

PATHWAYS TO PROFICIENCY IN ORGAN IMPROVISATION

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of
College of Fine Arts
Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts



December
2020

APPROVAL

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the help of the four interview participants. I wish to thank David Cherwien, Jeffrey Brillhart, Paul Soulek, and Todd Wilson for sharing their memories of learning improvisation.

Many thanks are due to my advisor, Dr. H. Joseph Butler, for nearly ten years of patient instruction as I have moved through the graduate programs at TCU. I also want to thank the members of my committee for their guidance in writing this document. The faculty at TCU has always been helpful, knowledgeable, and eager to assist the students.

My friends, coworkers, and leaders at Our Redeemer Lutheran have continually affirmed and supported my desire to pursue graduate studies while continuing to serve as church music director. My family has been a constant support, especially my wife, Rebecca, who has endured this degree with endless patience.

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	9
CHAPTER THREE: LEARNING SUMMARIES.....	22
David Cherwien.....	22
Jeffrey Brillhart.....	31
Todd Wilson.....	43
Paul Soulek.....	57
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS.....	61
APPENDICES.....	
Appendix A: Messiaen’s Modes of Limited Transposition.....	69
Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Protocol Approval.....	70
Appendix C: Human Subjects Researcher Course Completion Certificates.....	72
Appendix D: Participant Consent Forms.....	74
Appendix E: Initial Letter of Inquiry.....	91
Appendix F: Interview Questions.....	92
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	93

FIGURES AND TABLES

FIGURES

2.1	Structural diagram by Devin Howard.....	18
3.1	Cherwien scale harmonization.....	27
3.2.	Cherwien’s toccata modulation.....	30
3.3	Perfect fifths.....	37
3.4	Perfect fourths.....	37
3.5	Thirds.....	38
3.6	$\frac{6}{3}$, $\frac{6}{4}$, and $\frac{6}{5}$ chords.....	38
3.7	Messiaen’s second mode of limited transposition.....	39
3.8	Progression used in Messiaen’s <i>La Nativité</i>	41
3.9	The “Cochereau Rise”	41
3.10	Messiaen’s third mode of limited transposition.....	42
3.11	Hancock sonata form template.....	49
3.12	Dupré’s scale harmonizations.....	51
3.13	Dupré’s binary exposition model (major key)	54

TABLES

1.1	Improvisation continuum.....	5
3.1	Cherwien’s two-voice counterpoint combinations.....	28
3.2	Cherwien’s three-voice counterpoint combinations.....	29
3.3	Cherwien’s toccata modulation.....	30
3.4	<i>Breaking Free</i> Part II summary.....	36
3.5	Dupré’s combinations for harmonizing a chorale.....	55
3.6	Dupré’s combinations for three-voice counterpoint.....	56
4.1	Learning path (combined from all interviewees)	61
4.2	Learning path for David Cherwien.....	63
4.3	Learning path for Jeffrey Brillhart.....	64
4.4	Learning path for Todd Wilson.....	64
4.5	Learning path for Paul Soulek.....	65

CHAPTER ONE

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

How does one learn to improvise on the organ? While the organ has a long history of improvisation, there is no definitive, authoritative resource for this question. There is also no professional organization dedicated solely to organ pedagogy, and as a result there is a paucity of pedagogical research on this subject. While there are many written manuals on organ improvisation, it does not logically follow that what one finds in a written manual is how one actually learns. What I have done in this project is to interview four accomplished organ improvisers and ask them about their personal learning experiences. Interviewees were chosen based on the following criteria:

- 1) They have performed at a national convention of either the American Guild of Organists or a denominational organization
- 2) They specialize in liturgical or hymn-based improvisation by regularly playing for services and/or hymn festivals as a part of their professional practice

Based on these criteria, four organists participated in this study: David Cherwien, Jeffrey Brillhart, Todd Wilson, and Paul Soulek. Three of the interviews were conducted by phone and one (Wilson) was conducted in person. Two of the interviewees (Cherwien and Brillhart) have written manuals on improvisation, both of which were autobiographical in the sense that they were trying to replicate their personal learning experience. Wilson used manuals by Gerre Hancock and Marcel Dupré, and an overview

of those materials is included in his learning summary. Soulek did not use any written manuals in his learning process. Three of the four organists showed extraordinary aural skills from an early age and all four counted listening to and imitating other organists as a key part of their training.

All quotations from the organists were transcribed from verbal interviews. All participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy.

Improviser Biographies

David Cherwien serves as Cantor at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, and Artistic Director for the National Lutheran Choir. He holds a DMA in Organ Performance and Master of Arts in Theory and Composition from the University of Minnesota. His undergraduate degree is in Organ Performance and Choral Music Education, from Augsburg College in Minneapolis. After his undergraduate degree was completed, he studied for two years at the Berliner Kirchenmusikschule, Spandau. There he studied improvisation with Renate Zimmermann, organ literature with Karl Hochreither, conducting with Martin Behrmann, and composition with Ernst Pepping. He has also studied organ with Christian Baude in Aix-en-Provence, France, and with Paul Manz, Heinrich Fleisher, and Earl Barr in the United States, and is a Fellow with Melodious Accord,¹ studying composition with Alice Parker.²

¹ This is a program where students can attend a seminar with Alice Parker on topics including composition, church music, and score study. For a full description, see <https://www.melodiousaccord.org/workshops>.

² For a full biography, see <https://www.ecspublishing.com/composers/c/david-m-cherwien.html>.

Jeffrey Brillhart is Director of Music and Fine Arts at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania and on the music faculty at Yale University, where he teaches organ improvisation. He is also Music and Artistic Director of Philadelphia's Singing City Choir. A native of Iowa, his teachers include organists Carl B. Staplin, Arthur Poister, Russell Saunders, and pianist Barbara Lister-Sink. Further studies with Olivier Latry and Philippe Lefebvre in organ improvisation led to his winning first prize in the American Guild of Organists' National Competition in Organ Improvisation in 1994.³

Todd Wilson serves as head of the Organ Department at the Cleveland Institute of Music. In addition, he is Curator of the E.M. Skinner pipe organ at Severance Hall (home of The Cleveland Orchestra) and serves as Director of Music and Worship at Cleveland's Trinity Cathedral (Episcopal). Wilson received Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati, where he studied organ with Wayne Fisher. Further coaching in organ repertoire was with Russell Saunders at The Eastman School of Music.⁴

Paul Soulek serves as Cantor at St. John Lutheran Church in Seward, Nebraska and adjunct professor of organ at Concordia University Nebraska. He has played for hymn festivals across the United States and has been organist for national worship conferences of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. He received his master's degree in Church Music from Concordia University Chicago and a BMus in Parish Music from

³ For the full biography, see <https://www.jeffreybrillhart.com/bio>.

⁴ For the full biography, see <https://www.cim.edu/sites/default/files/2016-10/Wilson%2C%20Todd%202016.pdf>.

Concordia University Nebraska. His organ instructors include Steve Wente, Jeffrey Blersch, and Charles Ore. He has pursued additional tutelage from David Cherwien.

Defining Improvisation

Organ improvisation has a long tradition, going back to at least the fourteenth century.⁵ From its inception, this improvisation has been connected with the musical accompaniment of church services. Its earliest known use in the liturgy was the *alternatim* practice, where the organ would substitute for, and alternate with, the choir during services. Over time, organ improvisation in the sacred context has expanded to include chorale preludes, music for parts of the Mass (communion, elevation, etc.), creative hymn accompaniments, bridges and modulations, and postludes. These various needs allow for a great variety of length, form, and expressive character. These improvisations are often, but not always, based on the existing chants or hymn melodies used in the service.

All of the above liturgical functions for improvisation could conceivably be filled with written repertoire. These improvisations can also be based on pre-existing material to varying degrees. Therefore, one must define what exactly is meant by improvisation. On this matter, the interviewees are not in total agreement, but all place improvisation somewhere on the following continuum:

⁵ The earliest documentation of liturgical use for the organ comes from the fourteenth century. For a discussion of when the organ may have been used in the Middle Ages, see chapter five in Peter Williams, *The Organ in Western Culture 750-1250* (Cambridge, 1993), 70-93.

TABLE 1.1. Improvisation continuum

COMPLETELY SPONTANEOUS	←—————→	MEMORIZED COMPOSITION
PLANNED IMMEDIATELY PRIOR OR DURING PERFORMANCE		PLANNED IN ADVANCE
NOT REHEARSED		PRACTICED
DIFFERENT IF REPEATED		SAME WITH EVERY PERFORMANCE
NOT WRITTEN DOWN		NOT WRITTEN DOWN

Cherwien describes a range of improvisation from completely spontaneous to planned in advance. He admits there is a “fuzzy” category (the above “memorized composition”) where a planned improvisation no longer changes. For Cherwien and Soulek, a piece is an improvisation until it is written down, even if planned in advance. Cherwien said:

Probably the primary facet is that it’s just music that is not written out.... Until it’s been written out or published and you recreate exactly what you see written on the page, I still call it improvisation.

Soulek stated that improvisation is occurring when “the notes aren’t already on the page and you’re doing something different, adding your own spice to it.”

Brillhart prefers to call improvisation “composition on the spot.” He favors improvisation that is closer to the “completely spontaneous” end of Table 1.1 than the “memorized composition” end. He said:

I find that improvisations that are thought-out in advance tend not to be very good improvisations. The ones that are completely spontaneous, I think, are generally the most impactful.

Wilson called improvisation “spontaneous music making; making music without written notes in front of you (at least not many aside from maybe a theme).”

The four interviewees play in churches from the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran traditions. They all improvise preludes and postludes. The application of improvisation within the service proper varies somewhat. Wilson noted the importance of bridges and modulations to connect elements of the service. Cherwien uses Baroque forms for introductions to hymns. He also improvises varied accompaniments to hymns. Soulek likewise uses Baroque forms, such as a two-part invention or short fugal form, for hymn introductions. He said the main purpose of his service improvisations is to “illuminate the text,” adding, “The goal is to preach the gospel using notes.” Like Cherwien, Soulek extemporizes hymn accompaniments, but limits this to one stanza per hymn.

For Brillhart, the main practical function of improvisation is not to support singing, but to fill time in the service. On Communion Sundays, he has about ten minutes to fill with improvisation. Rather than forms typical of the German Baroque, he draws from twentieth-century French techniques. He described his approach as follows:

If it’s a one-minute improvisation, the form is going to be pretty simple, but in one minute you can actually do a rondo. Charles Tournemire proved that in the *L’orgue Mystique*. Typically, in a one-minute improvisation, for me, I would do a ternary form, and ternary really right up until five or six minutes. Once you get to that point, how you organize each of the sections of the ternary becomes more and more interesting, so the A section can be in itself its own ternary or binary form. The B section would typically structure in three or four parts, each part in a different key and then the return to the A or recapitulation. And beyond that...for a postlude, typically either a sonata-allegro form or a rondo is what I prefer to do.

There is a popular conception that improvisation is an innate skill. Improvisation is seen as a talent; one either has “it” or one does not. If this is true, then exploring paths to proficiency is a rather pointless task. The interviewees were asked whether they

thought improvisation could be taught. All four believe that some people have a more ready gift for the skill than others. Soulek, Wilson, and Brillhart teach improvisation at the university level and have seen varying degrees of this ability.

Brillhart began his answer by saying that improvisation was an innate skill; however, he clarified his answer:

And I say that, at the same time, I will say that I've had about one hundred and twenty students at Yale over the last nearly fifteen years and only one or two simply could not improvise at the end of the day. There were many that came in who had never improvised before, but who became credible improvisers. I only ever had one or two that couldn't, and I think for both of them it was a cultural thing....they both expressed the fear of looking foolish in public, and therefore the idea of improvising was a terrible prospect for them.

Soulek, likewise, has seen students obtain the ability to improvise. He said, "I've watched people develop that over time that I never thought would. If you're open to the idea, I think it's possible to be taught. But I think there are people that just have [the innate skill] more than others, naturally."

On this question, Cherwien observed that the concept of a music education without improvisation is limited to American classical musicians. In the areas of rock and especially jazz, everyone improvises, and organists in Europe cannot graduate with a church music degree without the ability to improvise.

Wilson believes that everyone can reach at least a functional ability in this regard:

Anybody can become at least a serviceable improviser. You may not want to come out and improvise in a really big public way, but I think for those of us who play in church, I think anybody can [learn to] improvise an okay interlude between verses of a hymn, or something that builds up to the doxology or something like that. With some work and some time...you may never feel like you're really good at it, but you can do it.

He added that the learning process with improvisation is a matter of natural ability plus “time spent at it in a disciplined way.”

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Catherine Chamblee

Catherine Burnette Chamblee’s dissertation, “Cognitive Processes of Improvisation: Performers and Listeners in the Organ Tradition and Contemporary Gospel Styles” is the most thorough treatment of the learning process as applied to organ improvisation that I have found in the literature. This document is notable for its lengthy literature review and for the integration of cognitive science.

Chamblee’s hypothesis is that the cognitive processes guiding the generation and reception of musical improvisation are culture blind.⁶ She states that improvisers learn through a four-cycle process:⁷

1. Contributing factors influence a soloist’s explicit and implicit long-term memories.
2. The soloist generates an improvisation based on a model.
3. Listeners evaluate the created piece using their perceptions of parametric closure (sameness and difference) at local and formal levels.
4. Listeners offer feedback to the soloist, the content of which becomes a new contributing factor affecting the soloist’s future extemporizations.

Chamblee builds an understanding of memory theory in the literature review, especially the three processes of memory (echoic, short term memory, and long-term

⁶ Catherine Burnette Chamblee, “Cognitive Processes of Improvisation: Performers and Listeners in the Organ Tradition and Contemporary Gospel Styles” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 2.

⁷ Chamblee, 7.

memory.) Memory theory comes from cognitive psychology, “a framework that considers cultural, pedagogical, and aesthetic influences alongside mental processes.”⁸ From cognitive psychology, Chamblee reviews works by Ernst Ferand, Bruce Nettl, E.T. Hall, Albert Lord, Alfred Pike, Philip Alperson, Derek Bailey, Andy Hamilton, Elliot Carter, Jeff Pressing, Eric Clarke, Benjamin Brinner, Bob Snyder, and Caroline Drake.

For her investigation of memory theory, Chamblee relies heavily on Brinner⁹ and Snyder.¹⁰ There are three processes of memory. The first is echoic memory, which “addresses the acoustical data the ear receives as unrelated neural impulses....”¹¹ Through a process called “impulse binding,” these related impulses “become distinct auditory events,” events that share similar qualities and temporal positioning. This whole process is “bottom-up processing.” The second kind of memory is short-term memory (STM), which operates with something Chamblee calls “elements” or “chunking.” STM can handle five to nine “chunks” at a time. According to Snyder, “chunking” might be hierarchical, meaning that a series of arpeggios may be one chunk, but the notes of the arpeggio itself might be a separate “chunk.”¹²

STM ranges from .25 to 8 seconds. Events of less than .25 seconds become fused in echoic memory, and those longer than 8 seconds become long-term memory events. Musical phrases are the longest musical groupings that can be actively processed by short-term memory. Long-term memory (LTM) has two types that we use to build

⁸ Chamblee, 2.

⁹ Benjamin Brinner, *Knowing Music, Making Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 28-31.

¹⁰ Bob Snyder, *Music and Memory: An Introduction* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

¹¹ Chamblee, 111.

¹² Chamblee, 120.

musical performance; implicit and explicit. With LTM, we build semantic memory, or “abstract conceptual categories organized hierarchically.”¹³ We create categories with our memories. Categories integrate perceptions and semantic memory.

Regarding musical improvisation, Chamblee finds evidence for implicit and explicit memory in Hall¹⁴ and Bailey.¹⁵ In his book, Bailey’s framework for learning consists of constructing a music vocabulary from years of playing. This “vocabulary” is subsumed into the consciousness and is what Chamblee calls “implicit” memory. Bailey practices the handling of new material by constructing various exercises. The intentional, focused concentration required by new material qualifies for Chamblee as “explicit” memory.

Chamblee ends her discussion of memory theory and her literature review with these hypotheses:¹⁶

1. Pedagogical sources, especially those in print, feed distinct explicit and implicit memory processes, and some of these may blend together over time as semantic memories become implicit in nature.
2. Improvisers use the primary parameters of pitch and rhythm to create arrangements of groupings that can be understood by listeners within a performance tradition. In a fashion analogous to the way listeners perceive salience at the phrase level, improvisers use the phrase as the centerpiece of their creative efforts. Correspondingly, secondary parametric changes reinforce or thwart these primary parametric constructs. Like changes in primary parameters, secondary parametric change is tradition-driven.
3. Traditions vary in the character of their formal structures. We may define formal structures in a cognitive sense as any pattern or unit exceeding the time or element constraints of STM (i.e., patterns greater than eight seconds or nine elements.) Examining parametric convergence from scores and computer analysis indicates elements perceived by listeners. Studying pedagogical influences accounts for some (but not all) cultural influences contributing to

¹³ Chamblee, 140.

¹⁴ E.T. Hall, "Improvisation as an Acquired, Multi-Level Process," *Ethnomusicology* 36, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1992): 231-32.

¹⁵ Derek Bailey, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* (Da Capo Press, 1992).

¹⁶ Chamblee, 162.

explicit and implicit memory processes. Pedagogical influences are the source for some intentional improvisatory elements.

In chapters on organ and vocal gospel improvisation, Chamblee applies memory theory to the process of learning music. She looks at the treatise by Marcel Dupré, the manual by Gerre Hancock, and the “Learn to Improvise in 15 Minutes a Day” article series from *The American Organist* magazine.¹⁷ Chamblee discerns a three-step instructional process: planning, reducing memory load, and using meaningful memory units.

In the first step, the teacher presents a model, which is known in some way due to familiarity with the tradition. The second step is to learn the needed motor skills, and the third step is to apply these new skills as solutions to new problems or themes. For example, in the chapter on “Toccatas” in *Improvising: How to Master the Art*, Hancock presents a model (the form and style of the French toccata), then prescribes exercises to learn the motor skills (playing patterns), and finally challenges the player to apply these skills to new tunes and find new patterns. Chamblee finds a similar three-step process in the chapter on gospel singing. Singers work from a model (an existing song or lyric sheet), learn muscle memory (by imitating other singers), and then apply these skills to new repertoire.

¹⁷ Christa Rakich, “Learn to Improvise in Fifteen Minutes a Day,” *The American Organist* 39 (May and July 2005), 65 and 46. Although this is an ongoing series with multiple authors, Chamblee only discusses the two articles from 2005, both by Rakich.

One useful pedagogical insight from these chapters is the need to reduce memory load. Players can practice patterns (chord progressions, scales, etc.) until they move from explicit to implicit memory (muscle memory), a process called “overlearning.”

Chamblee’s integration of memory theory into the study of improvisation is noteworthy. She was able to bring her own experience in the gospel tradition into her discussion of a three-fold learning process. Her discussion of explicit and implicit learning, overlearning, and the three processes of memory are relevant for the present study. Chamblee demonstrates how musical events in short-term memory are integrated into long-term memory.

When discussing organ manuals, she presupposes that written manuals reflect the actual learning process for improvisers. The interviews that I have conducted show that the manuals are only one part of the learning process. They do not provide the entire skillset.

Leonardo Ciampa: Interviews with Planyavsky, Krasinski, and Toivio

Leonardo Ciampa has conducted occasional interviews with renowned organ improvisers for *The American Organist*. These short articles consist more of anecdotes and biography than details of how the improviser learned their craft. However, one can glean a few facts from these interviews; I have included a few notable examples:

Peter Planyavsky,¹⁸ a Viennese organist, began piano lessons at the age of five. He improvised from an early age and was able to reproduce what he heard on the radio.

¹⁸ Leonardo Ciampa, “Interview with Peter Planyavsky, part 1,” *The American Organist* 54, no. 4 (April 2020): 76-79.

From the age of eight, he could write out hymn accompaniments without the aid of the piano. He began playing for school Masses in the fourth grade. This shows strong natural aural skills, proclivity for harmony, and early practical experience.

Peter Krasinski¹⁹ won the National Competition in Organ Improvisation from the American Guild of Organists in 2002. He learned by ear first and was naturally gifted at aural dictation. Krasinski also plays for silent films. He thinks that improvisation is composition in real time based on knowledge and personality, or mind and heart. “Any good improvisation depends on a good grasp of music theory, respect for the theme, and understanding of existing music.”²⁰ He also teaches improvisation. This is his outline for teaching:

- I. Philosophy of the Improvisational Art
- II. Music Theory Outline for Improvisers
- III. Learning the Art of Improvising
 - A. Improvisational Applications (Including The Prelude, The Hymn, The Service, The Postlude, The Contest, The Concert)
 - B. Practical Exercises

Kalle Toivio could play piano before he could read. He started as a pianist and came to the organ in his twenties. His studies included counterpoint, composition, exercises from Dupré’s treatise, and harmony exercises based on Paul Hindemith.²¹ This intimates that, for him, improvisation is a synthesis of keyboard technique and improvisation exercises.

¹⁹ Leonardo Ciampa, “Catching up with Krasinski. I,” *The American Organist* 50, no. 7 (July 2016): 48–53.

²⁰ Leonardo Ciampa, “Catching up with Krasinski. II,” *The American Organist* 50, no. 8 (August 2016): 34.

²¹ Leonardo Ciampa, “An Interview with Kalle Toivio, First-Prize Winner: 2018 National Competition in Organ Improvisation,” *The American Organist* 52, no. 9 (September 2018): 38–39.

Philip Gehring

Gehring's dissertation from the 1960s, "Improvisation in Contemporary Organ Playing,"²² is monumental in scope and includes detailed chapters on the history of organ improvisation and a discussion of improvisation and aesthetics. Most relevant to the present study is his chapter, "Teaching Organ Improvisation." Gehring considers the technique but not the spirit of improvisation to be teachable.²³ He cites Charles Tournemire,²⁴ Eberhard Bonitz,²⁵ and Maurice Lieberman²⁶ to support this theory. Gehring discusses several manuals that were in use in the mid-twentieth century (the only one still in regular use is by Dupré). The role of the written manual is put into perspective when Gehring says, "Evaluation of improvisation texts is difficult, because a text itself often plays a relatively minor role in the teaching process. The teacher is the far more important factor."²⁷ In an interesting subchapter, Gehring compares contemporary organ instruction in American universities and colleges with the system in Europe. He finds that most American programs offer little or no instruction in improvisation. By contrast, the European schools make improvisation "inseparably linked with organ

²² Philip Gehring, "Improvisation in Contemporary Organ Playing," (PhD diss., the University of Syracuse, 1963).

²³ Gehring, 105.

²⁴ Charles Tournemire, *Précis d'exécution de registration et d'improvisation à l'orgue* (Paris: Eschig, 1936), 102.

²⁵ Eberhard Bonitz, *Die Orgel-Improvisation: ein Werkbuch für Organisten* (Tübingen : Schultheiss, 1954), ii.

²⁶ Maurice Lieberman, *Keyboard Harmony and Improvisation* (New York, W.W. Norton, 1957), vii.

²⁷ Gehring, 127.

playing.”²⁸ He relates the requirements for a first prize in improvisation from the Paris Conservatoire:²⁹

- I. Improvisation on a Gregorian theme. The mode of the theme must be preserved throughout, and the student may choose any of the following forms:
 - A. Trio
 - B. Ornamented Chorale
 - C. Organ Chorale
 - D. Chorale Prelude, with pre-imitation in each phrase
 - E. Canon
 - F. Fugal Exposition of each phrase
- II. Fugue in four voices upon a given subject.
- III. Free improvisation; e.g., an andante movement of a sonata. The student has 15 minutes to prepare this item.

Gehring then lists the requirements for a “B” level (the second highest), in German territorial church-music schools:³⁰

1. Introduction to hymn-singing, as for the opening hymn of a service
2. Toccata
3. Accompaniment for congregational singing, varied in three or four ways
4. Trio
5. Bicinium
6. Cantus-firmus in pedal
7. Larger musical forms according to the student’s talent

These outlines give an idea of the French and German schools, important to the interviews in chapter three, since Jeffrey Brillhart studied in France and David Cherwien in Germany.

Gehring also includes a chapter with transcriptions of improvisations by Louis Vierne, Tournemire, Dupré, Pierre Cochereau, André Marchal, Jean Langlais, Heinza Wunderlich, Anton Heiller, Bernard Bartelink, and Alexander Schreiner.

²⁸ Gehring, 132.

²⁹ Gehring, 132.

³⁰ Gehring, 133.

Devin Howard

Howard's dissertation is entitled "Organ Improvisation in Context: Historical and Practical Influences on the Craft of Improvisation at the Organ."³¹ The abstract states, "This project seeks to establish a precedence for the value of notated music as a resource in learning improvisation, and then, through music analysis, provide examples of how that process can develop. The result of the ideas presented here is a pathway whereby any disciplined organist can learn to imitate composed music, assimilate the musical ideas, and innovate through the act of spontaneous improvisation."³²

The abstract is intriguing because Howard's process coincides with that espoused by Chamberlee (model, motor skills, application). The instruction is in two sections. The first is a method for harmonization, beginning with the scale (in soprano, bass, tenor, or alto), and moving to the chorale. This technique is based on lessons that Howard took with Dutch organist Sietze de Vries. In the next section, Howard analyzes existing works and creates outlines that can theoretically be used for improvisation.

Here is an example of one of these analyses:

³¹ Devin Howard, "Organ Improvisation in Context: Historical and Practical Influences on the Craft of Improvisation at the Organ" (DMA diss., Arizona State University, 2012).

³² Howard, i.

Figure 2.1 Structural diagram by Devin Howard³³

Structural Diagram of Walther's Concert in B Minor - I. Allegro

Sections	Ritornello	Episode I	Ritornello	Episode 2	Episode 3	Ritornello	Episode IV	Ritornello
Measures	1 - 10db	10 - 17db	17 - 24 ³	24 ³ - 33db	33 - 40 ³	40 ⁴ - 50	51 - 57db	57-66
Key	B Minor	B minor -> D Major	D Major -> F# Minor	F# Minor -> D Major	D Major	D Major -> B Minor	B Minor	B Minor
Key Relationship	Tonic	Tonic -> Relative Major	Relative Major -> Minor Dom.	Minor Dom. -> Relative Major	Relative Major	Relative Major -> Tonic	Tonic	Tonic
Major Cadences	PAC 10db	PAC 17db	PAC 24 ³	PAC 33db	PAC 37db HC 40 ³	PAC 50	PAC 57db	PAC 66
Comments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Primary motive is introduced 2. Descending melodic scale from f#-b in mm1-2 which reappears throughout 3. Circle of 5ths in the bass voice (mm3-6) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No use of primary motive 2. Only 2 voices 3. Circle of fifths helps transition from Tonic to Rel. Maj. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Starts the same but in the Rel. Maj. 2. Primary motive reappears 3. Two ascending chromatic lines, first in bass and then in soprano, help transition to F# Minor 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begins with a circle of 5ths 2. No use of primary motive 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No use of primary motive 2. Second half is an altered echo of the first half 3. Circle of fifths 4. Only section to end in a HC 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Based on the primary motive 2. Extensive use of sequence 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No use of primary motive 2. Ascending four note scale in melody used twice 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exact recap of the original ritornello 2. Concludes with a 2 measure cadential extension

Howard discusses key areas, motives, and techniques (such as sequence) with each piece examined. The next step would be to take the outline above and transform it into a new piece, such as a hymn-based piece. Lacking from this dissertation is a complete applied example of this process. Howard gives a few exercises and prescriptive ideas to help the improviser assimilate the stylistic parameters of each piece. The idea of using an exemplar work to create an outline for improvisation is used by Hancock in his manual on improvisation, discussed in chapter three.

Christa Rakich, "Interview with Robert Nicholls" ³⁴

Robert Nicholls won the National Competition in Organ Improvisation from the American Guild of Organists in 2012. He describes some aspects of his learning process

³³ Howard, 60.

³⁴ Christa Rakich, "Interview with Robert Nicholls: 2012 NCOI Winner," *The American Organist* 47, no. 2 (February 2013): 70–72.

in this interview. He used the manual by Jan Overduin³⁵ to learn improvisation. He also used the manual by Hancock and two volumes by John Shannon.³⁶ Nicholls' practice routine is based on hymns for the upcoming service. He puts the hymns through the exercises of Hancock's chapter on hymn-playing and works on three-voice versets and canons. Nicholls took courses in ear-training in England in high school which included dictation of Bach chorales. One of the interviewees in this project, Todd Wilson, began his improvisation journey through transposition of Bach chorales.

Tom Trenney

Tom Trenney, organist at First Plymouth Congregational Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, was interviewed for the liner notes of his CD, "Organ Ovations and Improvisations."³⁷ He prescribes the following practice approach:³⁸

At first, it's important to do really simple things: pick a melody, put it in different keys, change to major or minor mode, change the time signature, play it with both hands and both feet, play it in inversion, retrograde, eventually in canon with itself. So then, in the first section, the melody might appear right side up, then in inversion or a new key, then come back; and all of a sudden you have a form, something you can hang your hat on. Practice by giving yourself rules, a context, and not allowing yourself to "just start playing."

Trenney could play piano by ear from an early age and learned piano through the Suzuki method. To intentionally acquire organ improvisation skills, Trenney listened to

³⁵ Jan Overduin, *Improvisation for Organists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³⁶ John R. Shannon, *Improvising in Traditional 17th- and 18th-Century Harmonic Style* (Colfax, North Carolina: Wayne Leupold Editions, 2007 and 2010).

³⁷ Trenney, Tom. Interview from the liner notes of his CD "Organ Ovations and Improvisations," accessed from the Raven website,

https://ravencd.com/merchantmanager/product_info.php?products_id=110.

³⁸ *ibid.*

recordings of organ improvisors and jazz musicians, read scores to familiarize himself with historical styles, and sought expert teachers. He studied with Hancock and Wilson, who worked improvisation into every lesson. Every day, Trenney would work on a different type of piece, like “toccata” or “*tierce en taille*,” and record himself.

Haejin Kim

Haejin Kim’s dissertation is entitled, “Organ Improvisation for Church Services: A Survey of Improvisation Methods Since 1900.”³⁹ Kim selects some of the extant method books and reorganizes some of their material in terms of melody, harmony, technique, and form. She uses the manuals by Hancock, Dupré, Don Rotermund,⁴⁰ Overduin, Petr Eben,⁴¹ Michelle Johns,⁴² Everett Jay Hilty,⁴³ and a dissertation by Michael Burkhardt.⁴⁴ Kim also draws from a few articles in *The American Organist*, *Clavier*, and *The Diapason*.

In the chapter on melody, Kim lists various ways to create a melody: derive a melody from the scale, create counterpoint to an existing melody, and improvise on simple chord patterns. The chapter on harmony lists various strategies for harmonizing scales, patterns, and tunes, and ends with a discussion of modulation.

³⁹ Haejin Kim, “Organ Improvisation for Church Services: A Survey of Improvisation Methods from 1900” (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2011).

⁴⁰ Donald Rotermund, *Off the Page: Tips and Techniques for Creating Hymn-based Organ Settings* (Fenton, Missouri: Morning Star Music Publishers, 2007).

⁴¹ Peter Eben, *Protestant Chorales from the Canzional of the Bohemian Brothers: Choral Variations and Improvisation Model* (Wien: University Edition, 2002).

⁴² Michelle Johns, *Hymn Improvisation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987).

⁴³ Jay Everett Hilty, *Principles of Organ Playing* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Co., 1971).

⁴⁴ Michael Arvin Burkhardt, “An Instructor’s Manual for Teaching Hymn Playing and Beginning Hymn-Based Improvisation” (DMA diss., Arizona State University, 2000).

Kim's final chapter is called "Forms and Techniques," which seems to be a stand-in for anything not covered in the previous two chapters. This covers canon, ostinato, sequence, ritornello, rhythmic subdivision, voice exchange, changing meter and rhythm, changing texture, octave displacement, suspension, pedal point, text-painting, interlude, pandiatonicism, parallel intervals, and toccata.

Kim does not give any criteria for why these manuals were chosen. The manuals are neither systematically described nor synthesized in any way. Kim could have added interest by performing a comparative study. For example, the manuals by Hancock, Dupré, and Overduin all contain harmonizations of the scale. Do they choose the same harmonies? What exercises do the manuals give for learning this skill? Does this skill come at the beginning of the training, or is it considered to be a more advanced skill? Kim's conclusion "that even lacking natural talent or inborn gifts, improvisation can be practiced and honed in much the same way as standard performance skills" is not supported by the data in the dissertation. In other words, the mere existence of instructional materials does not prove that one can learn from those materials.

CHAPTER THREE

LEARNING SUMMARIES

This chapter explores the pathway to organ improvisation for David Cherwien, Jeffrey Brillhart, Todd Wilson, and Paul Soulek. With Cherwien and Brillhart, I present the data from the interview, followed by a discussion of their own published manuals. For Wilson, the interview is followed by a summary of published manuals that helped him learn, although he did not write these manuals himself. For Soulek, I present the interview only, as he did not make use of any published manuals as he was learning.

David Cherwien

Interview

Cherwien's keyboard instruction began with piano lessons at the age of six. Improvisation was something that he did naturally, and this sometimes resulted in chiding from his teacher. He said, "I just remember being admonished... 'that's not what's on the page! Play what's on the page.'" He began organ lessons when he was in the seventh grade. When he was thirteen, his family moved to France for seven months. While in France, he began playing the organ more seriously and continued lessons through high school, leading to an undergraduate degree in choral education and organ performance.

As a high school student, improvisation was not a discipline, but a form of self-expression. He said, “I remember using improvisation in high school to express myself. I had a car accident once, for example, and I just went home and improvised on the piano for about five hours [to] get the emotions out.”

This early improvisation was completely free and was not the result of any method or training. His formal training came with study in Germany after college.

It was never part of the training. It was just a matter of fingers flying and if I liked what came out, great, if I didn't, I just moved on. That's why Germany was so important, because it really brought the brain into the act.

Cherwien was also in rock bands in high school and early college, which proved to be a practical workshop in improvisation. He credits this experience with helping him to play hymnody with creativity:

Certainly, all of the improvisation that is around hymnody and congregational singing...goes back to the rock band where we were always making up the accompaniment. There might be a melody that we were working from, but then we would come up with harmonies and chords to go under it.

While in college, Cherwien heard a hymn festival played by Paul Manz, which made a lasting impression. From this experience, he learned that he could take the creativity he learned from the rock band and apply it directly to hymn playing. Cherwien listened to recordings by Manz and played them by ear. He credits this experience and the rock band with his ability to play by ear.

For Cherwien, composing and improvising have always been the same process. He stated, “For me they're one and the same. That's not the case for a lot of composers, but for me it certainly is. I tend to capture improvisation when I'm writing and refine it as

I write it.” His first published compositions came from this process. In his senior year of college, as an independent study, he created improvisations based on hymns and wrote them out and performed them as a final project. The music publisher Robert Wetzler (of Arts Masters Studio), heard the recital where these pieces were performed and asked to publish them. In the editing process, Wetzler marked part-writing errors in these transcriptions, and this was Cherwien’s first experience with a disciplined approach to improvisation. He recalled:

I realized that if I fixed those, the pieces were way better. It illuminated the fact that I could make them better if I thought about not doing parallel fifths. Not just because I was following the rules, but it literally was a stronger sound to incorporate that into the improvisation. Writing them out illuminated that and writing out these improvisations always makes them better. I can then see on paper if there are weaknesses that can be addressed.

Upon completion of his undergraduate degree, Cherwien moved to Germany for a time to study improvisation with Renate Zimmerman at the Berliner Kirchenmusikschule, Spandau. At the school, he took an advanced ear training class and studied organ, with separate teachers for improvisation and organ literature. He studied with Zimmerman for two years. Cherwien described that experience:

It’s pretty much what I’ve outlined in my book. You begin with harmonization and then move to counterpoint and forms. That was it, really. The second half of my book was [based on her method]. You start with very simple forms of harmonizing and then you move the *cantus firmus* around to different voices. With counterpoint you start with two-voice counterpoint and then you move to three-voice counterpoint. First you start with one note per note of the melody, then you have eighth notes against the melody, then triplets against the melody, then sixteenths against the melody, then mix them all up. Then you move from there to creating the Baroque-form pieces (bacinium, trio, fugue, etc.) It was that sequence. It just got more and more complex.

Because his book, *Let the People Sing!*,⁴⁵ is a recollection of his own successful learning process, I will discuss it in some detail below. Cherwien says that out of all the training, learning to improvise a fugue was both the most challenging and the most rewarding.

Currently, Cherwien practices improvisation when he has a program that he's preparing (he plays a special program approximately once or twice per month):

The best thing for me in the past has been what I call "tedium" (not unlike pianists do scales and arpeggios and Hanon exercises). There are similar kinds of things for the improviser at the organ. For example, doing a trio where one hand (the right hand for example) would have the melody of the hymn and the left hand and pedal have to do counterpoint to it. That's pretty complicated and it's just practicing that more and then maybe practicing little fugue intonations or something. Another way is to just take a melody and practice harmonizing it with the right hand soloed out, then with the left hand soloing the melody out, and then having the pedal do the melody, and doing strict four-part harmonizations around those. Those are practicing; they are drills; skill-providing drills.

In his weekly playing at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Cherwien employs improvisation every week. He uses German Baroque forms for hymn introductions and sometimes uses free forms (based more on the twentieth-century French style) for preludes and postludes.

Cherwien: *Let the People Sing!*

Cherwien's manual on improvisation divides into two parts. In both parts, he turns his recollections of his learning experience into exercises for the student. The first half is based on leading congregational hymns (learned from his rock band days and listening to

⁴⁵ David Cherwien, *Let the People Sing!: A Keyboardist's Creative and Practical Guide to Engaging God's People in Meaningful Song* (St Louis: Concordia, 1997).

Manz). The second half lays out the methodology he encountered with Zimmerman. The stated purpose of the book is effective leadership of congregational song. Cherwien's strategy is that the melody and lyrics of a hymn are a given, but everything else is subject to change.

The first chapter of the book, "Be Clear," focuses on breath and tactus in hymn leadership. He instills the importance of clear rhythm, using the acronym DFA (doubt to fear to abstinence). In other words, if there is doubt about where the beat is, or where to breathe, the congregation will fear to participate and will eventually abstain altogether.

Chapter two covers hymn introductions, which can bring out a specific meaning of a text. He gives the example of bringing out "From our fears and sins release us" in the Advent hymn "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus." Cherwien suggests underlining a phrase of the text for emphasis. He gives the following seventeen ways to introduce a hymn, with examples of each (some are full examples, others are incipits):⁴⁶

1. Add voices one at a time
2. Alternate between unison and harmony
3. Mix up the phrases
4. Canon
5. Canon and harmony
6. Melody as a solo without any accompanying harmony
7. Pedal point
8. Ostinato pattern under the melody
9. Fanfare
10. Bicinium
11. Ritornello
12. Solo out the melody over soft stops, then add passing tones and trills to the melody
13. Treat each phrase using *Vorimitation* to introduce each phrase, then treat the melody as in number 12
14. Countermelody as an introduction to the main melody
15. Published literature

⁴⁶ Cherwien, 22-38.

16. “Only a suggestion,” (on a familiar hymn, just a brief intonation that hints at the melody)
17. Toccata

Chapters three through six are not instruction on improvisation, *per se*, but strategies for variety in leadership. These chapters cover organ registration, ways to vary performing forces, strategies for leading hymns on the piano, and insights into hymn selection.

The second half of the book is a method for learning the skillset of improvisation, focusing first on harmony, then on counterpoint. After these skills are mastered, the player can move on to form.

Chapter seven covers harmony. Cherwien leads the student through eleven steps to learning harmonization. For each step, he gives at least one example.⁴⁷

- Step 1: Write out six possible harmonies under a given soprano note
- Step 2: Change one chord in the middle of a hymn
- Step 3: Change two chords; the first is a secondary dominant
- Step 4: Harmonize “Amen” many different ways
- Step 5: Play a hymn from the hymnal, and sing the alto line, then the tenor, then the bass
- Step 6: Harmonize the scale, using a four-voice harmonization

Figure 3.1. Cherwien scale harmonization⁴⁸



- A. Begin with D major, using only I, IV, and V chords
- B. Try more combinations

⁴⁷ Cherwien, 111-132.

⁴⁸ Cherwien, 120.

- C. Use good spacing [examples are given]
- D. Normally double the bass note or root of the chord
- E. Avoid parallel octaves and unisons
- F. Do not move all voices in the same direction

Step 7: Harmonize familiar tunes

Step 8: Harmonize unfamiliar tunes

Step 9: Play the melody with the right hand, the alto and tenor with the left hand

Step 10: Play the melody in the left hand, soprano and alto in the right hand

Step 11: Play the melody in the pedal and harmony in the manuals

Chapter eight covers species counterpoint. He divides it into two-part, three-part, and four-part exercises. Most of the teaching focuses on two- and three-part counterpoint.

The student should keep the same melody while working through all steps.

Table 3.1. Cherwien's two-voice counterpoint combinations⁴⁹

Right Hand	Left Hand	Pedal	Ratio
Melody	CP (Counterpoint)	NA	1:1
CP	Melody	NA	1:1
Melody	CP 8 th Notes	NA	2:1
CP 8 th Notes	Melody	NA	2:1
Melody	CP Triplets	NA	3:1
CP Triplets	Melody	NA	3:1
Melody	CP Sixteenths	NA	4:1
CP Sixteenths	Melody	NA	4:1
Melody	CP	NA	Free
CP	Melody	NA	Free

Cherwien provides five steps for exploring three-part counterpoint (Table 3.2).

For these exercises, the melody stays in the right hand throughout. Cherwien then adds a

⁴⁹ Cherwien, 134-138.

sixth step, which is to mix these up by putting the melody in the left hand. He provides the option of playing these combinations with the melody in the pedal.⁵⁰

Table 3.2. Cherwien’s three-voice counterpoint combinations⁵¹

Right Hand	Left Hand	Pedal	Ratio
Melody	CP 1:1	CP 1:1	1:1
Melody	CP 8 th Notes	CP Quarter Notes	2:1
Melody	CP Triplets	CP Quarter Notes	3:1
Melody	CP Sixteenths	CP Quarter Notes	4:1
Melody	CP Sixteenths	CP 8 th Notes	4:1

For four-voice counterpoint, Cherwien does not list any steps, but gives a written example of what such an improvisation might look like. This page is subtitled “for the experienced.”⁵²

The final chapter, “Harmony and Counterpoint together,” applies counterpoint and melody to various forms. Cherwien supplies ideas for creating two-voice ritornello, trio, countermelody, ABA form, fugal intonation, and toccata.

For two-voice ritornello, his method of finding a countermelody is to create a counter-rhythm first, then supply notes for the rhythm. Cherwien says the student should play the ritornello in the home key at the beginning and the end, change the key of the ritornello in the middle, and keep the chorale melody in the same key throughout.

For trios, he prescribes lightly ornamenting the melody in one hand while the other hand and pedal play free counterpoint.

⁵⁰ In fact, Cherwien did these combinations with melody in the pedal in his training. He has simplified this in his manual to make it somewhat less intimidating for the beginner.

⁵¹ Cherwien, 138-142.

⁵² From his interview, I know that Cherwien had training with four-voice counterpoint, leading up to improvising a full fugue. Cherwien chose not to include a full chapter on fugue in his manual. For comprehensive steps for learning counterpoint and fugue, one could use what is found in the Dupré manual.

Here is Cherwien's formula for ABA form:⁵³

- A. Play in the home key (not the chorale melody)
- B. New key with the chorale melody
- A. Return to the home key and restate the chorale melody

For fugal intonation, Cherwien prescribes the use of imitative entrances in three or four voices. The goal is to create a fugal chorale prelude in which each phrase of the chorale is treated in imitation on the manuals, followed by the full phrase of the chorale in longer note values in the pedal.

The toccata is the French style, which generally consists of a pattern of brilliant figuration in the manuals and melody in the pedal. Cherwien's personal stamp is to change keys on the last note of each phrase.

Figure 3.2. Cherwien's toccata modulation⁵⁴

The figure displays two systems of musical notation for a toccata modulation. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The first system is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The manual part (treble and bass staves) features a complex, rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The pedal part (bass staff) has a simple melody of quarter notes. Annotations include "simply get the pattern going:" above the manual part and "melody in the pedal:" above the pedal part. The second system modulates to A major (two sharps). The manual part continues with the same pattern, but the key signature changes to A major. The pedal part continues with a new melody. Annotations include "The last note of phrase in the pedal is A. simply take the pattern to A—the new key" above the manual part and "pedal proceeds in A major" above the pedal part.

⁵³ Cherwien, 153-155.

⁵⁴ Cherwien, 164.

Jeffrey Brillhart

Interview

Brillhart began piano lessons at the age of four and showed a proclivity for aural skills at a young age. His path to improvisation began with the family's Hammond organ. He recalled, "Growing up as a kid, we had a Hammond, of all things, at home, and I would hear something (on a recording or wherever) and I would just play it. So that was really how it started." This quickly led to an opportunity to put these skills into practice in a public way:

My father owned a roller-skating rink... in the middle of the rink was this Hammond and I, from a very early age (about 7 or 8), would skate out to this crazy Hammond and sit down and all I had to work with was [a fakebook], and I would decide which melodies I would do. It involved figuring out the harmonies and the rhythms and all that, so it was sort of a rudimentary kind of improvisation. I think having that happen at an early age created a sort of fearless quality. At seven or eight you're not afraid of anything, really.

His move to the pipe organ came about as the result of an emergency need:

The transition to pipe organ was sort of hysterical. When I was in the sixth grade, the organist of our little church in Iowa fell ill on Christmas Eve, and the minister knew that I played the organ. He didn't know Hammond vs. Moller (the church had a four rank Moller *Artiste*), and he called my dad and said, "Mrs. Maple is sick, could Jeff play the Christmas Eve service?" And my father said, "Sure!" He didn't ask me. I was in sixth grade [and] I wasn't in the least afraid of that. But I had never played a pipe organ before... But I was certainly, to be honest, blown away by the sound, even on a four-rank Moller, which we all make fun of now. But over the following months, I found this faded copy of the John Stainer organ method, like from 1911... And I took it home with me and I read it and then just started doing exercises that were in the book, and basically, taught myself how to play the pipe organ.

Concurrently, he had a gig playing in a restaurant. He said, "I started studying jazz piano when I was in middle school and then got a job at a restaurant bar (in middle

school of all things) and my parents would drive me to this gig three nights a week and I would go out and sit down at the piano and play lounge music.”

When he was in the seventh grade, Brillhart began serious organ studies with Frank Jordan of Drake University. His collegiate training included four years of music theory. In the graduate program at the Eastman School of Music, composition studies aided his improvisation:

For me what was far more helpful was composition class. I loved that. That was much more of a connection to improvisation than a theory class ever was. Particularly in the areas of formal structure and how you organize music. [There was] an immediate, direct correlation between composition studies and that.

In 1993, Brillhart took a sabbatical and traveled to Paris to study improvisation with Olivier Latry, *Organiste Titulaire* of Notre Dame Cathedral. Latry, in turn, recommended study with Philippe Lefebvre. Study with Lefebvre was most fruitful for Brillhart, who later took what he learned in these lessons and wrote it down in his book, *Breaking Free*:

I studied improvisation with Olivier Latry on my first sabbatical in 1993, which was great, but while I was studying with him, he connected me with his colleague Philippe for a one-week immersion in improvisation in the south of France. And so, for seven days in Toulouse we did nothing but eat, drink, and sleep improvisation. We started at nine in the morning and at ten o'clock at night we were still improvising. Without any question, that was the most impactful week of my life for improvisation and Philippe has continued to be an incredible inspiration, without question. And Philippe...the most important thing I learned from him was...he would take the improvisation student wherever they were and without any judgment or any negativity whatsoever... and in the most positive and supportive way move them immediately to a different level. And when I got to Philippe I was at a point in my sabbatical where I was feeling rather frustrated by it all. Frankly, I had more days when I thought, “I’m not getting anywhere” than days that I thought, “wow, I’m making a lot of progress here.” And the first session I had with Phillippe was immediately validating and immediately it was like everything was unleashed. It was really incredible. And so, I’ve tried to take what I’ve learned about his approach to teaching and use it in my own.

The most difficult aspect of this learning process for Brillhart was assimilating the musical vocabulary of the French school:

Assimilating Messiaen's modes was initially kind of a nightmare. Once I assimilated them, it was just exhilarating completely and opened up a whole world of harmony that I had dreamed of being able to do because I would hear recordings of people like Pierre Cochereau and also Langlais and others improvising and think, "Oh, if I could only...I would love to make those sounds." But I just couldn't...replicate what it was they were doing. It wasn't until I'd assimilated Messiaen's modes that I was like, "There it is!" For me, the challenge was assimilating it, which is why I spent so much time thinking through exercises that could help others assimilate it. For me, I learned them from Olivier [Latry], but with Olivier, he simply would play.... My very first lesson with him, he played a progression of the second mode of Messiaen's and said, "Ok, learn that, and for the next time, we'll do that." Well, I wasn't even sure what "that" was, and he didn't write it down, he simply played it and said, "Ok, this is what you will do." I, fortunately, recorded all this, and then I would go back to my apartment and transcribe it. So, I finally said, "Ah, well that's what he's doing." Notating it was helpful, but then getting it into your hands and into the transpositions.... I thought I was going to lose my mind. I was in Paris for six months. [assimilating the harmonic language] took two months. And that was with the luxury of practicing every single day, all the time.

Brillhart continues to practice his improvisation skills. When asked how often he practices these skills, he responded, "Every time I go to the organ. Every single time. Every time." He described a couple of "warm-ups" that he uses with his students at every lesson:

1. "Drop Your Hands." Whatever harmony your hands land on is the parameter for what you are about to create.
2. "Open Up the Hymnal." Whatever hymn you open to ("no matter how terrible") must serve as the basis of an improvisation. About this item, Brillhart emphasized its practical use:

Ideally, when you're improvising in public, you're given a wonderful theme. You have a wonderful organ, a wonderful theme, a wonderful ambience and everything is just great. But, more often than not, the themes that are given to

you when you improvise on the spot are not so good. I think it's helpful to force yourself to take bad material and turn it into something good.

3. Bitonal whole-tone scale. One hand is in the C position of the whole-tone scale and the other hand is in the C# position of the whole-tone scale.
4. Anything contrapuntal. This could include improvising a fugue on the head of a hymn tune.

Brillhart: *Breaking Free*⁵⁵

As mentioned above, Brillhart wrote his book *Breaking Free* to document his learning experience in France in 1993. Above all, this was a matter of assimilating the French harmonic tradition. Most of the chapters in the book include rudimentary exercises to be played in every major and minor key. Once the basic element is assimilated, he provides more ideas and applications. He does not prescribe strict forms or phrase-lengths. Rather, the purpose of the book is to encourage the organist to explore. He quotes Lefebvre as saying, “Jeffrey, *il faut chercher* (one must search).” This is the motto of the book.

Chapter one is entitled “What is Improvisation?” Brillhart discusses improvisation as “composition-in-performance” and claims that anyone can learn to improvise to some extent. Since he draws from the French tradition, he also names organists from that tradition, encouraging the student to explore the repertoire. In the second chapter, Brillhart gives practice tips. Chapter three teaches the student to analyze a theme. This is done by answering the following questions:⁵⁶

1. Where is the summit?
2. Where is the resting point?

⁵⁵ Jeffrey Brillhart, *Breaking Free: Finding a Personal Language for Organ Improvisation through 20th-century French Improvisation Techniques* (Colfax, North Carolina: Wayne Leupold Editions, 2011).

⁵⁶ Brillhart, 9.

3. What keys or modes are suggested?
4. What is the most expressive musical gesture?
5. Does the theme suggest a particular mood?
6. Is there an interesting pitch or collection of pitches that might be developed in the improvisation?
7. Is there an interesting rhythmic gesture that might be developed?

With the fourth chapter, “Developing the Theme,” Brillhart gives the student playing exercises for the first time. The first assignment is to find ways to ornament a major second. The next step is to ornament intervals starting with a second and moving outward. After this, Brillhart provides ten ways to vary a melody. These include repetition, melodic variation, rhythmic variation, change of meter, call-and-response, elimination, interversion of pitches, change of register, changing major to minor and minor to major, and changing tonal to modal.⁵⁷

Chapter five is entitled “The Exposition.” Brillhart shows a four-bar antecedent phrase by César Franck. He then asks the student to find the summit, resting point, suggested keys, predominant pitches, rhythmic gestures, most expressive gesture, and mood. With these questions answered, the assignment is to improvise four-bar consequent phrases. Expositions will have “A” and “B” material. These will sound like “foreground” and “background,” respectively. He gives four practical hints:⁵⁸

1. With a more complex theme, the accompaniment should be less complex
2. With a rhythmically active theme, the pace of harmonic changes should be slower
3. With a rhythmically active theme, playing in unison or at the octave can be an attractive option
4. The antecedent will generally end on the dominant, in preparation for the consequent.

⁵⁷ Brillhart, 11-12.

⁵⁸ Brillhart, 14.

Part II of the book begins the process of assimilating the musical language of the French organ school. This section of the book is systematic. Each chapter provides examples from the repertoire. These are followed by the key exercises, which are reproduced below. Finally, Brillhart gives ideas for searching out new possibilities.

Table 3.4. *Breaking Free* Part II summary⁵⁹

Chapter	Harmony	Examples
6	Perfect Fifths	Vierne: <i>Berceuse</i> and Langlais: “Nazard” from <i>Suite Française</i>
7	Pentatonic	No example given
8	Perfect Fourths	Dupré: “ <i>Le Monde dans l’attente du Sauveur</i> ”
9	Major Seconds	No example given
10	Major and Minor Thirds	mm. 67-70 of Vierne: “Finale” from <i>Symphonie I</i>
11	Major and Minor Sixths	Vierne: “Prélude” from <i>Symphonie I</i> and Alain: <i>Scherzo</i>
12	6/3’s, 6/4’s, and 6/5’s	Opening of Alain: <i>Petite Pièce</i>
13	Harmonizing a Motive	Combines previous chapters
14	Sevenths	No example given
15	Dominant Sevenths	No example given

The following are the assimilation exercises from Part II. Except where noted, they are to be played in all major and minor keys:

⁵⁹ Brillhart, 16-58.

Figure 3.3. Perfect fifths⁶⁰

Figure 3.3 consists of six piano accompaniment exercises, each with a treble and bass staff. The exercises are arranged in three rows of two. The first row shows two exercises in C major, with the first exercise having a bass line of whole notes and the second having a bass line of quarter notes. The second row shows two exercises in C major, with the first having a bass line of quarter notes and the second having a bass line of quarter notes with a flat. The third row shows two exercises in C major, with the first having a bass line of quarter notes and the second having a bass line of quarter notes with a flat. The exercises demonstrate various voicings and progressions of perfect fifth chords.

Figure 3.4. Perfect fourths⁶¹

Figure 3.4 consists of two piano accompaniment exercises, each with a treble and bass staff. The first exercise has a treble staff with a sequence of chords and a bass staff with a sequence of chords. The second exercise has a treble staff with a sequence of chords and a bass staff with a sequence of chords. The exercises demonstrate various voicings and progressions of perfect fourth chords.

Practice this in all major keys and in both hands.

Now play these three-note chords as arpeggios, practicing this in all major keys and in both hands:

Example 8-10

Example 8-10 is a single piano accompaniment exercise in C major, showing a sequence of three-note chords arpeggiated in the treble staff. The exercise consists of six measures, each with a triplet of eighth notes. The chords are: C major (C-E-G), and C major (C-E-G).

⁶⁰ Brillhart, 16-17.

⁶¹ Brillhart, 26.

Figure 3.5. Thirds (no transposition assigned)⁶²



Now doubled with a major third:

Example 10-3



A minor third:

Example 10-4



Alternating major and minor thirds:

Example 10-5



Alternating minor and major thirds:

Example 10-6



Figure 3.6. $\frac{6}{3}$, $\frac{6}{4}$, and $\frac{6}{5}$ chords (the instruction is simply “transpose”)⁶³

$\frac{6}{3}$ – Major



$\frac{6}{3}$ – Minor



$\frac{6}{4}$



$\frac{6}{5}$



In each chapter, Brillhart provides a series of assignments to explore the use of the basic skill. For example, these are the assignments from chapter six, “Perfect Fifths”:⁶⁴

1. Add fifths below the hymn tune EIN FESTE BURG
2. Add a pedal point to the same tune
3. Transpose to D major
4. Play the melody in the right hand, harmonizing in fifths and moving in half notes in the left hand
5. Use rhythmic variation to create a scherzo
6. Play with fifths in both hands
7. Play fifths in both hands with ornamented melody in the pedal

⁶² Brillhart, 40.

⁶³ Brillhart, 45.

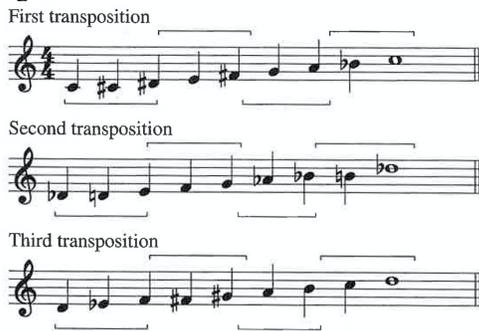
⁶⁴ Brillhart, 15-21.

8. Change the meter and modify the harmonization by adding passing eighth notes

The learning pattern is clear here: internalization through methodical repetition, followed by exploration. Brillhart gives written examples of the assignments. Some are complete examples, and some are the beginning of pieces to be continued by the student.

Part IV covers Olivier Messiaen's modes and how they can be used in improvisation. After an introductory chapter on Messiaen, chapter 22 teaches his second mode of limited transposition, the octatonic scale:⁶⁵

Figure 3.7. Messiaen's second mode of limited transposition⁶⁶



Messiaen gives us this base chord for the mode:

Example 22-2



⁶⁵ The first mode is the whole-tone scale, which was not commonly used by Messiaen. The second mode alternates whole steps and half steps. The third mode alternates one whole step with two half steps. *Breaking Free* only utilizes modes 2 and 3. For all seven modes, see Appendix A.

⁶⁶ Brillhart, 73.

In analyzing the second mode, Brillhart says that one can think of each transposition as two superimposed diminished seventh chords. There are no augmented triads or major seventh chords, but all other chord types can be found. There are also no V-I progressions. This gives the major-minor seventh chord a completely different color and role. If one stays in the mode, there are no wrong notes.

Exercises:⁶⁷

1. First transposition, L.H. ostinato and R.H. melody
2. Repeat #1 with second and third transpositions
3. Turn this idea into an “allegro” selection by switching the L.H. and R.H. roles to create a contrasting section
4. Experiment with rhythmic variation
5. Experiment with elimination
6. Experiment with pitch inversion
7. Experiment with interversion of pitch
8. Experiment with change of register
9. Practice progressions
 - A. Minor thirds
 - B. Alternating perfect fourths with major thirds
 - C. Alternating minor sixths with perfect fifths
 - D. Alternating $\frac{5}{3}$ and $\frac{3}{2}$ chords
 - E. Alternating major $\frac{6}{3}$ and minor $\frac{5}{3}$ chords
 - F. Alternating minor $\frac{6}{4}$ and major $\frac{5}{3}$ chords
10. Use these progressions in the L.H. while the R.H. has the melody (optional pedal)
11. Play the #9 progressions in the L.H; the pedal has a slow melody
12. Same as #10, but create the R.H. melody mostly out of minor thirds

The following chord progression is important in Messiaens’ *La Nativité* and *Livre du Saint Sacrement*:

⁶⁷ Brillhart, 74-79.

Figure 3.8. Progression used in Messiaen's *La Nativité*⁶⁸

First transposition



Second transposition



Third transposition



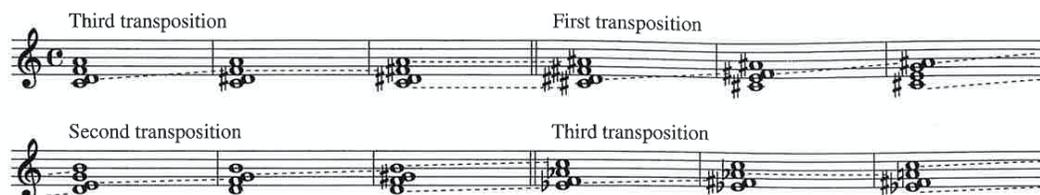
Exercises:⁶⁹

1. L.H. plays chords from the progression with top note omitted. R.H. melody. Add pedals from the mode. The melody should include the omitted tone
2. R.H. plays the progression, omit the lowest tone. L.H. or pedal plays a melody that includes the omitted tone
3. Play the progression in one hand and play chords strictly from the mode in the other hand
4. Combine the mode with the circle of fifths. Each time the bass line moves, the transposition of the mode will change

The mode can be used as a transposition technique to move between more stable church modes. This concept can be used with the circle of fifths.

Another colorful technique is the “Cochereau Rise.” This is a four-voice chord (in his examples, a minor seventh in third inversion). The inner voices move up by step, then the outer voices move up by step:

Figure 3.9. The “Cochereau Rise”

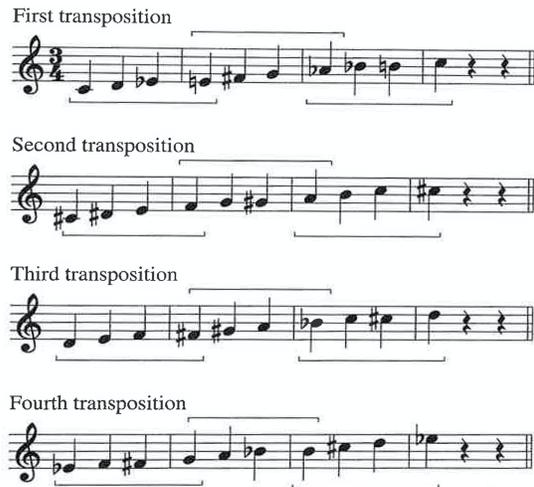


⁶⁸ Brillhart, 80.

⁶⁹ Brillhart, 80-84.

Chapter 23 discusses the third mode of limited transposition. The methodology is the same as in chapter 22.

Figure 3.10. Messiaen's third mode of limited transposition⁷⁰



After assimilating the harmonic language of Messiaen, one is ready to move forward to the study of form. This is Part V of the book. Here one finds chapters on the development, climax chords, passacaglia, song form, Louis Vierne's improvisation structure, scherzo, sonata allegro, toccata (prelude), Pierre Cochereau's style variations, free improvisation, and improvising on a literary text. While these chapters are worthwhile, they break from the pattern of exercises to be internalized and ideas to explore. As such they are not directly related to Brillhart's learning experience in France. They do present general structural outlines for improvisation; they do not prescribe a set number of measures or key areas for different structural units. Chapter 33, "Cochereau Style Variations," will be discussed in connection with Todd Wilson's learning path.

⁷⁰ Brillhart, 87.

Todd Wilson

Interview

Wilson started piano lessons in the fourth grade and organ study in high school. He recalled, “[the teacher] was very exacting in every way and showed me how to work to a really high standard in everything that you do music-wise, from page one, which I’ve always been so grateful to him for.” Once Wilson achieved basic competency in piano and knew key signatures and scales, he was allowed to begin study on the organ. His first training in improvisation came via transposition of Bach chorales:

[Wilson’s teacher] gave me this book of Bach chorales and would have me transpose. He would give it to me up a half step this week, down a half step next week, whole step this week, down a whole step the next week. And then he would ask me to...make up little modulations going from the original key to the new key. And we talked about what might be in those modulations and what kind of chords, what kind of accidentals, and how do you think about it. That’s the first that I can remember improvising in a really simple, functional way. It was just making up little passages to get from whatever the original key of that chorale was to the key I was transposing it to and make it sound not too bumpy, so that it got there in a logical way.

He practiced these functional modulations, and he heard improvisations in the church service as well:

... the organist at that church would improvise interludes into the doxology... often using a little motive from whatever our choir anthem had been just before. And it always interested me because I could tell he was making it up and that he would take the mood and material from whatever we’d sung and work into G major and build up and it was kind of a big thing and I thought, “well, that’s cool.”

When he was in high school, Wilson spent two summers in a program at the Cincinnati Conservatory. At this time, Gerre Hancock was organist at Christ Church,

Cincinnati. At the urging of his organ teacher from back home, Wilson went to hear

Hancock play on a Sunday:

I remember going down there and I went about five Sundays in a row...I can still remember where I sat and everything because it made such a big impression on me. I'd never heard service playing or improvising quite like that and I just thought, "man, if I could be 1/8th as good as that." ... that really lit a fire for improvising for me. From then on, I just tried to hear people improvise every time I could.

After his formal studies, Wilson's main method of learning has been to listen to model improvisers and try to imitate their craft. He specifically mentioned Hancock, Cochereau, and Jean Langlais:

I listened to Gerre a lot and recorded things and then when I was in France, I certainly had a chance to hear Cochereau a lot and Langlais and all those people improvise, and so I tried to soak that up. I took some lessons with Gerre on and off over a period of many years, never as a regular thing, but over a period of probably a decade or so. And when I was in France, I took a few lessons with Cochereau, who was very nice of him to offer to do that. Aside from that it's just always been listening to people and trying to develop my own little vocabulary.

Wilson also spent some time with method books by Hancock and Dupré. He credits Hancock as his "number one" inspiration and teacher. He worked through sections of Dupré's book "very, very slowly."

In his position at the Cleveland Institute, Wilson teaches a course on organ improvisation. Preparing for the class is one of the ways that he practices improvisation today. For this course, he uses the manual by Jan Overduin. He also improvises service music at Trinity Cathedral on a weekly basis. He described his approach to practice:

I do think it's just like repertoire, you have to practice it and you have to have some self-discipline with it. A lot of it I do in terms of teaching. Teaching improvisation keeps me sharper at it and keeps me doing a lot of the things we all need to do to be sharper at it. Every other year I teach an improvisation/service

playing class...I have them do a lot of different basic skills and I always do those same skills myself so I can be along with them and hopefully set some little examples and show them how it might be done. In our first semester we work up to improvising a little partita on a tune with an original harmonization, a bicinium, sometimes a trio, sometimes a variation in the minor, a concluding sort of toccata, a more brilliant thing, and an ornamented variation (usually an ornamented chorale). And I work on those things myself, which is always time well-spent, even if it's just five minutes a day so you can keep your bicinium skills not sounding too bad.

Listening and mimicking were, for Wilson, the primary tools of learning improvisation. He names Pierre Cochereau as a primary model. The lists below characterize Cochereau's improvisations in a general sense and specifically in terms of variations:⁷¹

General characteristics:

1. Rhythmic drive
2. Dissonance is often derived from the use of Messiaen's second mode of limited transposition
3. Symphonic approach to orchestration, with unique registrations, especially in his use of mutations and short-length reeds
4. Density of musical texture, achieved in part by complex poly-rhythms
5. Wonderful control of climax
6. Unexpected harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic moments

Characteristics of Cochereau's improvised variations:

1. Mode change (minor to major, major or minor to ecclesiastical mode, introduction of Mode 2 or Mode 3)
2. Change of meter
3. Thematic ornamentation and alteration
4. Omission of theme [i.e., a variation that is built on the harmonic support of the theme]
5. Ostinatos in the pedal, as well as in the hands
6. Canons
7. Pedal points
8. Theme is not ALWAYS in the right hand
9. Counterpoint
10. Not always using the entire theme

⁷¹ This is found in Brillhart, 117.

Unlike Brillhart and Cherwien, Wilson did not write a manual to capture his personal learning experience. He credits manuals by Hancock and Dupré with helping him learn. I will now discuss these manuals, although to a lesser degree than the autobiographical manuals by the first two subjects of this study.

Hancock: *Improvising: How to Master the Art*⁷²

Hancock published his book in 1994. The book is not intended to be a complete, comprehensive course in improvisation (for that, Hancock refers the reader to Dupré): rather, Hancock's book is intended as an "informal workbook."⁷³ He includes two axioms that are often quoted in the organ world. The first is to "never stop" and the second is "salvation is never more than half a step away."⁷⁴ The improviser will inevitably make mistakes. Hancock encourages the player to incorporate the mistake into the improvisation so that it sounds intentional. On the second hearing, the player can resolve the mistake in a satisfactory manner.

Hancock's manual, more than the others I have examined, recommends writing before playing. Hancock states its importance for practice this way: "As always, the intellect guides the performer; writing before playing is the secret of all improvising. If your ideas are meticulously organized and your practice procedures carefully followed, your improvising will be convincing and compelling."⁷⁵ His overall approach is three-fold. First, the student should analyze the form of a model piece. Second, the student

⁷² Gerre Hancock, *Improvising: How to Master the Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁷³ Hancock, vii.

⁷⁴ Hancock, ix.

⁷⁵ Hancock, 148.

should write an adaptation in both musical and non-musical outlines. The third step is to practice on the keyboard what the student has written out.

Each chapter contains several “exercises” at the beginning and “recommendations” at the end. The exercises and recommendations for the first two chapters are given here to give the reader an idea of the methodology.

Chapter 1: “The Scale”⁷⁶

Exercises:

1. Create a melody utilizing the scale exclusively (one voice)
2. Create a melody utilizing the scale exclusively and add a second voice
3. Add a third voice
4. Add a fourth voice

Recommendations:

1. Write out your examples away from the keyboard
2. Play the first half of each example, then improvise a second half
3. Count beats and measures out loud while you play
4. Experiment with different time signatures
5. Practice the exercises of chapter one in a different key each week

Chapter 2: “The Phrase”⁷⁷

Exercises:

1. Create phrases by improvising answers to the questions provided in the chapter
2. Answer the given two-voice questions
3. Answer the given three-voice questions
4. Answer the given four-voice questions

Recommendations:

1. Write out your answers
2. Write out your own questions and answers
3. Try practicing in thirds, then parallel fourths and fifths, then parallel seconds and sevenths. Try them in combinations. *Slow practice is recommended.*
4. Practice answers to each question in this section in the relative major or minor
5. Carefully control the voice ranges
6. Count aloud
7. Practice a familiar song in each church mode

⁷⁶ Hancock, 1-20.

⁷⁷ Hancock, 21-34.

8. Combine this chapter with chapter one to develop facility in all keys concurrently
9. Practicing phrases will help the student develop interludes

One can already see the importance of writing out answers and counting measures aloud while playing. The counting helps the player control form, which comes into play in later chapters. From here, chapter headings and a few explanatory notes should provide a sufficient idea of the method:

Chapter 3: The Interlude

Chapter 4: The Hymn [This chapter includes various ways of modifying an existing hymn accompaniment by adding non-chord tones and exchanging voice parts]

Chapter 5: The Ornamented Hymn [By “Ornamented Hymn,” Hancock means a piece in which the hymn tune appears note-by-note from beginning to end. The tune is “ornamented” by the other voices.]

Chapter 6: The Chorale Prelude

Chapter 7: Song Form

Chapter 8: The Sonata Form.

Chapter 9: The Toccata

Chapter 10: The Canon

Chapter 11: The Duo and Trio. The form for these pieces derives from Bach’s two-part inventions.

Chapter 12: The Fugue. The fugal chapter, like the Sonata Form chapter, includes a model form to which the student should add written examples.

Chapter 8 includes the following template:

Figure 3.11. Hancock sonata form template⁷⁸

Section	Element	Key	Number of voices	Number of measures	Measures
1. Exposition	Introduction	I	3	4	1–4
	Theme 1	I	4	12	5–16
	Transition	I → V	2	4	17–20
	Theme 2	V	3	<u>9</u>	21–29
				29	
2. Development	Theme 1	V	3	4	30–33
	Bridge/Transition	V → II	2	2	34–35
	Theme 2	II	3	4	36–39
	Bridge/Transition	II → IV	2	2	40–41
	Theme 1 (inverted)	IV	4	4	42–45
	Bridge/Transition	IV → III	2	2	46–47
	Themes 1 and 2 combined	III	4	4	48–51
	Bridge/Transition (sequential)	III → V	3	<u>4</u>	52–55
				26	
3. Recapitulation	Theme 1	I	4	8	56–63
	Bridge/Transition	V	2 (or 3)	2	64–65
	Theme 2	I	3 (or 4)	6	66–71
	Coda	I → VI → IV → V → I	4	<u>4</u>	72–75
				20	
			Grand total:	75	

To use the above outline, the student is to write the themes first, then the bridge material. The next step is to add more musical examples to this non-musical outline. The final step is to improvise the entire piece.

Dupré: Cours Complet d'Improvisation à l'Orgue

Wilson said that working through some of Dupré's treatise "very slowly" was part of his learning process. Hancock claims that Dupré's book "cannot be too highly

⁷⁸ Hancock, 116.

praised.”⁷⁹ Cherwien said of this book in his interview, “I can imagine if somebody were to go through and do all the steps that Dupré outlined, with all the melodies he prints there...you would be able to do anything.” The two volumes are indeed very methodical and detailed. The first volume to be written, Dupré’s treatise on improvisation, is now called “Volume 2.” In 1937, Dupré published a volume of preparatory exercises, now called “Volume 1.”

As with the manual by Hancock, my intent here is not to summarize Dupré’s Volume 2 in full. Although it is universally praised, none of the four interviewees for this study used this method in a complete fashion or as their primary aid in learning.

Lessons in the preparatory course (Volume 1) teach the student how to harmonize a scale and a melody, to modulate, and to form units within a larger form. The lesson plans are as follows:

1. Harmonization of the Scale
2. Given Melodies and Harmonized Chorales
3. The Antecedent and Consequent
4. The Modulating Consequent
5. The Commentary
6. Parenthetical Sections
7. The Binary Exposition
8. The Placement and Order of Voice Parts
9. The Modulating Bridge
10. The Development – First Part
11. Lyrical Part of the Development and Preparation for the Re-Entry
12. The General Plan

To demonstrate the complete and methodical nature of this book, the examples and assignments of Lesson 1 are summarized below:

Lesson 1: The Harmonization of Scales

⁷⁹ Hancock, vii.

1. The scale is harmonized in soprano, pedal, and tenor, given the models below. These are to be transposed to every major and minor key
2. The only voice-leading rule given is to move the pedal in contrary motion with the given scale
3. The six-four chord will only be used on the first and fifth scale degrees

Figure 3.12. Dupré's scale harmonizations⁸⁰

Mode majeur
Major Scales

Degrés
Degrees

I V I IV I VI V I V VI I IV I V I

Mode mineur
harmonique
*Harmonic
Minor Scales*

Degrés
Degrees

I V I IV I VI V I V VI I IV I V I

Mode majeur
Major Scales

Chiffre
Chord positions

Degrés
Degrees

6 6/4 5 3 6/4 5 6 5 5 5 6/4 6 5 6/4 6

I V I IV I IV VII I III IV I IV I V I

Mode mineur
mélodique
*Melodic Minor
Scales*

Chiffre
Chord position

Degrés
Degrees

6 #6/4 5 6 6/4 5 #6 5 b5 5 6/4 6 5 #6/4 6

I V I IV I IV VII I III IV I IV I V I

⁸⁰ Dupré, 1-3.

Mode majeur
Major Scales

Chiffre
Chord positions

Degrés
Degrees

5 6 6 5 6 6 5 6 6 6 5 6 6 5

I V I IV I IV V I V IV I IV I V I

Mode mineur
mélodique
Melodic Minor Scales

Chiffre
Chord positions

Degrés
Degrees

5 #6 6 5 6 6 6 5 6 6 6 5 6 #6 5

I V I V I IV V I V V I V I V I

Mode majeur
Major Scales

Chiffre
Chord positions

Degrés
Degrees

6 6 5 6 6 5 6 3 6 5 6 6 5 6

I V I IV I IV VII I VII IV I IV I V I

Mode mineur
mélodique
Melodic Minor Scales

Chiffre
Chord positions

Degrés
Degrees

6 #6 5 6 6 5 #6 3 6 5 6 6 5 #6 6

I V I IV I IV VII I VII IV I IV I V I

The student learns from the first lesson to move the soprano and bass lines in contrary motion. The preparatory course does not require the student to track all four

voices in strict counterpoint. This comes with the chapter on counterpoint in the second volume.

The second chapter of Volume 1 contains pages of material for harmonization, all in half-notes. Here are Dupré's instructions:⁸¹

Harmonize in the Soprano, then in the Pedal, and finally in the Tenor, the following given melodies, using perfect chords [root position] and chords of the Sixth, attempting to avoid Six-Four chords.

He also includes a note that the melodies "may be transposed."

All the lessons that follow are similarly detailed and rigorous. Using the basic harmonization skills of the first lesson, lessons three through twelve slowly build the skills needed to play an exposition and development. Dupré gives outlines for the forms, and the exact number of measures for each phrase and sub-section. In Chapter 7, he includes this outline for a binary exposition:

⁸¹ Dupré, *Preparatory Exercises*, 4.

exposition, bridge, development, and return. All this is what he considered to be “preparatory” for Volume 2, which is his improvisation treatise.

The second volume, or *Traité d’Improvisation à l’orgue*, begins with three introductory chapters. These chapters do not contain exercises, but discuss prerequisite piano and organ technique, natural harmony, and the nature of thematic material. The chapter on natural harmony covers the harmonic series, tertian chords, modulations, and resolutions of “polytonal aggregations.”

Chapter four, “Counterpoint and Chorale,” contains a very thorough treatment of chorale harmonization and counterpoint exercises. Unlike in the preparatory course, the student is now required to strictly follow voice-leading rules. The skills taught here are the principal skills for all that follows in the treatise. This is also the most thorough teaching for improvised counterpoint that I have found in written form. The following are Dupré’s rules and procedures for harmonizing a melody with proper voice-leading. All combinations use a 1:1 ratio:

Table 3.5. Dupré’s combinations for harmonizing a chorale⁸³

Voices	Right Hand	Left Hand	Pedal
2	Melody	CP (Counterpoint)	NA
3	Melody	CP	CP
3	CP	CP	Melody in Bass Range
3	CP	Melody	CP
3	CP	Bass	Melody in Tenor Range
4	Melody and Alto	(Alto) and Tenor	Bass
4	Soprano and Alto	Melody	Bass
4	CP	CP	Melody in Bass Range
4	Soprano and Alto	Bass	Melody in Tenor Range

Voice-leading rules to follow for three voices:⁸⁴

⁸³ Dupré, 48-49.

⁸⁴ Dupré, 48-49.

1. Use only consonant chords with three notes
2. Never sound two consecutive fifths or octaves in the same voice, either by parallel or contrary motion
3. Do not repeat the same note in the same voice more than once
4. Avoid melodic intervals larger than a major sixth (except the octave) as well as augmented and diminished intervals
5. Do not arrive on a fifth or an octave by parallel motion between outside parts except when the soprano moves stepwise
6. Resolve the leading tone to the tonic, except when the bass moves from the fifth scale degree to the sixth
7. Do not use the fourth and sixth (relations between the parts) except for cadences
8. Do not employ voice crossings or unisons
9. Avoid the diminished chord in root position

Rule changes for four voices:⁸⁵

1. Dominant seventh chords and their inversions may be employed resolving the seventh
2. A note may be repeated twice in the same voice, but not to excess
3. Unisons are permitted, especially on the weak beats

For counterpoint training, Dupré supplies major- and minor-key melodies (all are twelve measures in length). They are to be practiced in three voices in the combinations shown in Table 3.5. The given melody is in whole notes.

Table 3.6. Dupré's combinations for three-voice counterpoint⁸⁶

Right Hand	Left Hand	Pedal
Melody	CP 2:1	CP 1:1
Melody	CP 1:1	CP 2:1
CP 2:1	CP 1:1	Melody
CP 1:1	CP 2:1	Melody
CP 2:1	Melody	CP 1:1
CP 1:1	Melody	CP 2:1

When completed, the student should do the above counterpoint exercises again, substituting 3:1 for the 2:1 ratios.

⁸⁵ Dupré, 48-49.

⁸⁶ Dupré, 50-52.

Dupré gives examples of canons to be played first at the octave, then at the fifth. This is to be done first in two voices in all combinations of hands and feet. After this, the student is to practice three-voice canons in six combinations, with two voices performing the canon and one voice a free counterpoint. The next step is to transpose canons, and after that to write canons in invertible counterpoint. The final step in canons is to improvise them in three voices with the following species: 1:1, 2:1, 3:1.

After this extensive training in counterpoint, the different forms of the chorale may be explored. Working through these exercises “very slowly” (as Wilson says he did) can aid in the ability to improvise in complex, contrapuntal forms.

The complete list of lessons from Volume 2 is as follows:

1. Organ Technique
2. Natural Harmony
3. Theme
4. Counterpoint and Chorale
5. The Suite
6. Fugue
7. The Variation – The Tryptique
8. The Four Symphonic Forms
9. Free Forms
10. Appendix [on the use of improvisation in the Roman Catholic Mass]

Paul Soulek

Interview

Paul Soulek’s path is unique among the interviewees in that his musical education was almost entirely aural and self-directed until college. He began to play the organ at the age of four and was able to pick out a melody from the first time he sat down to play.

Here he described the first time he played the organ:

There was an organ that got left on after the Christmas Eve service and it had light-up stop tabs...The soft glow of the green, red, and amber stop tabs spoke to me, and so I went up and I started playing... it was a couple little melodies of Christmas hymns, and I was just kind of poking around and it sounded like fun.

He developed a repertoire by reproducing the records of Manz; he recalled that the Manz records were on at home from a very early age. This talent led to playing organ or piano for church services, school plays, and other community events, always by ear. He remembered that “as I grew up people thought it was exactly like whatever [the songs] were, but I wasn’t able to hear and replicate that exactly, so I always just had to make something up that kind of sounded like it.”

His only formal training in music before college was a one-semester theory class in high school. For him, learning music theory was naming what he already sensed:

... for me it was associating a term with muscle memory. For me, everything kind of boils down to that muscle memory category, so when I look at a page and I see a chord that’s a C major chord, I just feel that, and that’s how I feel the improvisation thing, so music theory came in a backwards way in that sense.

A systematic training in music theory in college then led to the ability to play four-part harmonizations while following voice-leading rules:

[My undergraduate theory teacher] was amazing. His method of very highly structured, formulaic stuff really worked for me. So, once I got that part, that was really easy. For some reason, out of all that structure, I can play a four-part hymn harmonization [improvise one] using the right voice-leading and the right doublings.

For Soulek, this connects directly to muscle memory. He described his learning process by saying, “For me, I play it this way because that’s what sounds right. You

found out, ‘to get from here to here I need to do this thing with these fingers.’ And for some reason that lined up in my brain.”

Until, recently, however, Soulek still had no formal training in improvisation. He recalled, “For me, I needed to learn technique, I needed to learn repertoire. So, I had really good teachers in the sense that they were always doing things and people that would encourage me to experiment with things.”

Listening to other organists was how he expanded his improvisation technique:

I listened a lot. Mostly I just liked finding out what Michael Burkhardt was doing, or Cherwien or Manz or... that school and style was always appealing to me. I just listened to whatever I could of their stuff.

Since his undergraduate days, Soulek has learned through imitating composed pieces, including some composers from the traditional organ repertoire:

I really enjoy the little Pachelbel chorale preludes and J.C. Bach. Those are the things that really taught me more of an imitative, light counterpoint. I’m not doing any Art of the Fugue, but useful chorale things. So, a lot of those good Baroque things were very formative in what I now do in improvisation.

He claims that teaching improvisation is itself the best teacher. The other great teacher is playing for services:

Right now, I’ve got a student that’s really good with [improvising] and creative thinking, and so we’re using Cherwien’s book, *Let the People Sing!* and doing the “Getting Beyond the Page.” ... In lessons, when they ask a question, being put on the spot and having that fun adrenaline rush of, “how can I make this work?” And then when it *does*, that is the best way that I practice...I play a lot of services, and I don’t know if something will work unless I try it. I’m much more cautious, of course, in a service, to try something different, but I try to just take the opportunity to go and do it.

In recent years, he has studied improvisation with Cherwien, who has encouraged him to use the repertoire as a basis for expanding his improvisation technique.

Unlike the other interviewees, Soulek neither credits a written manual with aiding him in the learning process nor has he written a book to recall his learning. This would be very difficult in his case because most of the learning came through purely aural skills.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS

Table 4.1. Learning path (combined from all interviewees)

Learning Pathways	
Part I	Foundational Skills
Aural Skills	Mimic recordings
	Reproduce extant recordings
	Play known melodies by ear
	Play from fake books
	Play jazz
	Transposition
	Improvise bridges (modulating transitions)
	Experiment (“make it up as you go”)
	Harmonize melodies
Keyboard Skills	Piano proficiency
	Organ technique
Part II	Advanced Skills: Counterpoint and Form
	Harmonization
	Voice-leading
	Counterpoint and fugue
	Form
	Advanced harmonic language
	Integration of repertoire

The foundational skills were all learned at high school age or younger, although some of these skills continue to develop during a career. For David Cherwien, Paul Soulek, and Jeffrey Brillhart, the ability to play by ear, reproducing extant recordings and songs, came naturally and did not require intentional skills acquisition. At the same time, they put their natural gift into practice and developed these foundational skills to a

significant degree before the Phase II training began. Todd Wilson's path is somewhat different, since he first came to improvisation through score-reading and not through playing by ear. However, his training in transposition and modulation moved him beyond the written score early in his organ training.

The extant manuals do not generally cover the foundational skills but rather start with harmonization and voice-leading, which I have labelled "advanced skills." This might help explain, in part, why those who come to the craft of improvisation later in life feel that they do not have the needed talent. In this situation, the discouraged improviser might conclude that one simply either has "it" or does not. The "it" might be all the foundational aural skills.

One aspect that is very difficult to quantify is the impact of listening. All four players learned by mimicking their favorite improvisers. In the charts that follow, I have listed whom they listened to in the learning process. This listening impacts many aspects of their playing, including harmonization, form, style, and texture. For Brillhart, an inability to naturally reproduce the French harmonic language motivated his advanced study in France. I have categorized listening under "Foundational Skills," but it could be included in either or both categories.

In the following charts, I have outlined the path to proficiency for each improviser in this study. Where possible, I cite the written source for a specific skill and list the skill in regular type. Where there is no written source the skill is listed in italics. Notice that improvisation is a reflection of the player's complete background and experiences. As a result, most of the major components in their learning are not included in the written manuals, even when the manual was autobiographical (Cherwien and Brillhart).

Table 4.2. Learning path for David Cherwien

David Cherwien	
Part I	Foundational Skills
Aural Skills	<i>Play in a rock band</i>
	<i>Experimentation (let the fingers fly where they may)</i>
	Harmonization (Cherwien, the first part of chapter seven)
	<i>Mimic recordings (Paul Manz)</i>
	<i>Reproduce recordings (Paul Manz)</i>
Keyboard Skills	<i>Piano lessons</i>
	<i>Organ lessons</i>
Part II	Advanced Skills: Counterpoint and Form
	Harmonization (Cherwien, the second half of chapter seven)
	<i>Voice-leading (He wrote out his improvisations and compositions, which were reviewed by a music editor. This is how he learned to control voice-leading while extemporizing.)</i>
	<i>Advanced ear training (melodic dictation in Germany)</i>
	Species counterpoint from 1:1 bicinium to improvised fugue from two to four voices (Cherwien chapter eight. For a very thorough approach, use the chapter on the same subject in the Marcel Dupré manual. ⁸⁷)
	Forms: Ritornello, trio, countermelody, ABA form, Fugue, Toccata (Cherwien, chapter 9)
	<i>Integration of Repertoire (This kind of learning is praised in his manual, but Cherwien gives no exercises on the matter. Gerre Hancock's manual gives a systematic approach for working from a composed model.)</i>

⁸⁷ Based on Cherwien's description of his counterpoint training, the Dupré manual is likely a more accurate reproduction of the scope and sequence of his training.

Table 4.3. Learning path for Jeffrey Brillhart

Jeffery Brillhart	
Phase I	Foundational Skills
Aural Skills	<i>Reproduce extant recordings</i>
	<i>Play from fakebooks</i>
	<i>Play jazz</i>
	<i>Listening (Pierre Cochereau, Jean Langlais)</i>
Keyboard Skills	<i>Piano lessons (from age four)</i>
	<i>Organ lessons (serious study began in high school)</i>
Phase II	Advanced Skills: Counterpoint and Form
	<i>Form (composition class in graduate school)</i>
	<i>Form (Part V of <i>Breaking Free</i>)</i>
	<i>Harmonization (Part III of <i>Breaking Free</i>)</i>
	<i>Advanced Harmonic Language (Part IV of <i>Breaking Free</i>)</i>
	<i>Integration of Repertoire (This is done throughout <i>Breaking Free</i>. He makes use of the French school, especially Louis Vierne, Charles Tournemire, Langlais, and Olivier Messiaen.)</i>

Table 4.4. Learning path for Todd Wilson

Todd Wilson	
Phase I	
Aural Skills	<i>Transposition (using Bach chorales)</i> ⁸⁸
	<i>Play jazz (lessons in jazz piano as an adult)</i>
	<i>Improvise bridges</i>
	<i>Listening (Hancock, Cochereau, Langlais)</i>
Keyboard Skills	<i>Piano lessons (from fourth grade)</i>
	<i>Organ lessons (from high school)</i>
Phase II	Advanced Skills: Counterpoint and Form
	<i>Form (Hancock, where form is developed throughout)</i>
	<i>Harmonization (Dupré, chapter one of the preliminary exercises)</i>
	<i>Integrate the repertoire (Hancock)</i>
	<i>Counterpoint (Dupré, Vol. II, chapter four)</i>

⁸⁸ Gerhard Krapf's book on improvisation describes a very similar skillset. See the bibliography.

Table 4.5. Learning path for Paul Soulek

Paul Soulek	
Phase I	Foundational Skills
Aural Skills	<i>Play known melodies by ear</i>
	<i>Mimic extant recordings</i>
	<i>Reproduce extant recordings</i>
	<i>Listening (mostly Manz, also Cherwien and Michael Burkhardt)</i>
Keyboard Skills	<i>Organ lessons (only in college and graduate school)</i>
Phase II	Advanced Skills: Counterpoint and Form
	<i>Voice-leading (integrated undergraduate theory training into muscle memory)</i>
	<i>Form (through listening)</i>
	<i>Integration of Repertoire (imitation of Johann Pachelbel and J.C. Bach)</i>

Notice in these paths that the one most based on classic training and score-reading is the most documented (Wilson). However, in Soulek’s case, the training was almost entirely aural, and nothing comes from a written manual. What Cherwien and Brillhart have documented in their manuals is not so much their complete paths to improvisation, but their Phase II learning as adults. Going back to chapter two, one sees that the pathways described by Peter Planyavsky, Peter Krasinski, Kalle Toivio, and Tom Trenney fit with the overall outline of skills acquisition listed in Table 4.1.

None of the pathways to proficiency are exactly the same, but they are all similar. For example, Cherwien played in a band, and Brillhart played from fake books. While these are different activities, they both consist of utilizing an existing melody and adding harmony and rhythm. There are no areas of direct conflict among the various pathways.

My findings affirm and clarify those of Catherine Chamblee’s dissertation (see my chapter two). Improvisation is indeed learned by imitating a model. However, a “model” must be defined in a broad sense. Using a “model” can include everything from

imitating the moods, textures, and harmonies of a piece encountered aurally to creating a written measure-by-measure outline from a written score. For the improvisers in this study, their approach was closer to the former than the latter.

Application

One could conceivably take any of the four learning pathways outlined above and try to implement it for pedagogical purposes. The difficulty with this task is that improvisation is multi-faceted. Technique, literature, composition, aural skills, and personality all come into play. No written instructional material covers the complete skill set. Devising a new, comprehensive method of instruction in organ improvisation is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, I can propose six general guidelines for learning improvisation.

1. The learning process is a combination of “tedium” and exploration

The theme of Brillhart’s *Breaking Free* is *il faut chercher* (one must search). While his book contains many ways to stimulate the imagination, each lesson begins with “tedium” (e.g., play a given progression in every major and minor key). Cherwien spent years using exploration as a means of self-expression before learning the “tedium” (his term) of counterpoint exercises. The best and most complete resource for “tedium” is Dupré’s *Cours Complet*. A successful curriculum would balance exercises such as these with time spent exploring and experimenting with new ideas. Brillhart’s “drop your hands” warmup is a good example of such exploration.

2. Assimilation of new ideas requires a methodical, disciplined approach

Dupré's first lesson requires the player to harmonize a scale in soprano, tenor, and bass in all major and minor keys. Brillhart's manual likewise requires the student to play new progressions in every major and minor key. This level of repetition is necessary for the player to internalize the lessons and use these skills without thinking about them.

3. Aural skills should not be neglected

None of the published manuals include assignments with aural skills. However, each of the interviewees developed these skills (and from a young age). A student lacking in this area could practice this intentionally. A simple assignment could be to "pick out" a known melody by ear (such as "Happy Birthday"). Next steps could include adding a simple harmonization or transposing to all major and minor keys.

4. Listen to other players

All four of the subjects of this study listened to favorite organists and tried to emulate what they heard. Their desire to learn was driven by a desire to emulate a model. The three pillars of their inspiration were Hancock, Manz, and the modern French school. Students could copy this process by picking an organist of their choosing, listening to recordings, and trying to copy moods, textures, or even the complete score.

5. Study model pieces of literature

Hancock's manual does an excellent job of showing how this is done in written form, demonstrating how to create an outline and then create music from it. Brillhart lists model pieces at the beginning of the chapters in his book. Cherwien and Soulek both say that the study of repertoire was a discipline that expanded their musical language.

6. *Practice often*

Brillhart practices improvisation, “Every time I go to the organ. Every single time. Every time.” The practice of improvisation is like the practice of literature, requiring a regular, disciplined approach.

APPENDIX A

MESSIAEN'S MODES OF LIMITED TRANSPOSITION

Mode 1



Mode 2



Mode 3



Mode 4



Mode 5



Mode 6



Mode 7



APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD PROTOCOL APPROVAL



***TCU Institutional Review Board 3101 Sadler Hall
Fort Worth, Texas 76129***

DATE: 18-November-2019

TO: H. Joseph Butler & Timothy Shewmaker FROM: TCU Institutional Review Board
RE: Expedited Approval of Protocol 1920-91

Dear Joseph & Timothy:

In accordance with applicable federal law governing the use of human subjects in research, the TCU Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) has reviewed and approved your proposed project entitled "Paths to Proficiency in Organ Improvisation: Exploring Skills Acquisition". Your study is considered minimal risk and was reviewed through the expedited process, category 7. Please know that the IRB has not evaluated your project for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the risk/benefit ratio (i.e. do benefits outweigh risk). This approval does not replace any other approvals that may be required.

Your IRB approval is effective on November 18, 2019. Continuing review is not required; however, an annual progress report is. This report must be submitted to the IRB before each anniversary of your approval date every year until this study is closed.

The approved consent is attached to this letter. Only this version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research participants.

Remember that you are responsible for ensuring that your study is conducted in an ethical manner and in accordance with applicable law and TCU policies and procedures. You must submit required reports, as well as any proposed modifications to the IRB for review. No changes to your protocol may be implemented without prior IRB approval. Also, you are required to promptly report unanticipated problems and adverse events.

Your study may be selected for a Post-Approval Monitoring (“PAM”). You will be notified if your study has been chosen for a PAM. A PAM investigator may

request to observe your data collection procedures, including the consent process. Once your research is complete and no identifiable data remains, please use a [Project Closure and Final Report](#) form to close this study. All active projects are subject to PAM.

Please contact Research Compliance at research@tcu.edu or (817) 257-4266, if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,
TCU Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C

HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCHER COURSE COMPLETION CERTIFICATES



Completion Date 22-Jun-2019

Expiration Date 21-Jun-2023

Record ID 32116147

This is to certify that:

Timothy Shewmaker

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Subjects Research

(Curriculum Group)

Human Subjects Researcher (social-behavioral-educational)

(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Texas Christian University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wa4aab800-f1d0-4699-aaaa-68ac5da09992-32116147



Completion Date 22-Jun-2019
 Expiration Date N/A
 Record ID 32116146

This is to certify that:

Timothy Shewmaker

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Humanities Responsible Conduct of Research (Curriculum Group)
Humanities Responsible Conduct of Research (Course Learner Group)
1 - RCR (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Texas Christian University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w420bc5ef-f0bd-4055-8e05-9f9390e2087a-32116146



Completion Date 02-Oct-2019
 Expiration Date 01-Oct-2023
 Record ID 27485794

This is to certify that:

Joseph Butler

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Subjects Research (Curriculum Group)
Human Subjects Researcher (social-behavioral-educational) (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Texas Christian University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?webd2347a-7ee2-4d97-a772-bee0714bdc02-27485794

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORMS



Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Research: Paths to Proficiency in Organ Improvisation: Exploring Skills Acquisition

Principal Investigator: Dr. H. Joseph Butler

[Co-investigators:] Timothy Shewmaker

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be an organ improviser who has performed at a national convention of either the American Guild of Organists or a denominational organization. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

What is the purpose of the research? The purpose of this study is to determine how organists learned to improvise musical compositions.

The primary research instrument will be interviews with up to five organ improvisers.

The objectives of the interviews will be:

- To determine and describe the path to proficiency in improvisation for the interviewees
- To explore the interviewees' general music background in areas of keyboard proficiency, music theory, ear training, and counterpoint

Our hypothesis is that organ improvisation is not an innate ability, but that the experiences and education of the player are the primary determinants of improvisation abilities. This study will also consist of a literature review of published manuals for organ improvisation. At the conclusion of the study, we expect to be able to:

- Determine which existing manuals on improvisation technique relate best to the actual learning process
- Suggest, in general terms, ways to supplement the existing manuals to build the necessary skill set

How many people will participate in this study?

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of up to five participants in this research study.

What is my involvement for participating in this study?

If you agree to be in the study, we will ask you to do the following things:

Approved 11/18/2019

Consent to one interview by phone. The phone interview will be around 1-2 hours in length based on the pace and natural process of conversation. The phone interview will be scheduled in February 2020. After the phone interview, a transcription will be sent to you to review and approve the content.

How long am I expected to be in this study for and how much of my time is required?

The target timeline for initial data collection is February 2020. Transcriptions of interviews will be provided no later than March 15th, 2020.

What are the risks to me for participating in this study and how will they be minimized?

There are some risks you might experience from being in this study. They are loss of time and anonymity. You will approve all phone interview transcriptions and have access to the interview recording. To minimize risk caused by loss of time, phone interviews will be scheduled at your convenience.

What are the benefits for participating in this study?

Although you will not directly benefit from being in this study, others might benefit because we will gain insight into your individual learning processes that can be applied or adapted for use by other performers or teachers. Specifically, we will learn how experienced, respected improvisers gained the skills they put into practice. In addition, there are limited sources or papers that take this approach, and this research will add to the body of knowledge.

Will I be compensated for participating in this study?

No, you will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

What is an alternative procedure(s) that I can choose instead of participating in this study?

There are no known alternatives other than not participating in this study.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

All information collected through the course of this study will remain confidential until you have had the opportunity to review the transcript of the phone interview. After you review the phone interview transcript, the interview will no longer be confidential since it will use your name and learning process throughout the paper. You will also be provided the consent form prior to any interviews taking place.

What will happen to the information collected about me after the study is over?

Raw data, both in written or audio form, will only be accessible to the primary investigator and co- investigator and will be stored in the Primary Investigator's (Dr. H.

Joseph Butler) password protected computer in a secure office on the TCU campus for at least three years following study completion.

Is my participation voluntary?

Yes, your decision to participate is voluntary.

Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study?

Dr. H. Joseph Butler, Primary Investigator, Faculty Advisor, h.j.butler@tcu.edu Timothy Shewmaker, Student, Co-Investigator, tshewmaker@tcu.edu

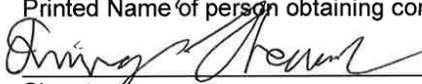
Who should I contact if I have concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?

Dr. Dru Riddle, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-6811, d.riddle@tcu.edu; or Dr. Floyd Wormley, Associate Provost of Research, research.tcu.edu

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. A copy also will be kept with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

Jeffrey Brillhart
Printed Subject Name

Signature
February 12, 2020
Date
Timothy Shewmaker
Printed Name of person obtaining consent

Signature
02-12-2020
Date

Consent to be audio/video recorder

I agree to be audio/video recorded. Yes No

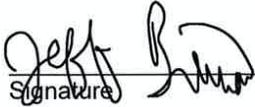

Signature
February 12, 2020
Date

Approved 11/18/2019

Consent to Use Data for Future Research

I agree that my information may be shared with other researchers for future research studies that may be similar to this study or may be completely different. The information shared with other researchers will not include any information that can directly identify me. Researchers will not contact me for additional permission to use this information.

Yes No

 _____
Signature Date
February 12, 2020

Consent to be Contacted for Participation in Future Research

I give the researchers permission to keep my contact information and to contact me for future projects. Yes No

 _____
Signature Date
February 12, 2020



Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Research: Paths to Proficiency in Organ Improvisation: Exploring Skills Acquisition

Principal Investigator: Dr. H. Joseph Butler

[Co-investigators:] Timothy Shewmaker

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Approved 11/18/2019

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Will I be compensated for participating in this study?

No, you will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

What is an alternative procedure(s) that I can choose instead of participating in this study?

There are no known alternatives other than not participating in this study.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

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What will happen to the information collected about me after the study is over?

Raw data, both in written or audio form, will only be accessible to the primary investigator and co-investigator and will be stored in the Primary Investigator's (Dr. H.

Approved 11/18/2019

Joseph Butler) password protected computer in a secure office on the TCU campus for at least three years following study completion.

Is my participation voluntary?

Yes, your decision to participate is voluntary.

Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study?

Dr. H. Joseph Butler, Primary Investigator, Faculty Advisor, h.j.butler@tcu.edu Timothy Shewmaker, Student, Co-Investigator, tshewmaker@tcu.edu

Who should I contact if I have concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?

Dr. Dru Riddle, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-6811, d.riddle@tcu.edu; or Dr. Floyd Wormley, Associate Provost of Research, research.tcu.edu

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. A copy also will be kept with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

DAVID CHERMEN
Printed Subject Name

[Signature] 2/13/20
Signature Date

Timothy Shewmaker 02-03-2020
Printed Name of person obtaining consent

[Signature] 02-03-2020
Signature Date

Consent to be audio/video recorder

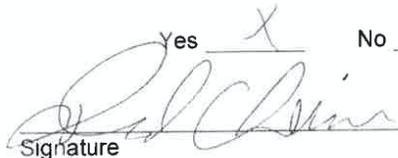
I agree to be audio/video recorded. Yes X No _____

[Signature] 2/13/20
Signature Date

Consent to Use Data for Future Research

I agree that my information may be shared with other researchers for future research studies that may be similar to this study or may be completely different. The information shared with other researchers will not include any information that can directly identify me. Researchers will not contact me for additional permission to use this information.

Yes No

 2/13/20
Signature Date

Consent to be Contacted for Participation in Future Research

I give the researchers permission to keep my contact information and to contact me for future projects. Yes No

 2/13/20
Signature Date



Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Research: Paths to Proficiency in Organ Improvisation: Exploring Skills Acquisition

Principal Investigator: Dr. H. Joseph Butler

[Co-investigators:] Timothy Shewmaker

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be an organ improviser who has performed at a national convention of either the American Guild of Organists or a denominational organization. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

What is the purpose of the research? The purpose of this study is to determine how organists learned to improvise musical compositions.

The primary research instrument will be interviews with up to five organ improvisers.

The objectives of the interviews will be:

- To determine and describe the path to proficiency in improvisation for the interviewees
- To explore the interviewees' general music background in areas of keyboard proficiency, music theory, ear training, and counterpoint

Our hypothesis is that organ improvisation is not an innate ability, but that the experiences and education of the player are the primary determinants of improvisation abilities. This study will also consist of a literature review of published manuals for organ improvisation. At the conclusion of the study, we expect to be able to:

- Determine which existing manuals on improvisation technique relate best to the actual learning process
- Suggest, in general terms, ways to supplement the existing manuals to build the necessary skill set

How many people will participate in this study?

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of up to five participants in this research study.

What is my involvement for participating in this study?

If you agree to be in the study, we will ask you to do the following things:

Approved 11/18/2019

Consent to one interview by phone. The phone interview will be around 1-2 hours in length based on the pace and natural process of conversation. The phone interview will be scheduled in February 2020. After the phone interview, a transcription will be sent to you to review and approve the content.

How long am I expected to be in this study for and how much of my time is required?

The target timeline for initial data collection is February 2020. Transcriptions of interviews will be provided no later than March 15th, 2020.

What are the risks to me for participating in this study and how will they be minimized?

There are some risks you might experience from being in this study. They are loss of time and anonymity. You will approve all phone interview transcriptions and have access to the interview recording. To minimize risk caused by loss of time, phone interviews will be scheduled at your convenience.

What are the benefits for participating in this study?

Although you will not directly benefit from being in this study, others might benefit because we will gain insight into your individual learning processes that can be applied or adapted for use by other performers or teachers. Specifically, we will learn how experienced, respected improvisers gained the skills they put into practice. In addition, there are limited sources or papers that take this approach, and this research will add to the body of knowledge.

Will I be compensated for participating in this study?

No, you will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

What is an alternative procedure(s) that I can choose instead of participating in this study?

There are no known alternatives other than not participating in this study.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

All information collected through the course of this study will remain confidential until you have had the opportunity to review the transcript of the phone interview. After you review the phone interview transcript, the interview will no longer be confidential since it will use your name and learning process throughout the paper. You will also be provided the consent form prior to any interviews taking place.

What will happen to the information collected about me after the study is over?

Raw data, both in written or audio form, will only be accessible to the primary investigator and co-investigator and will be stored in the Primary Investigator's (Dr. H.

Approved 11/18/2019

Consent to Use Data for Future Research

I agree that my information may be shared with other researchers for future research studies that may be similar to this study or may be completely different. The information shared with other researchers will not include any information that can directly identify me. Researchers will not contact me for additional permission to use this information.

Yes No

Paul Smith 1/16/20
Signature Date

Consent to be Contacted for Participation in Future Research

I give the researchers permission to keep my contact information and to contact me for future projects. Yes No

Paul Smith 1/16/20
Signature Date

Approved 11/18/2019



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Although you will not directly benefit from being in this study, others might benefit because we will gain insight into your individual learning processes that can be applied or adapted for use by other performers or teachers. Specifically, we will learn how experienced, respected improvisers gained the skills they put into practice. In addition, there are limited sources or papers that take this approach, and this research will add to the body of knowledge.

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What will happen to the information collected about me after the study is over?

Raw data, both in written or audio form, will only be accessible to the primary investigator and co-investigator and will be stored in the Primary Investigator's (Dr. H.

Joseph Butler) password protected computer in a secure office on the TCU campus for at least three years following study completion.

Is my participation voluntary?

Yes, your decision to participate is voluntary.

Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study?

Dr. H. Joseph Butler, Primary Investigator, Faculty Advisor, h.j.butler@tcu.edu Timothy Shewmaker, Student, Co-Investigator, tshewmaker@tcu.edu

Who should I contact if I have concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?

Dr. Dru Riddle, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-6811, d.riddle@tcu.edu; or Dr. Floyd Wormley, Associate Provost of Research, research.tcu.edu

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. A copy also will be kept with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

X TODD WILSON
Printed Subject Name

X Todd Wilson 1/23/20
Signature Date

Timothy Shewmaker 01-23-2020
Printed Name of person obtaining consent

Timothy Shewmaker 01-23-2020
Signature Date

Consent to be audio/video recorder

X I agree to be audio/video recorded. Yes No

Todd Wilson 1/23/20
Signature Date

APPENDIX E

INITIAL LETTER OF INQUIRY



Dear organists,

I am currently a DMA candidate in organ performance in my final year at Texas Christian University under the tutelage of Dr. H. Joseph Butler. In addition to my recitals, the capstone of my degree program is a research project. As a church organist, I am interested in the subject of improvisation. Like most organists, I invariably use improvisation to some degree in all worship services. I am interested to learn from expert improvisers.

For my research, I am investigating how accomplished improvisers acquired their skill set. This project will include an interview with you and up to four other organists to further understand how your education and experiences enhanced your improvisation abilities. My goal will be to conduct the interview before the end of February 2020.

This research will explore how improvisers put their musical background into practice. I would like to ask you about a variety of training areas, including music theory, form, counterpoint, ear training, and keyboard technique. Please see the attached list of questions for more details. The results of this interview will then be used to evaluate some of the improvisation manuals and determine if supplemental learning strategies are in order.

You were selected based on your reputation as an organ improviser and service player who has played for a national convention of the American Guild of Organists or a denominational organization.

If you are willing to participate in this project, please read and sign the “Consent to Participate in Research” form and return it to me.

Sincerely,

Timothy Shewmaker
DMA Candidate, Organ Performance
Texas Christian University
tshewmaker@tcu.edu
956-xxx-xxxx

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions template

*These interview questions serve as a guide for conversation. The Co-Investigator might pursue additional questions as they pertain to the participant's line of thinking. As with any of these questions, the subject may choose to not answer or later redact answers as they see fit.

What is improvisation?

When did you first improvise? What inspired you?

Why did you first improvise? Is that still true today?

What are your improvisations like? What type of improvisation do you employ?

How do you practice your improvisation skills?

How often do you practice your improvisation skills?

How often do you employ your improvisation skills?

What led you down this path?

Which teachers were most helpful?

Which instructional materials were most helpful? What was especially challenging?

What was especially rewarding?

Tell me about how you learned your instrument.

How did you develop your keyboard facility? How often do (did) you practice those skills?

Do you ever play by ear (play pre-existing music without consulting the written score)?

Was that part of your education? How did you develop that skill? Do you practice that skill?

Tell me about your training in music theory and composition.

Is there a relationship between written composition and improvisation?

Do you compose?

Do you write out your improvisations? What does this teach you?

Some think that improvisation is an innate skill. What do you say to that?

What is the ideal path toward learning improvisation?

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VITA

Timothy Shewmaker was born in Missouri and raised in Jonesboro, Arkansas. He received a Bachelor of Music degree from Concordia University Nebraska in 2007. In 2014, he received a Master of Music degree in Organ Performance from Texas Christian University. The following year, he entered the doctoral program at TCU and received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Organ Performance in 2020. He won first prize and the prize for hymn-playing excellence at the William C. Hall Pipe Organ Competition in San Antonio in 2013. Timothy holds the Associate certificate from the American Guild of Organists.

Abstract

The question of how one learns to improvise at the organ is complex. This study uses interviews with four organists to establish their paths to proficiency. The questions asked covered organ improvisation and the interviewees' general background and experiences in music. Summaries of organ improvisation method books that were deemed helpful by the interview subjects are included in the learning descriptions. These method books were *Cours complet d'improvisation à l'orgue* by Marcel Dupré, *Improvising: How to Master the Art* by Gerre Hancock, *Breaking Free* by Jeffrey Brillhart, and *Let the People Sing!* by David Cherwien.

The author found that improvisers had significant background and training in aural skills that were acquired outside their formal training in improvisation. A more complete picture of their skills acquisition is given in light of this insight.

Interview subjects were David Cherwien of Mount Olive Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, Jeffrey Brillhart of Yale University and Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, Todd Wilson of Cleveland's Trinity Cathedral and the Cleveland Institute of Music, and Paul Soulek of St. John Lutheran Church in Seward, Nebraska, and Concordia University Nebraska.