



**MINDFUL PERSONAL ORGAN PRACTICE TECHNIQUES
FOR THE YOUNG (AND NOT SO YOUNG) ORGANIST**

FEATURING CLINICIAN: Dr. Katherine Meloan
Feb 28, 2021, 4 p.m.

**SUMMARY OF SOME OF THE PRACTICE TECHNIQUES
INSPIRED BY KATIE'S INTERACTIONS WITH OUR FOUR PLAYERS:**

Leonora Colletti – (Organist, *Presbyterian Church of Islip*) – *While By My Sheep*, arranged by Douglas E. Wagner, *Jüngst* Traditional German melody Approximately 2 mins

Katie's reflective feedback included four areas of personal practice technique emphasis: breathing/slow down/changing manuals technique/phrasing

BREATHING:

- Take a deep breath at the outset.
- Breathe in your tempo and in the style of the piece (i.e., meditative? Energetic?).
- The result of mindful breathing into your tempo includes an enhanced sense of tempo, better phrasing, and natural relaxation.
- Note where the breath will be in your phrasing, and be consistent in practicing that way.
- Practice your breathing the same way you'd practice fingering or changing pistons.

CHANGING MANUALS:

- Practice the changes.
- Move/place your fingers/then play.
- Practice slowly.
- Begin SLOWLY, working up to practicing in tempo
- Practice piston/registration changes in tempo.
- Breathe

REFLECT ON YOUR OWN PRACTICE TECHNIQUES:

- Reflecting on your own playing in order to identify problem areas which you can then solve (on your own or with a teacher).
- Always identify the places that give you trouble. For instance, any time you are hesitating, you will have something to address or fix. It could be fingering, or just the need to develop greater fluency in a difficult passage.
 - Slow down. Don't rush through it. Take it "tediously slow" until problems have been worked out.

- Use a metronome; keep it steady
 - Listen to yourself
 - As needed, work on separate parts, i.e., LH with pedal, RH with pedal, RH w LH, all together.
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Shibin Joseph – (College Student) Playing Prelude from the Bach Prelude and Fugue in D minor, BWV 554

Katie's reflective feedback emphasized registration and the releases.

REGISTRATION:

- Be conscious of the style of the pieces you are playing and the acoustic environment of the instrument....
- In playing North German baroque pieces, use a full principal chorus or Plenum for performance registration (8' 4' 2' – principal stops, mixture), and you may need to couple in 8', 4', 2' from other divisions, depending on the organ and acoustic of the room.
- Record yourself... put the recorder out in the church... to see what you actually sound like and what you like. This will help you to determine the registration.
- Choose your manual according to the style and temperament of the piece, i.e., using the positif on this instrument for the middle section.
- **Performance registration is totally different than practice registration.** You don't want to double up when you are practicing. For performance, maybe. For practice, keep it simple. Use one stop (8' principal or 8'flute) so you can hear clearly.

THE RELEASES: be intentional to release as written, or as you actually want them... Use repetition in your practice to help the coordination of hands and feet. Slow down as you practice.

Patrick Hines – (HS Student member) Playing Bach's "Preludium et Fuga XI" (BWV 541), in G major, 3 minutes and 20 seconds

Reflective feedback themes from Katie: Achieving the crescendo in a baroque piece, rests, self reflection, practicing middle to end, or starting at a challenging place in the piece, and "skeletonizing."

Think through how you will create a crescendo, since swell pedals aren't used in the baroque. You imagine it and you get it.

Approach the rests in the spirit of the piece... i.e., take an excited breath.

In playing baroque $\frac{3}{4}$... allow a little break before the down beat.
Lead into to the downbeat...

TIP: The bench needs to be higher for baroque because you are primarily playing with your toes. If bench is too low, it can tire you out. (For music where one will be playing very legato with a lot of heel and toe, set bench lower.)

Energy:

Always reflect on your practice.

TIP: Try practicing end to beginning... middle to end, or start in a challenging spot in the music. Don't always start at the beginning of the piece.

TIP: really slow practice... Using a metronome, practice slowly and precisely, with evenness... (at first) then musically.

In this piece, lock in the first 9 measures to make it seamless and perfect.

Skeletonizing: cover the weak parts of the measure (in this case beats 2 & 3) and play only on 1
This makes it harder (on purpose) to assist you ultimately with performance.
(Like a dancer putting weights in his shoes).

Richard Whitten – (Organist, St. Peter's Evangelical Huntington Station, NY Lutheran Church) – Playing J. S. Bach, Sonata V in C, BWV 529, Mov't. 1, Allegro, parts 1 and 2. Approximately 3.5 minutes.

Comment from Katie: Tempo was extraordinary.

TIP: Reflect on how you approach your practice, how you analyze and solve challenges For instance, as problems arise, work on:

- L w pedal
- R w pedal
- Then put it together.

Problems come up.

AGAIN, ASK YOURSELF HOW YOU PRACTICE:

Do you practice slowly or fast?

Often, you may find that the end isn't as strong as the beginning.

Switch it up; practice from the end.

NOTE: These pieces that Bach wrote for his son were structured to build technical facility.

There are technical exercises within the piece and counterpoint throughout, imitating orchestral instruments. It can be played a bit more slowly to bring out the orchestral quality.

TIP: To build facility, identify the weak areas and practice them, i.e., Left hand and pedal (weak with weak). Pedal part is usually the weakest. Go a little more slowly.

REGISTRATION TIP: Be mindful that you want to hear every part.

TIP: Once established, don't switch pedaling or fingering. **STICK WITH** the pedaling/fingering that you work out.

TIP: when playing left hand and pedal, you can put the left hand on **silent registration**.

TIP: in rehearsing you can bring out the hand or pedals you are focusing on and soften or silent the other two.

FINAL THOUGHTS FOR THE CLASS:

- Make things harder in your practice so the performance will be easier
- Listen to yourself, to identify those things that you want to fix
- Record yourself. You can be your own teacher
- Imagine your organ teacher or organ hero to be **IN THE CONGREGATION** during the performance or practice. What would that person have to say?

FOR WRITTEN PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS AT THE END (USING THE CHAT BOX)

1. WHAT ARE YOUR TAKE AWAYS FROM TODAY'S SESSION? What are some practical strategies or techniques that you might be more intentional in incorporating into your own personal practice?
 2. WHAT OTHER TYPES OF MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS, OR CONCERTS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE US SCHEDULE IN THE FUTURE (both virtual and as we move back into live sessions)?
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