are accompanying will need to provide the music in a digital format or far enough in advance for you to transfer it into the device. Having a paper backup is also a good idea, just in case.

Finally, some people will make photocopies of pages and tape them together. I discourage this practice. It looks bad, the photocopies are never as good as the original and tend to fade faster than the original. If performing in academic situations or competitions, photocopies of any sort are usually

frowned upon, although as far as I know, making a copy of one page of a piece of music you own for page turning purposes only is 100% legal. Making a copy of one or two pages is not so bad, but if the music is so demanding or your page turning skills are such that you have to make copies, you probably need to find a page turner. (As a side note, judges and rule-makers in competitions must start to realize that much music is purchased online in digital format and the customer has to print out the music or use an electronic display. These printouts and display units are perfectly legal and there is no reason why competitions should in any way restrict or question their use).

Sight Reading

As you read this section you will probably think to yourself, "This is way too much to learn." Relax. You don't need to learn all this material in order to accompany or in order to be able to sight read. However, an accomplished accompanist will know this material, or at least most of it. As you accompany and practice sight reading, you will pick up on these items very quickly and you eventually won't even realize you are thinking about them. The point of going into so much detail here is not that you are expected to learn this overnight or even in a few weeks, but rather that you start thinking about these things and paying attention to them in the music you are accompanying or practicing. Even in solo piano literature you should pay attention to and recognize these things. It can help you be a better soloist too. The more you can see in the music, visually, in the shortest amount of time, and know, in general terms, where on the piano to play it, the more you can apply to the actual playing of the notes.

One of the harder aspects of being an accompanist is the need to sight-read music. Do your best to get the soloist or choir director to give you the music in advance. This does not happen all the time. Frequently you will not receive a copy of the music until the rehearsal starts or you first meet the soloist. This makes sight reading something you need to learn to do and do well. The more music theory you know, the easier sight reading should be.

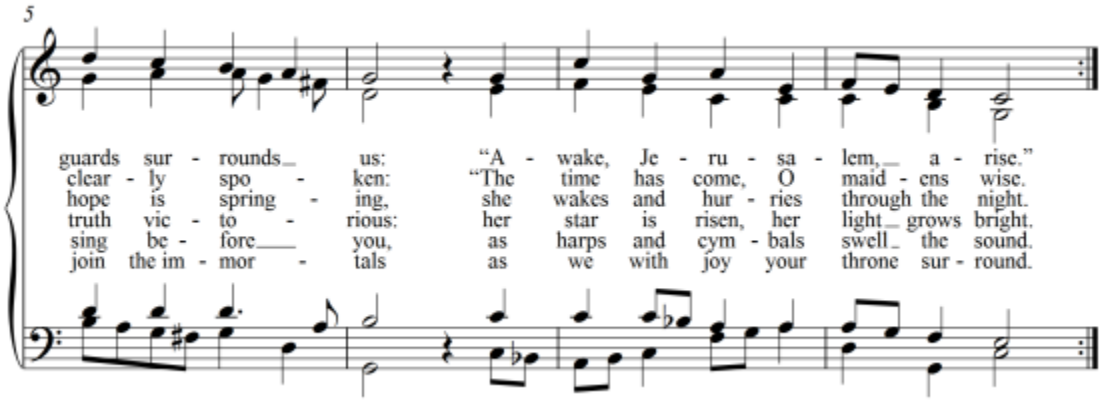
Sight reading is easy: *Touch the right key at the point in the music it occurs* (to misquote J.S. Bach. The full quote is *It's easy to play any musical instrument: all you have to do is touch the right key at the right time and the instrument will play itself).* The simplest definition of sight reading is to play a piece of music you've never seen before and do so as close to perfectly as you can. (By perfect, I mean comparable to how you would perform if you were playing at a recital or public performance). One point to make about sight reading: You will never be able to sight read music if it is beyond your technical ability. If learning a Bach 2-part invention in a short amount of time is beyond your level of experience, you won't be able to sight read an accompaniment similar to it. To put it another way, you will only be able to sight read music that is easier than the hardest music you can currently learn in a short amount of time.

One thing to note with sight reading (or performing in general) is that the audience you are playing for rarely knows the music you are playing and almost never has a copy of the music in front of them. So, it is not necessary to play every note or every articulation on the page perfectly. You simply need to present enough correct material (sound) so that it gives the impression of being what is written on the page. If you are performing in a competition where a judge will have music in front of them, remember they are more concerned with the soloist than they are with your part, but even so, if you are performing in a competition, you really should not be sight reading at the performance. (If you are, I hope you charge the soloist more than you typically would charge).

We've all been taught that *practice makes perfect* although *perfect practice makes perfect* is probably more accurate. This is true even with sight reading. The more you do it, the more proficient you become. Rather than practice at rehearsals, you will want to practice away from rehearsals. Rather than focus on just one musical style of music or one area of accompanying, try sight-reading all different styles, even if you think you'll never have to play that style. But most of all, practice.

How can you practice sight reading if sight reading is playing something once and not playing it again? A very effective way to help learn sight reading begins with playing hymns you don't already know. Regardless of your religious beliefs, or lack thereof, reading through a hymnal is a great way to practice sight reading. Hymns contain a great deal of issues related to sight reading that it is worth spending some extra time on it. We won't look at just hymns to practice sight reading, but it's a good starting point.

As a quick example, shown below is a phrase from the hymn tune Wachet Auf, harmonized by J.S. Bach. In this 4 measure phrase there are a number of items that your knowledge of theory and ability to visually recognize what is happening will help in the actual playing of the hymn. For example, there is a classic ii-V-I progression at the end. If you recognize it and are familiar with playing such a progression, your fingers know naturally where to go, there is less thinking involved. There are two examples of secondary dominants. The range of the right hand illustrates how you may have to move your hand while playing and (ms. 6) how the RH may have to play LH notes. There are examples of syncopation and the list could go on and on, all in a 4-measure phrase from a standard hymn.



Before sight reading any music, hymns or otherwise, take a look through the entire piece. Determine the key, meter and whether your hand will stay in one general area or be moving around a lot. In hymns,

perhaps more so than other music, sometimes the right hand has to play notes from the bass clef or vice versa. Are there spots in the hymn that would make playing the piece easier if you did that? Make note of accidentals, key or meter changes, articulation (legato, staccato, etc), general feel of the piece (chordal or great independence between the hands) and anything that looks unusual or different from what you usually play. In popular music, look for rhythms that are not familiar, especially syncopation. Figure them out in your head. Don't bother practicing those sections now – that would defeat the purpose of practicing sight reading – but make a mental note of it so that you are ready when you get there. If it takes you more than a few seconds (per item) to figure out what is going on, you need to review your music theory. Remember in sight reading, the beat keeps on moving and you can't stop to figure out things. You have to figure them out as you go and do so in the blink of an eye.

With hymns, they are very chordal in structure. For the most part all the notes you will play will play at the same time. If you have a choice, make sure you are using a standard edition rather than an accompanist edition. (It should look similar to the example previously shown). This will help later with choral and chamber music accompanying. (After getting comfortable with sight reading, then move on to an accompaniment edition). In a standard hymnal edition, there are usually 4 parts: two in the treble clef and 2 in the bass clef. From top to bottom, they are the Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass parts of a choir. Typically, the Soprano part will have notes with the stems going up. Almost all of the time, the Soprano is the melody. The Alto will typically have notes with the stems going down. (Sometimes the parts are written more like piano music, with proper stem direction in both the Soprano and Alto parts. In those cases, the top note is the Soprano, the bottom note the Alto). Likewise, the Tenor notes will be stems up and the Bass notes stems down.

Practice playing each part separately *without stopping*. Remember that a choir or soloist will not stop for you to figure out the notes or rhythm. You should not be stopping anywhere. Use a metronome

to insure a steady tempo. Rhythm should not be a major issue since almost all of the notes on each beat are played at the same time. (Hymns with harder rhythms should be saved for later). Once you've played through it once, keep a mental note of where you had trouble. Try to use good fingering and articulation, but don't worry too much about fingering or playing legato. Everything will change when you put all the parts together. Focus on playing the correct notes and rhythm without stopping or pausing. Go back to any areas you had trouble with and try to figure out *just by looking at the music* why you had trouble. Knowing why you had trouble by only looking at the music will help in future sight reading practice. Play those trouble sections a couple of times starting 3 or 4 beats before and up to 3 or 4 beats after. Then play the phrase that the trouble spot is in. You should know what a phrase is and how to find one in a piece of music. If not, you'll need to look it up.

Now, go back to the beginning and play just the Soprano and Bass parts together. This will help you to read across multiple notes and to isolate specific parts. When you will need to play parts in an open score – typical in choral music – or play individual parts in chamber music, this will help your eyes be accustomed to jumping around. As before, play through without stopping. Go back to trouble areas and review. Try the same process with various combinations of the parts. Once you've played all the various combinations, play the hymn as a whole, straight through without stopping. Make a note of any trouble spots and review them. As you continue to practice sight reading hymns, vary your method. Sometimes read the entire hymn once through and go on. Sometimes just play through the Soprano and Bass parts and go on to something else. Do not spend too much time on a single hymn.

In addition to the notes and rhythm in hymns, they abound in many aspects of theory that can be of great help in all styles of music. This is one reason, I believe, that 4-part voice writing is given such emphasis in many college theory courses. Since in most hymns the melody and harmony parts occur at the same time, it is easier to figure out the harmony than, in say a Bach invention. Unless you are doing

some avant-garde or atonal music, almost all the music you will play will most likely follow some sort of chord progression.

These chord progressions are based on fairly standard rules. Hymns are good examples of this. The typical I-IV-V7-I progression is found in many hymns, especially gospel hymns. (I-IV-V7-I refer to chords build on those degrees of the scale. In C major, I=C major; IV=F major; V7=G major with a minor 7^{th} (an F) added. If you don't know this, you really need to go back and study theory). The I chord is sometimes substituted with a iii or vi (minor chords are written in lowercase). The IV substituted with the ii and the V or V7 by the vii°. Some common chord progressions to look for are: I-IV-I; I-V7-I; I-IV-I-V7-I and ii-V-I.

Instead of playing a hymn, take some time and analyze a hymn. Figure out the chords and see how they go from one progression to another. Try to figure out the chords and progressions *away from a piano by looking at the music, not by playing the music.* Become familiar with various chord progressions and think about the harmony of a piece as you play. As you continue to sight read, you will begin to recognize progressions. By being familiar with various progressions, you can often tell what is coming in the music before you actually get there. That means your fingers will know where to go. In addition to helping with sight reading, having a good idea what will come next can help with page turning.

All of the examples of sight reading hymns mentioned so far can apply to all styles of music. Some variations in the way you practice your sight reading will need to be made. In classical pieces there would be little point in playing just the top note or just the middle note of the accompaniment so focus more on being able to play through the whole piece without stopping or changing tempos. In popular music, notably jazz, you may need to focus on the rhythmic aspects of the music. When practicing, take some time to become familiar with those rhythms that are not familiar to you. You will almost certainly run across them again, so learning them now will make it easier next time. So take the hymn sight reading suggestions and adapt for other styles, but do give hymn sight reading a serious try.

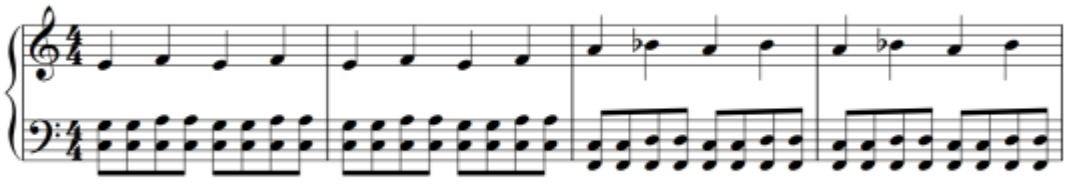
When accidentals occur in music, it may indicate a *temporary* change of key, at least so far as the harmonic progression is concerned. The key signature will not change, but the underlying harmonic focus will change. If you can spot that just by looking at the music, you can use it to your advantage. When sight reading you will know what notes your fingers will be playing and which will be common to that key, not the original key of the piece. Composers often do this to add variety to the music. Look for secondary dominants for classic examples of temporary changes of keys. The more you sight read and think about harmony as you are playing, the more familiar the progressions will be and the more you will know without looking what comes next (harmonically speaking).

With classical music literature, think in terms of the style of music as well as potential harmonic progressions. For example, in Baroque music, so far as the chordal nature of the music is concerned it is almost the opposite from hymns. Rather than everything played at one time, there is great independence between the hands and often within one hand. Rather than chords, Baroque is more concerned with individual melodies that happen to make up harmonies. These harmonies are frequently the same progressions as in Classical, Romantic and Popular music but are implied rather than obvious. The melodies in Baroque are sometimes imitated in the opposite hand, but not always exactly. Classical period music is more chordal in nature than Baroque. The Romantic period becomes very chromatic with many temporary changes of key within one piece. Then there is the whole world of popular music (including Jazz) that has its own uniqueness. Knowing your styles and their own idiosyncrasies will help with sight reading.

When sight reading, look ahead in the music as you are playing. Rather than focusing on one measure (or worse yet, one beat), look a few measures ahead. The idea is to take a mental snapshot of the first measure, have your fingers start playing it. While your fingers are playing it, your eyes look ahead taking a mental snapshot of the next measure. Repeat the process as you go. As you do more

sight reading, expand the mental snapshots so you are viewing 2 or 3 measures at once, or even whole phrases. In some music, you may find yourself reading whole pages, only taking a quick glance back to refresh and assure yourself that you are playing the right notes. This brings up a point worth mentioning. Even if you look away from the music while you are playing, you should be able to find where you are in the music in a fraction of a second.

Most music consists of some sort of repeatable pattern. While the patterns may get complex, they are nonetheless there. The more patterns you can recognize at sight (before playing) and know, in a general sense, how to play them, the easier sight reading can become. An example that comes to mind are the patterns found in some Broadway music. In that pattern you have a chord note in the left hand followed by a chord or partial chord in the right hand with some occasional moving part in the middle or descant/obbligato part at the top. For another pattern, think of the song *Greased Lightning* from the musical Grease. The left hand pattern repeats the same thing over and over with the right hand part not having much change either. In both cases, you are playing the same patterns over and over. What changes is where on the piano you are playing it. When you can recognize those patterns at sight and know how to play them before you play them, that will help greatly with sight reading.



An example of a repetitive pattern that changes location on the keyboard (a la Greased Lightning)

Sometimes the music you are being asked to sight read is beyond your level of ability or is just too complicated to fully sight read. In those cases, you may need to "fake" your part. That is, play enough to give the soloist the accompaniment they need, but not play all that is on the page. There are a few ways to do this. The style of the music can make a difference as to which works best. One approach is to play the top note of the right hand and the bottom note of the left hand and nothing else. If you've been practicing sight reading hymns as discussed earlier, this will be fairly easy to do. Where possible, add in the missing notes. At the end of cadences is a good spot to do so. In popular music that is chordal, instead of trying to play all that is written in any given measure, play a block chord on the first beat (or whenever the harmony changes). Ignore any melody or rhythm present. Finally, if there is a consistent or recurring rhythmic pattern present, play that pattern based on the harmony. If you don't already know the 3 and 4-note chords possible in the majority of keys, how to recognize them quickly and how to play them, this would be a good time to learn them.

To review: the quicker you can look at a piece of music and know where on the keyboard your fingers need to go, the easier sight reading will be. Rather than read notation letter by letter, read the patterns and intervals. If the note goes to the 3rd line up from the line it is on and you are playing the first note with your thumb, the next note is your 5th finger – no need to know its letter name. Use the harmony (either implied as in polyphonic music or present as in much music) to help you know the most likely location you will need to go to next. Most of all, practice your sight reading. Find music you've never played before that is easier than the hardest music you can play now and play through it once or twice and move on. If a section really trips you up, go back to it and re-read it. You will be well on your way to being a good sight reader.

Top tips

- Learn your part before the first rehearsal
- When accompanying remember to "be in the background" and let the soloist shine

- Know the various musical styles you might have to play
- Practice turning pages
- Practice sight reading by playing through hymns
- Also practice sight reading by playing different styles of music, even unfamiliar styles
- Learn common chord progressions for different styles of music
- Knowing theory can help you with your accompanying.

Chapter 4 – Rehearsals

Choral Accompanying

Choral accompanying probably presents the most challenges and demands the most from an accompanist. It is typical for choral groups to be rehearsing several pieces of music at once, often of different styles and difficulty levels. Within a choral group you will have 3 or 4 separate voices that will have to learn their parts. Except in the most advanced, professional choirs, it is my experience that the majority of the singers in a choir rarely learn their parts away from rehearsals. Thus, choral rehearsals have more going on than soloists or small groups. Even when they do learn their music away from rehearsals, those 3 or 4 parts have to be put together so it sounds like one voice. That takes practice.

The first thing you should do in choral rehearsals is make sure you can see the director clearly. If you cannot see the director, you cannot follow their conducting. If you can't follow their conducting, it is unlikely that you will be able to accompany the group in a satisfactory manner. Adjust the location of the piano, change lighting or do whatever you can to get a clear view of the director. My preference is to have the piano facing the director at or close to a 90 degree angle to the choir. (I suggest that you position a grand with the lid opening toward the singers, but only half-lid). I prefer with an upright not to have the piano facing the choir unless you are far enough back from the choir to see the entire choir. Be aware that many choir directors tend to move around as they conduct, so make sure you can see them wherever they might move to. The more you can position yourself so you can see the director out of the corner of your eye – your peripheral vision – the better. In doing so, you don't have to take your eyes off the music in order to follow the conductor.

The most important skill needed when accompanying a choir is being able to follow the conducting of the director no matter how wonderful or inconsistent it is. My high school chorus teacher said there were two rules in his class: The first is that the director is always right. The second is that if you have any questions, refer to rule 1. In other words, even if the director is wrong, they are right. From the accompanist's point of view, the director's conducting is 100% right and as far as tempo is concerned, it is the only tempo allowed. As accompanist, you absolutely have to follow the director's conducting, without exception. There is no room for flexibility with this, you have to follow the director. If you find there are passages where you can't keep up with the director or you are racing ahead of the director, then you need to practice the music with a metronome outside of rehearsals.

In order to follow the director, you have to look at them from time to time while still reading your music. This is why your ability to see the director is so important. Take advantage of the ability to view the director with peripheral vision so you don't have to look away from your music too much. If you aren't familiar with conducting patterns, get familiar with them. Assuming your director knows how to conduct – not always the case with some volunteer groups – you can count on the director's downward arm motion to indicate beat one. Every beat that occurs after a bar (measure) line in your music is beat one. If you see the director moving downward with their arm and you aren't about to play beat one, find the next beat one and get there. You can worry less about the other beats, but don't ignore them completely as tempos do sometimes speed up and slow down (even when the music doesn't indicate a change of speed).

Choral directors tend to perform music faster than the composer indicates. In defense of choir directors, sometimes the choir members don't have the breath support necessary to sing the music at the marked tempo but can sing it at a faster tempo. Earlier I suggested practicing your music at a tempo marking 20 beats faster than marked. This is one reason why. Always keep an eye out for changes in the

tempo and keep following the director. Choral directors like to stop a lot in rehearsals, so keeping an eye on the conductor for those stopping points is important. If you have the opportunity to work with the same director on a regular basis, you will become familiar with their conducting style. (I'll admit that I never can get use to the way some choir directors conduct, however, all but the worst of conductors can be followed).

Depending on the experience level of the choir you are accompanying, you may find that a great amount of time in rehearsals consists of the director teaching the choir their parts. Frequently this means you as accompanist are teaching them their parts. Accompanists I know refer to this as 'banging out their parts.' If the tenors need to learn their part, you will have to play just the tenor part by yourself, then with them singing. I've even had to play just their parts while the rest of the choir sang their own parts. You need to know which of the choral parts is the tenor part and you need to be able to play that part. In some cases you may be asked to play your regular part and 'bang out' the tenor part in various spots. In those cases, you need to be able to jump between your part and the tenor part and back again and make it sound like it was suppose to be that way. Sometimes you may be asked to play your part and 'occasionally' play a specific choral part (or even all of the choral parts).

As you stop and start in a rehearsal, you need to be prepared to give the choir their pitches when they start back up. For example, if the director stops in the middle of a phrase and wants just the altos to go over their parts, you will need to be ready to give the altos their pitch before they start singing. Without their pitch, most choir singers would not be too sure which note to start singing on. Once a particular section has rehearsed their parts, it is likely that the entire choir will then start at the same place. In those cases, you will need to give the pitches for all the parts. Most directors like the pitches to be given from the bottom up – Basses, Tenors, Altos then Sopranos. Play them one at a time, not holding down the previous note unless your director says otherwise.

A brief word about choral music and the way it looks on the page. Traditional 4-part SATB (Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass) music or even SSA or TTB is such that each vocal part is located on a single line. In SATB settings, the top staff is Soprano, the next Alto, then Tenor, then Bass and finally the Piano part. The tenor part is usually written in treble clef (sometimes with a little '8' below the clef) but sounds an octave lower. When you play the tenor part in such music, play it an octave lower than where it would be played in treble clef. You will note the typical brace connecting the piano staves while the choral parts have brackets. Some choral music, especially contemporary music or situations where the publisher wants to save paper, the parts are condensed onto two lines. In those cases, the Soprano and Altos will be on the 1st staff. The Tenor and Bass will on the 2nd staff (with the tenor reading bass clef).

The other element of choral notation that is typically different than other music is the way 1/8 notes are beamed. As you know, eighth notes can be written individually with a single flag or two or more 1/8 notes can be beamed together. In older choral music you will often run across flagged 1/8 notes every time there is a different syllable in the lyrics. If there are 2 or more 1/8 notes and only one syllable in the lyrics, the music is beamed together. While this shouldn't present a major challenge in reading the music, for an accompanist who isn't concerned with the lyrics, it is easy to confuse 1/8 notes with 1/4 notes or even with 1/16 notes. This way of beaming 1/8 notes in choral music is now considered obsolete, but you will run across it in many classical publications or traditional sacred choral anthems.

When accompanying a choir, you should be able to hear all of the different vocal parts present in the choir. You don't need to hear all of the individual singers, just the different sections. If you can't hear the different sections, then you are probably playing too loud or you haven't played through each choral part in your practicing. Remember, as a choral accompanist, it is the choir that is important, not you, so play softer than the choir. (Although it is the exception, there are some choral pieces where the accompaniment is sometimes specifically marked to be louder than the choir). Besides allowing the

choir to be the focus, by playing softer than the choir it allows you to listen to the different vocal parts and hear problems.

As mentioned before, as an accompanist in a typical choral rehearsal, you may need to play individual parts or combinations of parts. As you are accompanying, the director may stop in the middle of a section. As accompanist, you need to have some idea of why the director stopped. By having a general idea why they stopped, you will have a general idea of where in the music the director will start again. By listening to the choral parts while accompanying, you will be aware of where mistakes happen or where improvement is needed. When the director instructs the choir to go to a certain spot and rehearse it, you will already be there, ready to do whatever needs to be done. Nothing drags a rehearsal to a crawl than an accompanist that can't find wherever it is the director wants to rehearse at or start back up at. This is important with school choirs where the director needs to keep the students focused on the music.

One way to know where the director may be going back to is to figure out the form of the piece. Figure out the 'A' or 'B' sections and know where the start of one of those sections is relative to where you stopped. Rehearsal letters or boxed measure numbers can help you find those sections. In addition to the larger sections, be aware of where the start of the last phrase the singers just sang is. There is a good chance that you will go back to that point to rehearse. When picking a spot for the whole choir to start after having stopped and rehearsed, the director is most likely going to pick a spot that is easy for all the parts to start at. Easy spots do not have rhythmic challenges, do not have the individual parts starting at extremes in their range and do not contain a lot of accidentals. Of course, 'easy' is relative to the overall difficulty of the piece. But whatever the case, knowing the form of the piece, phrasing and where easy passages are will be the likely spots the director will re-start from.

It has been said that a good accompanist can read the mind of the choral director. More correctly, a good accompanist can anticipate the actions of the director. It takes time, just like learning anything, but eventually you should learn to anticipate the director. This is most helpful in rehearsals when the director stops to rehearse a part. Knowing where they will start rehearsing, what they are rehearsing and where they will re-start with the whole choir will help speed up the rehearsal. Most choral directors, at least the good ones, will pretty much operate in the same fashion, so once you first learn how one director works, you can apply that to future directors you may work with.

Sometimes the director makes a mistake or looses focus. It is best to hold off saying anything in front of the choir. Make a note of the problem and wait until after the rehearsal to talk to the director. If, for example, the director says that the Sopranos need to make sure to sing an 'F natural' when they really have an 'F#', play the 'F#' when running through the part. If the director realizes you are playing the 'F#' and says something, you can play dumb. Say something like 'are you at measure xx' or 'I thought the piece changed keys and we now had F#'s'. If the director has worked with you long enough, he'll realize that he's wrong and move on. In general, use your discretion. Is the mistake something that will make a big difference in the long run or is it something that can easily be corrected at the next rehearsal? Whatever the case, try to avoid making the director look like they don't know what they are doing (even if they don't).

One aspect of accompanying that will help you do a good job is focus. You need to focus on the task at hand and avoid being distracted by other things. I was working at a school where, among other things, I would help some of the student accompanists during rehearsals. All of the student accompanists also sang in the choir. One girl was asked to accompany and was doing fine, but when the director stopped, she would look toward the choir and not pay as much attention as she should have. She did fine for a student and was doing as well as one would expect a student to do. After a while, it

became obvious to me that she was trying to have a conversation with one of the choir members (one of the more popular guys). As time went by her accompanying skills started to suffer as she allowed the person in the choir to become a big distraction. I talked to her about it but she didn't change.

In talking to the director I told him why I thought she was getting worse. Eventually her lack of focus resulted in her and the person in the choir being singled out in class, embarrassing both of them and probably getting a negative mark in the grade book. But worse than that, she wasn't asked to accompany as often as she had been. Her lack of focus had made her unreliable and at this particular school there were several students capable of accompanying so she wasn't needed if she wasn't going to be reliable.

The point of this story is that no matter what is going on in the choir, no matter how cute the guy, how pretty the girl or how interesting the view is out the window (or in the audience), all that matters is accompanying. You can't afford to think about or do anything else but the task at hand – accompanying. In addition to physical distractions, there can be mental distractions as well. Don't let the pressures of life or things you are thinking or worrying about become too much that they distract you from accompanying.

Instrumental and Vocal Soloist accompanying

Accompanying solo instrumentalists, vocal soloists or instrumental chamber groups is similar to accompanying a choir. The major difference is there will often be more interaction between you and the vocalist or instrumentalist. Depending on the style of music, you may find it to be more challenging than choral accompanying, not so much because the music is harder but rather the fact that it is only you and the soloist that the audience hears. There is also a very good chance that your role will be less subservient than in choral accompanying, depending of course on the material.

As with choral accompanying, being able to see your soloist (or chamber group) is important, but perhaps not quite as important. Because choirs are so big, you really need one person to take charge and keep the tempo going and make sure everyone is interpreting the music the way that person wants it done. In instrumental or solo vocal accompanying, the soloist is the one who will keep the tempo going and will be interpreting the music. There aren't 40 or 50 people to manage. I find with vocal and instrumental solos or duets that the soloists aren't doing very much physically that requires you to watch. As long as you can hear them, you are pretty much okay. It is important to listen. There may only be one time in a piece of music where you have to be able to see the soloist. So, it is still a good idea to always be able to see the soloist.

Frequently an accompanist for soloists will be called upon to help the soloist learn their music. For that reason, as mentioned before, you need to be able to play the soloist's part as well as yours. You may even need to play both your part and theirs as best you can in rehearsals. Nobody expects you to be able to play 100% of your part and theirs, but in spots where the soloist is having trouble, needs pitch or rhythmic help, being able to get that in as well as your part is most helpful to the rehearsal.

For whatever the reason, I find vocal soloists will expect you to teach them their parts if they don't already know it, whether that be all of the song or part of the song. When accompanying for pre-college age singers in academic situations, count on being asked to help them with their parts. They usually welcome the help and I would suggest offering it even if they don't ask for help. College and older age singers may need help, but some will tend to be offended if you offer help when they don't think they need it.

In a good accompanist and solo collaboration, both the accompanist and soloist should not be afraid to point out mistakes they hear. If the soloist points out mistakes in your part, don't take it personally, but use the advice to make sure you are playing it correctly. When pointing out a soloist's mistake, be as

diplomatic as you can. If you're getting paid for accompanying, you will want the soloist to hire you again.

What this means from a musical standpoint is that you must be able to hear if the soloist is performing their part correctly. One way to help in doing that is to play through the solo part (before a rehearsal) and be familiar with what the part sounds like. That is usually enough so that when you are accompanying the soloist, you can tell if they are playing correctly. If it is a particularly complex part (either yours or the soloist or both), you can record your part, then play the solo part while listening to what you recorded. If a professional recording of the piece you are playing exists, it never hurts to take a listen to it. Make sure you are listening to a recording of the same arrangement or edition that you are playing.

Sometimes you will run across a soloist who is convinced that they are the best singer or instrumentalist in the world and that they can never be wrong. These soloists will always blame the accompanist if the performance goes wrong and will claim that the accompanist played something wrong if they have trouble in rehearsals. We'll discuss personalities later, but for now, just learn to deal with it. In rehearsals, let the soloist think they are always right and do what they ask. The professional musicians you'll probably want to impress in performances will know whether it was you or the soloist that was wrong.

Top tips

- Know your music before the first rehearsal, if at all possible
- The director is always right.
- Know where the director or soloist is in the music. If they stop where will they restart from?
- Be focused on accompanying
- Always listen as you accompany

Chapter 5 – Performances

Know your piano and location

By the time you get to the performance stage, you should be quite proficient at playing the piece with the choir or soloist. At least, in an ideal world that would be true. Sometimes you may have only had one rehearsal or two prior to the performance. As long as your first rehearsal is not a few minutes before the performance you need to make sure you have learned your music prior to the performance. (Once, at a state level choral competition another choir's accompanist suddenly became ill and I was asked to fill in). In a last minute, one run-through situation, you need to make sure the choir director or soloist realize that you might not do that great of a job. Whether you've had months to practice or a few hours you should know your music as well as possible when you get to the performance. The advice prior to this section should help you get well on your way toward that goal.

Ideally, you should have a chance to practice in the room and on the piano that you will performing on. The feel of the room, whether it be the acoustics, the lighting or whatever, it can present challenges to the accompanist. If you are use to practicing in a room without much reverb (echo), you may find playing in a very live room (one with much reverb) will throw you off a bit to start with. Better to have that happen with a practice than in a performance. When moving from one piano to another you probably already have experienced how each piano is different in sound and feel from one another. It is better to know how the piano you are going to play will react to your playing before the performance. I find the action (notably in soft passages) and the pedals (too much or too little travel time before it lifts the dampers) are the biggest challenge. Take some time to play the piano prior to the performance. If at all possible, make that time with the soloist.

If you are following another performer, say in a competition setting, do not hesitate to get everything 'just right' prior to starting. Adjust the height of the bench (if possible). Adjust the music rack (on grand pianos they can move in and out). Make sure your music fits comfortably on the music rack. Try turning a page or two to see how it turns. Some music racks will cause the music to stick. Make sure your bench is centered with the piano and position as close or as far from the piano as you like. This may annoy some audience members or judges, but do it anyhow. Not having everything just right runs the risk for potential problems.

Stage etiquette and clothing

The choir or soloist may require you to wear a uniform or particular piece of clothing for the performance. In that case, wear it and make sure it looks good. If there is no uniform, discuss with the soloist or choir director what to wear. A safe bet for most situations is a darker suit and tie or a nice dress. In a formal concert where it is just the soloist and you performing a 30 minute or more program, a tuxedo or fancy (usually black) dress would be quite appropriate for both you and the soloist or choir. These days there doesn't seem to be any one outfit that is a 'must wear' type of outfit and outfits in general seem to be getting more and more casual. It all seems to be dependent on the situation and location of the performance. Talk to your soloist or choir director and work out what to wear. It doesn't look good for one person to be in a tuxedo (or black evening dress) and the other to be wearing jeans & a t-shirt. At least try to be wearing something close in style to one another.

The way you act while you are on stage – what I call the stage etiquette – can point out the difference between the experienced/professional accompanist and the inexperienced/amateur accompanist. There are certain accepted ways of doing things that have stood the test of time. They are worth learning and doing. Obviously, it depends on your circumstances as to what needs to be done or not done. If you're accompanying a show choir in a mall during the Christmas season, you might not

need to be as formal as if it was you and a soloist on stage at the Grammy awards. Be aware of your circumstances and observe etiquette as needed. Not everyone will agree with the following suggestions, but I find they work in most situations.

When accompanying choirs when the piano is on stage where the audience can easily see you, I tend to let the entire choir go ahead of me. As soon as practical I separate from the choir and head straight to the piano. A page turner would follow you. The conductor would walk on last, usually after you've had a chance to get adjusted. Usually it will take the choir longer to get on the risers and situated than it takes you to get to the piano, even being last in line. When exiting the stage, let the choir start to leave the risers, then walk to the edge of the risers where they are stepping off and wait for the last person, then exit. Any page turner will follow you. In the event of a really large stage where it doesn't look odd for there to be two rows of people exiting stage, then you can enter and exit with the first person in the choir.

Sometimes when accompanying choirs or soloists, the piano is situated in an orchestra pit, at ground level near the first row of the audience or off to the side on stage where the audience cannot see you very easily. In those cases, it makes as much sense as anything to go straight to the piano as the choir starts to walk on. Most people will not see you so it doesn't matter too much.

If you are entering or exiting the stage with no lighting, be careful but you don't need to worry about any formal etiquette. Likewise, if you are entering or exiting the stage behind a curtain, you also do not need to worry about any formal etiquette. The main reason for entering and exiting in a particular order when the audience can easily see you is to give the audience the impression that you know what you are doing. When the entrance and exit are done in an orderly, consistent manner, it helps the audience in enjoying the overall experience.

When accompanying a soloist, always go on stage last. Any page turner would follow you. When exiting, follow the soloist off stage. Again, if the piano is in a pit or out of sight of the audience, it doesn't matter too much about etiquette. It is a good idea to know where the piano is, where any light switches (for music lights) might be prior to the performance. Likewise, figure out before the performance what the best path to and from the piano to your off-stage waiting place is.

While at the piano, whether you are accompanying a soloist or choir there are some things that demonstrates good etiquette. It may seem obvious, but be sure to sit up straight and don't slouch. Once the performance has started, don't look at the choir or audience (unless it is part of the performance). If you're at that mall at Christmas time or doing anything with a show choir, and the audience can see you, then you will want to interact with the audience. There may be times when accompanying a choir that they sing unaccompanied. In those situations, it is best to follow the choir's part along in your music, keeping an eye on the director. In extreme situations, the director may want you to start playing the choir's part if there is a problem during the unaccompanied section. When you take glances at the choir during unaccompanied sections, it can give the audience the impression that someone in the choir did something wrong and it can be distracting. Finally, don't touch your face, nose, hair or yawn. When not playing, rest your hands in your lap.

Solo and ensemble festivals can have a sense of less formality than a full concert. Be careful not to let it lull you into acting to informally. Solo competitions are typically held in average sized classrooms and not in auditoriums or rehearsal halls. If the room is large enough and the judge allows it, you will often be sitting in the room watching the previous performer. Sometimes you'll be waiting out in the hallway. When you enter the room, let the soloist go first. Find the piano and get situated. Sometimes the judge is busy writing comments so you may end up waiting a few minutes. I would not play the piano during this time nor would I talk to the soloist or others in the room (unless everyone is talking).

Top Tips

- Get comfortable with where you will be performing
- Dress appropriately and look appropriate for the type of performance
- Follow good stage etiquette

Chapter 6 – Accompanying large groups

Accompanying large groups can present its own unique challenges. Large groups can include school assemblies, community events, holiday events and of course accompanying religious services. Of these large groups, you will probably find more employment opportunity or will be called upon to accompany in church settings more so than anything else. The bulk of this discussion will focus on church accompanying but everything can easily be adapted to accompanying other large groups.

Churches

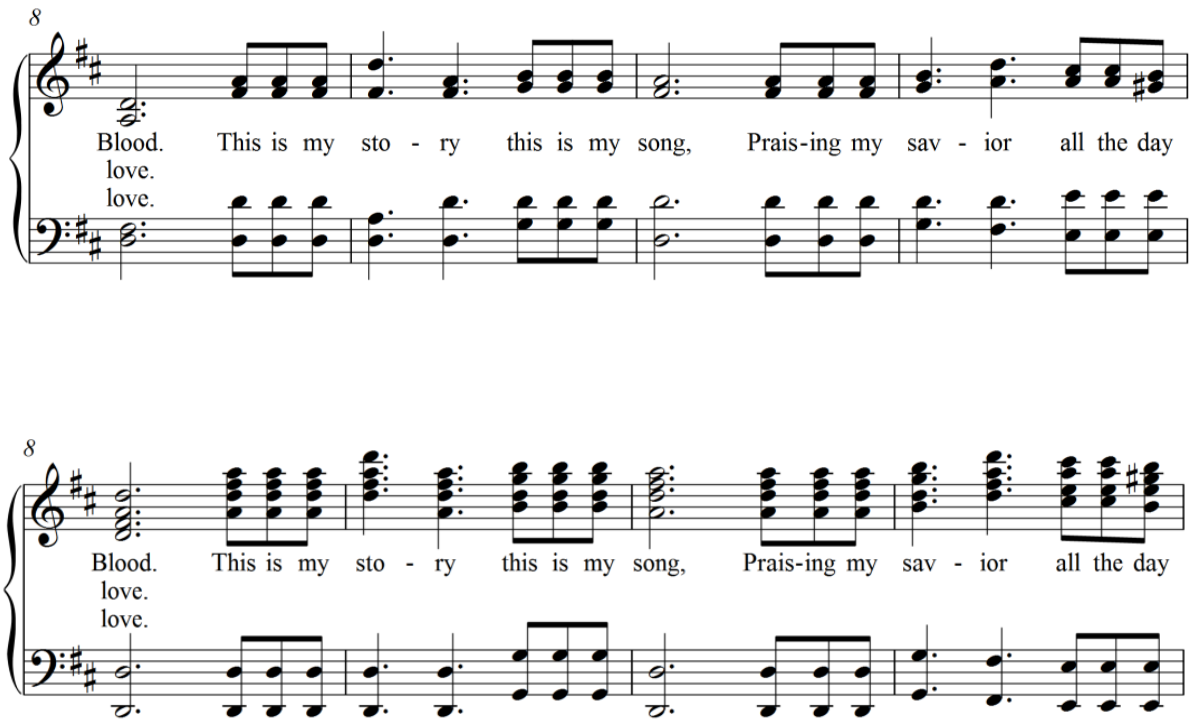
Most churches still use a hymnal as their primary source material for their singing. A smaller number of churches are using songbooks, sheet music or leadsheets mainly of music consisting of titles by contemporary Christian artists or music made popular in other churches. This music, frequently referred to as 'praise and worship' music, is usually more contemporary than hymns (but, for the most part, a long way from being as contemporary as current 'top 100' music). A few guitars, bass, and drums make up the core of a 'praise band' that accompanies the music. The 'praise band' usually has a few vocalists who lead the congregation. Sometimes it will include piano (or keyboard/synthesizer). Although this section will focus on hymns, the fundamentals talked about can apply to any style of music in church. Especially is you are the only instrumentalist.

Since you've been practicing your sight reading using hymns, you should have a good grasp of hymns. However, you usually will not want to play the hymns (or praise & worship music) exactly as printed in the hymnals or songbooks. This is where your knowledge of theory and improvisational skills will come in handy. Regardless of what you do, the melody should be played and should be predominant

in your accompanying. This is quite different from accompanying a choir where you are secondary to everything else.

Since the melody is most important, it needs to be played and should be the highest note heard. In addition to playing the right hand part of the hymn as written, you can double the melody in octaves. That is, in addition to playing the melody where written, also play it one octave higher. Where possible, you will need to move (not double) the harmony notes in the right hand up an octave. If the resulting sound is a little weak or doesn't give support to the group, fill in the missing notes from the harmony.

In this first example, the hymn passage is shown as printed in the hymnal:

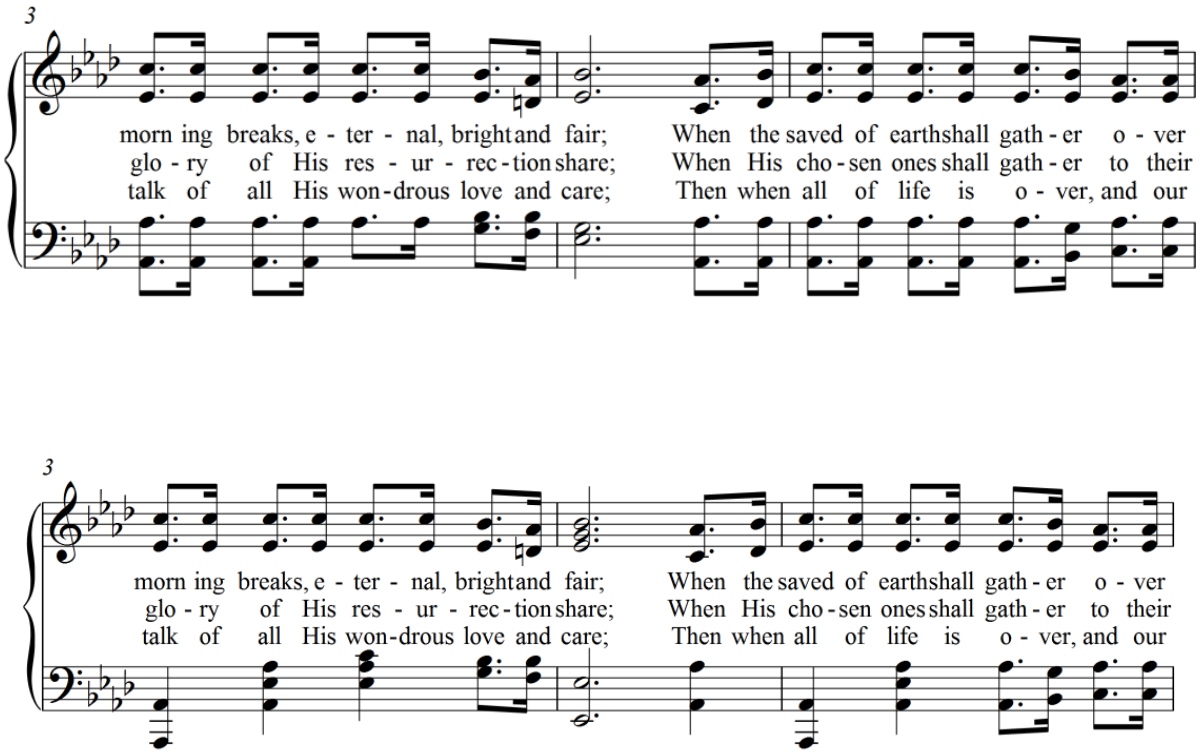


In this second example, the entire passage is shifted up an octave and the melody is doubled down one octave. The left hand high part (tenor) is moved up an octave and placed in the RH. The remaining LH notes are doubled in octaves.

If you are accompanying this hymn on organ, stick to the version in the hymnal. The lowest note would be played by your feet on the pedals. The LH would only play the tenor part. Whenever a note repeats in any voice *besides* the melody, hold the note down and do not repeat. At every comma or period in the lyrics, lift the fingers, even if the notes repeat. Since the organ is a wind instrument and sounds sustains as long as there is air (or electricity), take advantage of that and hold the inner notes down. If the congregation is dragging one trick is to play the hymn *exactly* as written, repeating every note.

The style of the hymn will determine what the left hand does on piano. What I recommend against doing that too many untrained or inexperienced pianists do is double the lowest note in the bass clef an octave lower and only play octaves in the left hand. (It makes for a bass heavy sound that detracts from the melody). For a few phrases in a few hymns, as shown in the example above (the chorus of the hymn), doubling the bass in octaves is acceptable, but it really doesn't work on an entire hymn (or praise & worship piece). Instead, on some hymns, play just an octave (doubling the lowest note in the left hand) on the first beat but play the rest of the measure as written. On gospel hymns and contemporary music a varied form of stride piano can work. In that style, typically in 4/4, the first beat of the measure is an octave doubled down the octave. The 2nd beat is a chord starting at least a 3rd higher than the highest note of the octave. The 3rd beat is another octave but this time not the root of the chord. The 4th and final beat is another chord starting higher than the octave on the 3rd beat. If you've played ragtime, you know what I'm talking about. Many gospel hymns were written around the time that Ragtime and similar styles were popular.

The example shown here is similar. It shows a slight variation on the stride piano. First the original, then the variation.



In the second measure shown, you could also play chords on beats two and three to keep the motion going.

In addition to the above improvisational methods for playing hymns, just about any type of improvisation would be appropriate if the melody is the main thing heard. You can use arpeggios (broken chords) in the left hand playing the harmony while the right hand fills in any missing harmony notes. In slow pieces (eg. Fairest Lord Jesus), you can emphasize the melody an octave higher while on the beats where the melody doesn't occur you fill in the harmony, usually with 8th notes.

You will most likely need to adjust how you play, with regard to the tempo, based on the size of the room, the number of people singing and the familiarity of the music to those singing. Larger rooms tend to have more reverb (a type of echo) than smaller rooms. The sound bounces around more making it harder for the congregation (and you) to find the beat or keep the beat steady. With a large number of

people singing, the tempo can become a tug of war between them and you. In both situations, you will need to keep a steady tempo with metronome precision and keep the tempo moving. You don't want the tempo to get slower as the song or new verses start. Play loud, but not overpowering or banging, and ignore what you hear from the singers in the middle of phrases. Once you establish a tempo, keep it going. It may be that the congregation is hearing you just fine and singing with you but the echo is making you hear them after the fact. Larger groups will sometimes try to lead you. Don't let that happen. When the music is not familiar to the group, you will want to make sure the melody comes through over everything. In some instances, I've switched to playing just the melody in double octaves (both hands in octaves) once I heard they weren't familiar with the music. Other times I might play the melody in octaves in the right hand and play only block chords only when the harmony changes. Keeping the tempo steady and the melody as the predominate sound will result in the best experience for those singing (which is what we want).

Please resist the urge to show off your gospel piano (or other) improvisational skills on 98% of the music you will play when accompanying large groups. A bit of improvisation is acceptable and welcome, but not when it focuses the audience attention on your playing. There is nothing worse than a pianist doing runs in the right hand with the left only playing octaves and the melody not being anywhere to be found. Of those 2% of pieces that the large group knows really well, go crazy, but save it for the last verse. Organists will sometimes play an alternate accompaniment (free improvisation) on the final verse of hymn. It might consist of harmonic progressions that are different than the original. Or it might be a descant in the right hand part that causes the melody to temporarily get lost. Any sort of really fancy improvisation should be used sparingly. In a typical church service, it is rare to use an alternate harmonization (or fancy improvisations) on all the hymns.

Top tips

- Make the melody the focus
- Improvise the piece but keep the melody on top and don’t show off your playing skills
- Adjust your playing to fit the room and the group
- Don’t let the group slow the tempo down, keep things steady.

Chapter 7 – Dealing with Personalities

Accompanists at some point in their career will run across a person that, frankly, nobody can stand to be around. Or, there are the directors or soloists who think they know everything there is to know about music. The ground they walk on and how they perform (or direct) is nothing short of a miracle. Although a minority, there are those who are super self-critical always putting their musicality down and expecting the accompanist to give them an ego boost.

The annoying personality

In the case of someone who doesn't complain about your accompanying but you just can't stand to be around them, a few suggestions. When possible, do not be early for a rehearsal. Show up as close to the rehearsal time as possible. This allows for the shortest amount of talking and interaction possible. Get straight into the rehearsal. If they want to chat instead of rehearse, tell them you have to leave right at whatever time the rehearsal is scheduled to end, and then leave then. Again, this allows for little time to have to be around the person. During rehearsal, keep the focus on the music, not chatting about anything not related to music. If you can't leave at the end of the rehearsal or you have to be early, try and find something to do that you 'just have to do' that prevents you from having to be around the person. A long trip to the bathroom or a trip next door for coffee or food also works well.

The know-it-all

For the director who thinks they know all there is to know about music, don't bother to try and correct them in the middle of a rehearsal. Talk to them after or before the rehearsal. If they don't allow time for you to talk with them outside of rehearsal, it might be necessary to enlist the help of someone in the group. Have that person or persons ask a question in a naive or ignorant way in the rehearsal that

points out the mistake the director is making. If the director is constantly criticizing your playing and you have other musicians of equal or better training or experience to that of your director tell you that your accompanying is correct, then make a point to talk to the director and ask what is wrong and how you should correct it. It is important to make sure that you are doing the accompaniment correctly. Just because you are convinced that you are correct or someone in the group who doesn't have much training or experience thinks you are doing your job correctly, that doesn't always mean that you are. If talking to the director in private doesn't help and if the criticism continues, especially if it continues in front of the choir, then privately offer to resign (if a paid position) or ask to quit (say, if you are a high school student playing for the choir, ask to go back to singing). Give the constant criticism without advice on how to do it correctly as your reason. It is possible you may find yourself without a job, but usually the director will realize what is going on and be a little less critical or arrogant regarding their abilities.

With a soloist or small group that always thinks it knows what it is doing but doesn't, the question to ask is how much abuse are you willing to take and how badly do you need the money. Again, you have to be absolutely sure that you are accompanying correctly. Just because you think you are doesn't mean you are. If you can't get the soloist to admit that they aren't perfect or to stop criticizing your playing when you are not making any mistakes, you can either ignore the criticism or quit. Since they are obviously wrong, their criticism is invalid to begin with, so you shouldn't allow it to bother you. The best thing you can do is talk to the soloist and explain that while you aren't always perfect when you play, they aren't always perfect either, no human is. The goal is to make the best music possible. Try to work with the soloist from that perspective. If they are unyielding on the subject and too difficult to put up with, then it is best to quit as their accompanist. If they want to hire you in the future, I suggest doubling your rates (or at least adding half again what you normally charge). If they don't complain, then it means

that other accompanists have been fed up with them. So, put up with their nonsense knowing that you'll be making more money.

The self-critical or no self-esteem soloists

With the really self-critical soloist or director that always needs someone to tell them how good they are, in the long run it is best not to satisfy their need for compliments too much. I would suggest waiting until near the end to answer any questions they have about 'how good does it sound.' Answer such questions early in the rehearsal by saying something like, 'let's start at measure xx and do a few phrases.' In other words, just practice. If they are really persistent in wanting to know how it sounds early in the rehearsal, tell them that it is too early in the rehearsal and suggest another section that needs to be rehearsed. Another response is to ask them how they think it sounds in comparison to other soloists they've heard perform the piece in question. If they've never heard anyone else perform it, and if recordings are easily available, suggest they should listen to some before worrying about how it sounds. Finally, toward the end of the rehearsal, give them an honest opinion of how they sound if they are still asking for it. Another approach is to tell them that you don't accompany soloists unless they meet a certain minimum level of quality (and that's not bad advice if you have the luxury of turning away clients).

A privilege to accompany

You will also run across soloists who make it seem that it is a privilege to accompany them. Unless they really are a top notch and respected performer who will be performing in a venue where they are well recognized, then I wouldn't pay much attention to anything they have to say. Nothing that you do, short of perfection, will do anything to impress them, so don't bother. Let your accompanying speak for itself. If you are good with the job at hand, they will not be bad to have to deal with. One advice I would give that applies to accompanying in general is to be confident, even somewhat over confident when

first meeting with any soloist. Give them the impression from the first moment you meet that you know what you are doing. If you have to ask questions, ask intelligent questions. Don't ask how do they want to perform a certain phrase. Instead, ask them if they want to do method a or method b in a particular phrase. Make sure method a and b are good methods. Doing this gives them the impression that you know what you are talking about and it helps settle any nerves they might have about working with you.

Do you know what you are doing?

Along the same lines are the soloists who don't think you know what you are doing. All I can say is that you'll need to learn to deal with this in whatever way works for you. The best thing to do is to have confidence in what you are doing because you know you are doing it right and demonstrate to the soloist that you do know what you are doing. If they don't hire you again, don't fret it. If your experience accompanying them was bad, you might consider refusing a job should they want to hire you just to let them know that they are a difficult soloist to work with. Keep an eye out on how many different accompanists they use each time they perform. If it seems like they always have a different accompanist, it probably means their relationship with accompanists is so bad that nobody wants to be their accompanist again.

Who are you?

No matter how great the personality of the soloist or director you are working with is, you can count on being ignored, not thanked or forgot about at some point in your accompanying career. While it is usually a job and I understand the attitude that you don't need to praise someone for doing what they were hired to do, too many soloists don't understand or accept that accompanists, while not in the spotlight, are still in the spotlight. Without the accompanist, the soloist would not be able to do what they are doing. So, some acknowledgement privately would be nice, but is not something you can count on. Usually at the end of a performance, a soloist will acknowledge their accompanist to the audience.

Sometimes, especially with less experienced performers, they will fail to acknowledge you at the end of the performance. Or, a church bulletin or recital program will not list the name of the accompanist.

Don't be upset if you don't get the recognition you need.

Top tips

- Don't allow the negative attitudes of soloists or directors upset you
- Make sure you are accompanying correctly if someone is criticizing you. Just because you think you are, doesn't mean you are. Get a professional opinion.
- Be confident with your accompanying
- If you're in this business for recognition and praise, you're in it for the wrong reason

Chapter 8 – Practical Tips

This chapter discusses some practical tips I've picked up over the years that will make your job as an accompanist easier. I'm not sure I'd call them tricks of the trade, but they will save you some headache. It may also give you some thought as to the type of questions you ask prior to accepting an accompanying job.

Problems with pianos

When playing for instrumental competitions, band and orchestra festivals tend to bring in cheap digital pianos (or even spring-action synthesizers with only 61 notes) and call them "pianos." They are of course, not pianos and, at the least, competitions should make adjustments for accompanists who do not want to play on digital pianos by allowing them to play in a room that has a real piano. But, the truth is at some point in your accompanying, you will probably end up having to perform on a digital piano that is sub-standard and not really a piano. Too many times I've been called upon to play a difficult accompaniment with a large dynamic range or using all 88 keys that is all but impossible on most digital pianos. If you suspect in advance that might happen and you have no way to get your time slot assigned to a room with an acoustic piano, go visit your local music store and try your accompaniment on some of those keyboards to get a feel for it. Or, find an organ and try playing your piece on that.

Another thing to be prepared for in a performance situation is the condition of the acoustic piano. In more competitions than I care to mention, I've run across pianos that are badly out of tune, have broken strings, out of tune notes, broken damper pedals, or keys that stick. With keys that stick or don't play, it can be a real challenge to play something that conveys the 'spirit' of the accompaniment but is not the accompaniment. Playing the offending note an octave higher or lower when it is important is sometimes

the only choice. If the pedal does not work, use the pedaling marks and hold down all the notes you're playing while the pedal mark is down, lift the fingers when the pedal indicates a change or release. At least if you've practiced ahead of time on the offending piano, you have some idea of what to expect when the performance comes.

My favorite story about notes that stick is that of a rural community Christmas program held annually by all the churches in town. The choirs sing for one another and the community at the only large church in town. One year the D below middle C would not play unless you pressed it really hard, and even then, it sometimes would not play. This meant having to play it an octave lower or leave it out. The next year at the pre-concert rehearsal, the note was still sticking – their piano tuner had not tried to figure out the problem. I was able to stop by the morning of the concert and examine the piano. Nothing was obvious looking at the strings or hammers of the grand piano. I tried to look through the crack when the keyboard lid is partially closed. I thought I saw part of a candy cane! So, I removed the keyboard lid exposing the hidden part of the keys one would not normally be able to see. Something was indeed lodged between the D and the metal frame of the piano. (The keyboard on this piano was split into 3 parts internally with the frame of the piano dividing the sections. This is typical for a grand). A rubber ball with colors similar to a candy cane was securely jammed between the key and the frame. Also present were numerous paper clips, some pencils, pens, a sealed envelope addressed to the church pastor and assorted junk. With the junk removed, the piano played just fine. It is worth learning a bit about how the piano works and be able to do simple repairs, like this or fixing an upright's pedal.

What do you do if you're playing on a digital piano and the music rack does not exist? If you can move the piano flush against the wall, that will solve the problem. If you cannot, try to borrow someone's large (heavy) purse and used it as a prop. Between the rehearsal and the performance you might make your own music rack (as I did once) so you have it for future situations. Otherwise, consider

using a couple of bags of flour or sugar as the music rack. A small piece of the material one puts under rugs and mats to keep them from sliding works good to stop the music from sliding out from the bottom. In a pinch, some small bubble wrap also works (but does make turning the page harder).

Sweaty Hands

Sometimes you may be working in a situation where there may be other accompanists besides you playing. The different songs are usually one after another in the program and require the changing of accompanists. You will sometimes need to come on stage while the other accompanist leaves. If possible, if there are only two different accompanists, turn pages for each other to avoid the awkwardness of having to leave stage. In one school I was working at, one of the girls who was accompanying a piece just before me had warned me some days prior to the concert that her hands sweated a lot when she played. I didn't think much of it until the dress rehearsal. That was the first time we had gone through the music in order. She wasn't kidding. The piano had to be wiped down with tissue to get all the sweat off the keyboard. So, have tissue or a handkerchief handy if you know the person before you will be sweating. Try to wipe the keys during the applause. Hardly anyone in the audience will notice and it will be less distracting.

Lighting

Probably the biggest challenge I've had to face is the lack of adequate lighting. For one school program, we had some of the solo vocal performances or choirs accompanied on the grand piano on stage. With the light that was lighting up the choir or soloists, I could see the music just fine. However, for a show choir, there simply wasn't room for the piano on stage, and it was too far backstage to be practical. In this school auditorium, the room between the first row and the stage would barely allow for a wheelchair to get by. We placed an upright off to one side against the stage (which was at least 3' above the audience floor). It was discovered at the dress rehearsal that there was inadequate light to

see the music. It was so dark it was hard to see the piano keys. The only lights the school had were stand lights which are useless on a console piano never mind that there wasn't an electric outlet close enough. Fortunately, there were flashlights. My hastily arranged for page turner (another accompanist) had to shine the flashlight in the right spot and turn pages. Make sure prior to the last minute that there will be enough light so you can see your music. Nowadays I would use my backlit musicpad and would have no trouble viewing the music.

Accepting or rejecting an accompanying opportunity

When someone contacts you about being their accompanist, there are a few things you should discuss straight away prior to agreeing to take the job. *Do not give them your rates until you have asked some questions.* Your rate should be based on the job rather than a one-size fits all standard rate. The first thing I ask is when is the performance and when would be the first rehearsal (assume there will be more than one). Check your calendar right then and make sure you can make the performance. In the case of groups that have a fixed rehearsal schedule, also check those. There is no point in agreeing to a job if you can't make a rehearsal or performance. Soloists and small groups are usually more flexible about rehearsals. If the date of the first rehearsal or the performance is less than one week away, seriously consider how much you need the money and how much you will have to re-arrange your personal life or other professional obligations. I may lose work, but unless the job in question appears to be really easy and not too time consuming, I'll decline the job right then. Note that competitions almost never run on time so you can count on an extra hour or more of time from what the client may say. In any case, charge more if someone is contacting you less than two weeks before the performance. If the dates look good for you, continue to ask questions. As you go through the questions, consider the answers and whether you are willing (or able) to do what the client needs you to do.

Ask how many rehearsals will there be and for how long. In addition to being paid for your musical skills, you are also being paid for your time. I've found that some groups, schools and churches in particular, are not very good at starting or ending on time. There have been a number of times when I was hired for one dress rehearsal and then one or two performances. At the dress rehearsal, for whatever reason, the choir sounded like they had never seen the music before. The choir director started rehearsing and kept going for about 45 minutes longer than the rehearsal was suppose to. If you haven't agreed to a fix time, then asking for more money because of the extra time will get you nowhere. I remember being a church pianist in a church that hired in about 20 freelance musicians to be the orchestra for a Christmas or Easter program. After one and-a-half hours of rehearsal, at the end of one of the songs, the concert master said that they'd be taking a fifteen minute break and would be back then. I suspect they were union musicians as such a rehearsal schedule is typical for the musician's union. The director was not happy. If you are the only accompanist and not part of a group, I'm not sure I'd just get up and walk away or make such a public display, but it wouldn't hurt to pull the director away and remind him that the rehearsal was suppose to already be over.

Ask for the locations of the rehearsal(s) and performances. If you are not familiar with the location of the performance or the rehearsal, ask for an address and area landmarks. It would not hurt to ask for directions and parking information, such as parking location, price and availability. You may want to check out the neighborhood in case you need to worry about your car being stolen or vandalized. Although it was a solo performance and not accompanying, I was once asked to play for a wedding at a university chapel. I didn't ask about parking. At the dress rehearsal I discovered that while the location was easy to find and parking was available, there were only about 15 spots available for a chapel that sat nearly 100. This chapel had one wedding after the other all day. It was a good thing I had to be there early.

Ask what music you are being asked to accompany. The more music, the more you may want to charge. If, for example, you are accompanying an entire concert, I'd charge more than if I were accompanying a single Schubert vocal solo. The difficulty of the music is something to consider. Figure out how much time you will need to spend in order to learn a piece. Will that amount of practice time prevent you from taking other accompanying jobs or other music gigs you might have an opportunity to participate in? If the market allows it, adjust your price so that you earn what you need to make.

Unless you are accompanying someone for the fun of it or because they are a friend or relative, you probably want to get paid for your work. Once you've tentatively determined that you can actually do the job you are being asked to do – sometimes you won't be able to do the job – then you need to discuss what you will be paid. Do not wait until the first rehearsal or worse yet, the end of the performance to talk about how much you are going to be paid. Once you've figured out jobs and done a few and checked on the going rates in town, you'll be able to quickly figure out how much to charge.

Business side of things

As mentioned above, figure out how much time you will need to practice for a particular job. Add that to the time you will spend at rehearsals and performance (including travel time). Add one hour for administrative tasks (eg. bookkeeping, contacting the client, etc). Divide that number into the amount you are being paid. That gives you an approximation as to how much you are being paid per hour. Assuming you are getting steady, regular accompanying work, this is a good number to know. You can compare it to someone who works a typical 9-5 job. If you are not getting steady, regular work, then you need to be making more per hour. Every few months, add up all the hours you spend accompanying with how much total you make from accompanying. Figure out how much you make per hour. Remember, if you don't have a job that gives you a W-2 form at the end of the year, you will have

various self-employment expenses the average person does not. Consider that into how much you are making.

I suspect most accompanists or potential accompanists reading this are not working as nor are considering working as a full-time accompanist. But even so, unless you are independently wealthy you should be charging the market rate for your time and skills. (If you don't care about being paid, then focus your efforts on accompanying those soloists who are genuinely poor, don't accompany those that can pay full price. That will also let those of us that do need to make a decent income do so. Also, please note that most college music students can afford to pay you the market rate even if they claim they cannot).

You should be charging for your time and skills so you do need to consider how much you will charge. Accompanying can be a good supplement to other music gigs, whether it be playing in a band or doing a solo act or even being an arranger/composer. Treat your accompanying as a business, even if it isn't your primary source of income. Think about how your local grocery store treats you when it comes to prices and how often they will let you pay less than the sticker price. I'd be surprised if any would. Many potential clients will try to get you for as low an amount as they can. You don't need the work that badly. A good accompanist is hard to find, so become a good accompanist and charge accordingly. There are very few reasons why you should charge anything less than the going market rate. Do not undercut other accompanists. If you do, they will not refer clients to you that they cannot accompany and you may end up blacklisted.

In an area where there is an over-abundance of accompanists, getting work can be a challenge. This situation is where a number of factors that you can control will come into play. Make sure you are a good accompanist. A good accompanist will develop a reputation and the word will get around. You could try and talk a well-known soloist or group into letting you accompany them one time for free. If

they like you, they may hire you to be their accompanist or at a minimum they will tell other soloists who are looking for an accompanist about you. Part of being a good accompanist is not just playing the notes correctly. It is also about having good personal hygiene (hide the tattoos and piercings; take a bath; look nice, etc.), being at rehearsals and performance a bit early and well prepared, and not saying anything negative about the soloist, choir or choir director away from rehearsals and performances.

Probably the best places to look for accompanying work are local public or private schools, universities and churches. Most grades 6 through 12 will have some sort of music program (we hope) that will need an accompanist. With schools it can help to offer to volunteer some of your time with the understanding that you will charge for some element of your time. For example, volunteer to accompany the largest choir one day a week for the month preceding a major concert or festival. In the case of a festival, make it conditional that you will have first refusal for accompanying any soloists and will charge for accompanying the soloists. In the case of a concert, do the 3 or 4 rehearsals for free, but charge for any afterschool dress rehearsal and the concert itself. Music programs that have a good parent's association or club booster will be able to pay more and on a regular basis. Universities with music schools will have a need for accompanists, most notably for their vocal students. Contacting the school's main office is the best way to get started. You can also contact individual teachers. Some will have a master list of accompanists that students will have access to. Many churches are finding it harder and harder to find competent accompanists. Larger churches usually pay better, but don't forget the smaller churches. If a church requires you to be a member of the church or sign some sort of belief/morals statement or expects you to be involved in activities at the church that go beyond accompanying, I would look elsewhere. My experience is that those churches are the worse to work for.

With churches it is likely that you will be hired as an employee or an independent contractor. I recommend that you negotiate a contract that spells out the details of your job down to as much detail

as the church will agree to. By detail, I mean how many regular rehearsals per week, how many special rehearsals annually; how many special programs per years; will there be any off-site performances (eg. tours). The contract should specify how long rehearsals will be and how many church services there will be per week. If a new service is added to the weekly schedule, will you be paid more (you should)? Will there be any committee meetings you will be required to attend (try to avoid being 'required' to attend, but do attend from time to time). If you are also the primary musician for services, how far in advance will you find out what you have to play each week and how much freedom will you have in selecting any solo material you might have to play (eg. preludes, offertories, communion, etc). If you can't get the church to hire you under a contract, then make sure the job description is detailed.

If you are offered a job based on an existing job description with no room for discussion, I would tend to pass on the job unless the job description is absolutely perfect. (Very few of them are anywhere close to perfect). If you do pass on the job, tell them why, they might reconsider. Whether a contract or a job description and whether a church, school or other business, make sure it is clear how long the contract is for; how much of a notice must be given by either side for termination; reasons for termination and how the agreement can be changed. Make sure a job description or contract can only be changed with your approval. Don't accept a situation where you might be told one day that the description is changing and that you must either accept it or leave.

As I said before, you need to treat your accompanying as a business. All this discussion of contracts and job descriptions may sound like a bit much for the casual, hobbyist musician, but whether you're accompanying professionally or just for fun, you really do need to treat it as a business. Think about how a typical business works. For most of us, that would be a local retail store or an online store. Very few stores will offer to sell you a product for less than what is marked. Yes, they will honor coupons and promotional discounts, but those items are figured into the price and potential future business. As an

accompanist, you are the product. Specifically, your time and skills are the product. Don't shortchange yourself by charging less than someone else does. Just as the quality of what you buy from a retail store matters to you, make sure the product you present to your clients is of quality. Keep good records on every job you take on and how much you make and how much time you spent on each job.

Top tips

- Don't be shocked if you have to play on a digital piano or a sub-standard acoustic piano
- Make sure you have adequate lighting to be able to read your music
- Get details before accepting an accompanying job
- Don't be afraid to turn away jobs, especially last minute jobs (or charge more than usual)
- Treat accompanying as a business, good records and good professional ethics
- If considering a long-term job, get a very specific contract or job description.

Chapter 9 – Some thoughts about Coaching

In my opinion, coaching is not really a part of the job of being an accompanist. Although coaching has become even more popular over the years, I question the need for it in most circumstances. Absolutely it should not be the job of an accompanist nor should soloists expect it of you. I believe there is a saying that goes something like 'Learn one thing and learn it well.' To be both an accompanist and a coach will result in one element or another suffering. You will either be a very good coach or an 'okay' accompanist or vice versa. It is unfortunate that some university programs now combine accompanying and coaching into one degree.

It is interesting to me that most coaches are vocal coaches. While I have heard of instrumental coaches, there seem to be far more vocal coaches than anything else. This raises two questions in my mind. Firstly, if a vocalist has a teacher who is doing their job, why do they need a coach? Secondly, if there are more vocal coaches than instrumental coaches, does that mean that vocalists are not as musically knowledgeable as instrumentalists? I've not been able to figure out why there are so many vocal coaches nor why so many vocalists need a coach.

I have yet to meet a vocal (or instrumental) coach that does not do essentially the same job as a good teacher would do. They observe the singer, comment on the singing and instruct them in how to sing better. How this is any different than a vocal teacher, I'm at a loss to figure out. I've read explanations on various websites that say there is a definite difference between them but almost all of them refer to opera vocal coaches ("repetiteur") but not to the myriad of styles that the vocal coaches I have known teach. One site said that they teach you literature. Shouldn't the singer be able to learn the notes and rhythm themselves as an instrumentalist or pianist is called upon to do? As a solo pianist and

organist, I've always had to learn the literature on my own. I've never even heard of a piano coach. It also said that they are experts in the diction of the language being sung. Shouldn't a teacher also be an expert in the diction required for a song? Another web site said that a vocal teacher teaches all skills needed to maximize your voice. So if that is true, why do we need a vocal coach?

I take issue with any vocal or instrumental soloist who says that their accompanist must also be a vocal coach. When I run across such vocalists and decide to meet with them to see if I want to accompany them, they have been, without exception, vocalists who can barely read music (if they can read at all); who think they are terrific singers (when they aren't); who have not even tried to learn their music before the first rehearsal; who will be quick to blame the accompanist if anything goes wrong and in general are anything but good musicians. I fault the singer for not doing what they should to become a well-rounded musician, but I must also fault the vocal teachers for not teaching all the elements necessary to be a good singer, including those that a coach might do. Any good piano teacher I have known does the jobs of both the teacher and coach as those jobs are defined by many a commentator on the internet. Why should vocalists require the assistance of a coach? (I've never encountered an instrumentalists who wanted me to be a coach or who utilized a coach).

Although I suppose many will disagree with me on this topic, I must consider a vocal or instrumental coach to be nothing more than a vocal teacher or instrumentalist teacher. For that reason, I do not believe that an accompanist should be doing coaching. I also have to suspect that the only reason universities require coaching classes as part of an accompanying degree is to make more money.

Top tips

- If a soloist wants you to also be a coach, think twice
- Encourage (require?) your soloists to know their music before the first rehearsal

Chapter 10 – Conclusion

Closing thoughts

I hope I've given you a helpful insight into the world being an accompanist. There is more to the world of accompanying than I could possibly include in a book like this. If you are already doing some accompanying, I hope that you've picked up some helpful musical and practical tips to improve your experience. If you've been thinking about getting into the world of accompanying, I hope this has given you enough information to help you decide. But please don't rely on just this book to make a decision. Talk to other accompanists, choir directors, soloists and other musicians about it. No matter how you look at it, the world of a professional musician is a job, not a hobby. Treat your musical life as a job – but still enjoy it – and not as a hobby and you'll be ahead of the game.

There are sections of this book that other accompanists or other people may disagree with. My experience is what this book is based on so it is only natural that other people's experiences will be contrary to my own. Do take the time and read between the lines if you are reading comments on the internet or other books that were written by people trying to sell something or get work as an accompanist. Their comments may not be entirely accurate.

Where to find work as an accompanist

Although I've already mentioned some ways to find work as an accompanist, I wanted to mention those again

- Churches (even if you don't go to church, they can be a great source for steady work)
- Public or Private Secondary Schools – be willing to do a little bit of volunteer work

- Colleges and Universities – Harder to get work and/or soloists don't want to pay going rate
- Musical theater groups – It helps to know someone who works there
- Amateur community choirs, boy choirs, girl's choirs and children's choirs
- Recording studios – Don't expect much from them, but it's worth checking out
- Local music stores – they always have people coming in asking for accompanists

I encourage you to check out all the possibilities in your area and if you've come up with some more ideas, please let me know about them.

As of this writing, this book is available in the Kindle and Nook format, specially formatted for those ebook readers and is available at the Amazon and Barnes & Noble stores, respectively. It is also available in PDF format from my website.

Thank you for purchasing this book and taking the time to read it. I'd love to hear back from you with suggestions or comments. There are several ways to reach me:

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