

## **Lesson 2: First Steps in Pedal Playing**

A podcast by Ruth Eldredge, Brigham Young University

Visit <[www.organ.byu.edu](http://www.organ.byu.edu)>

Materials needed: Pedal Orientation; Hymn 142 (simplified)

This is The New LDS Organist Lesson 2: First Steps in Pedal Playing. My name is Ruth Eldredge, representing the Organ Area of the Brigham Young University School of Music.

This lesson will address the basics of positioning yourself at the organ, playing the pedals, and registering hymns for clarity.

[The feet and the pedalboard]

Your feet are important to playing the organ. They control volume with the expression pedals and also play musical lines along with your hands. The pedal line provides stability to your organ playing and supports the congregation as they sing. The keyboard located on the floor underneath your organ manuals is called the pedalboard, the pedals, or the pedal for short. Also notice any expression pedals and crescendo pedals on your organ. These control the volume.

In organ music, the pedal notes often have their own staff which is placed underneath the manual staves. Notice that the pedal line is notated in bass clef. When you find the music written on only two staves, as it is in the hymnal, the bottom note or bass line is generally played on the pedals. First we will discuss how to sit comfortably at the organ, listen for and play a legato line with your feet, and decide how to mark and learn music for manual and pedal together.

As you can see, the pedalboard has a large range of notes. To orient yourself, remember that the lowest C on the pedal is the same pitch as the lowest C on the manual.

[Organ shoes]

Proper shoes are essential to playing a pedal line with comfort and accuracy. They help the foot to maintain proper positioning on the pedalboard and to achieve accuracy while maintaining a perfect legato. Organ shoes need not be expensive, but they should be worn only to play the organ to protect both the shoes and the organ from wear and dirt. As you decide on an organ shoe, look for these characteristics:

1. Heel – Find a shoe that has a heel about one inch in height. It should be moderately wide and able to slide up and down the keys without leaving marks.
2. Uppers – Find a shoe that has a flexible upper material and that fits snugly on your foot. Your shoes should slide against each other without sticking.
3. Arch – Find a shoe that has a space between the heel and sole. This allows the foot to straddle from C to E for example, without hitting the D between them.
4. Sole – The sole should be thin and should slide easily up and down the keys. It should not extend beyond the width of the shoe.

[Positioning yourself at the organ]

When you sit at the organ, consider your position relative to the pedals first. Center your body on the bench slightly left of the center of the pedal. On most organs, this means to center on the pedal note D. Move your body forward so that you can easily push down the expression pedal with your right foot. Then, move the bench forward enough so that you are well supported in this position. Realize that your bench will be closer to the organ than what you are accustomed to at the piano. If possible, adjust the height of the bench so that your toes and heels gently rest on the pedalboard.

As you play the pedal, focus on playing the natural keys with your toes just clear of the sharp keys. When your feet are close together, place one heel in the arch of the other foot. Maintain this contact whenever possible. When you need to reach larger intervals, keep your heels in contact for as long as you can. This will give you a reference system to help you find the notes without having to look down.

[Pitches of organ stops]

Now that you are sitting at the organ, look for a moment at the stops. The stops are grouped into divisions, labeled “Great,” “Swell,” and “Pedal.”

Notice that most of the individual stops have numbers on them. This number is called the “pitch designation,” and it refers to the pitch that will sound on the manual while that stop is engaged. To illustrate, find a stop on the Great division labeled with an 8. This is called an “eight foot stop.” Engage it and then play the middle C on the Great manual. Notice the sound it makes. This note is the same as middle C on a piano. Now retire that stop (meaning turn it off), and pull a four-foot stop on that same division. Play the same note you just played and notice the difference in the sound. The pitch you hear is one octave higher than the one you heard previously. Now retire the four-foot stop and find a stop marked 2’ on the same manual. Play the same C again. This pitch is two octaves higher than the first pitch you played and one octave higher than the second one you played.

Now find your Pedal division and pull a 16’ stop. Play the highest C on the pedalboard. This is Middle C.

[Chorus registration]

Several stops can be combined to form basic “organ” sounds. To illustrate this, cancel all of your stops, and engage the following stops: on the pedal division, find and activate the Principal 16’ and 8’ stops. These may be labeled “principal,” or “octave” on your organ. On the Great manual, activate the Principal 8’, 4’, and 2’ stops. Again, these may be labeled “Principal,” “Octave,” or “Super Octave.” This combination of stops is called a principal chorus. The principal chorus provides a clear sound that is easy for singers to follow. Play notes on the pedal and manual to hear the sound of the principal chorus combination. It will sound like this:

\*\*\*

[Playing pedal keys]

Now return your attention to the pedalboard. Pedal notes are easiest to play with your toes. Take out the *Pedal Orientation Sheet* and look at exercise one. Notice the carats or upside-down V’s placed above or below the noteheads. These carats are called pedal markings: a carat placed above the note tells you to

play with your right toe, a carat placed below the note tells you to play with your left toe. Later, you will see small circles also placed above and below the noteheads which tell you to play the notes with your heel.

Paying attention to the toe marking, place one toe on each note of the exercise and prepare to play the line using only your toes. First, follow along as I play it.

\*\*\*

Now stop the recording and practice yourself, paying close attention to pedal markings and note values.

[Playing legato lines with alternate toes]

Now that you can accurately play exercise one, move to exercise two, where you will learn to play legato pedal phrases with your toes. Listen for a smooth connection between notes as you play these exercises. Be careful that the sounding notes neither overlap nor detach as you move from one to the other. Follow this exercise as I play it.

\*\*\*

Place your hands on the bench or in your lap as you learn these exercises. Pay attention to the pedal markings and avoid looking at your feet as much as possible. Stop the recording and start it again when you can play the exercise accurately.

[Playing legato lines with alternate toes and heels]

Here you will learn to play legato pedal phrases with your toes and heels. Remember that organ shoes will be very helpful in achieving fluency in pedal playing, especially when playing with your heels. Place your right toe on E and your right heel on the D next to it. Practice rocking from toe to heel to allow the notes to sound one after the other. As you do so, listen for a perfect legato by using your ankle to make the motion and keeping your knees still.

Move to exercise three. Notice the pedal markings. Remember that markings above the note mean to play with your right foot, and markings below the notes mean to play with your left foot. Carats mean to play with your toe, and circles mean to play with your heels. Keeping your heel and arch in contact as much as possible, practice the exercises slowly enough for note-perfect playing. Increase the tempo gradually as you become more comfortable. Your practiced exercise will sound something like this:

\*\*\*

[Combining hands and feet]

Now that you are oriented to the pedalboard, you can begin to combine your hands and feet. As you practice, learn the pedal line first, following the pedal marks as much as possible. When you have mastered the pedal line alone, practice the left hand and pedal line together, the right hand and pedal line together, and then the left hand and right hand together. Once you can play these two-part combinations with few errors and no hesitations, combine all three parts. Use this method as a practice model throughout your organ playing experience.

[Pedaling—polish mode]

Playing the pedals is like learning a new instrument - it requires consistent practice, and is rewarding as your pedal skills improve. Do not give up playing the pedals if the exercises take time to master. Pedal use in hymn playing provides a strong foundation for the sound of the organ that will help your congregation to sing more confidently. As you polish your pedal playing remember these steps:

1. Practice the pedal line first, then your two-part combinations: left hand and pedal, right hand and pedal, and left and right hands together, no pedal. Play all three together after you are comfortable with these combinations.
2. Follow the pedal markings printed in your music as closely as possible. Where there are no markings, plan ahead and mark in the smoothest pedal for you.
3. Use the toe as much as possible. It is easier to play with the toe than with the heel.
4. Listen for a legato line in your pedal playing, as if someone were singing the line. You may wish to sing along with your pedal practicing to help you identify the legato sound.
5. Use the exercises regularly as warm-ups or “polishers” as you continue your organ study.

Correct pedal playing takes practice. Remember that you are learning a new instrument. It requires the feet to work independently in a new way. Consistent practice will help overcome hurdles that may arise, and will be a positive experience as you perfect your pedal skills. The use of pedals in hymn playing creates a strong foundation that will help the congregation sing more confidently.

At the end of this lesson, you should be able to position yourself comfortably at the organ, identify and use a principal chorus, find a proper organ shoe, and mark and play basic pedal lines. Continue to practice the exercises given and find other pedal lines in your hymnal to practice alone and with one or two hands.

In the next lesson you will learn about playing hymns effectively in your services.

# Pedal Orientation

## Organ Shoes

see <[www.organ.byu.edu/ORSHOE.html](http://www.organ.byu.edu/ORSHOE.html)>

**Upper**  
(snug fit, flexible)

**Heel**  
(wide, about 1 inch high)

**Sole**  
(thin, slide easily, not wider than shoe)

**Arch**  
(no bridge between heel and sole)



## Pedal Exercises for Lesson 2

### Exercise 1

Λ--a carat placed below the staff indicates left toe;  
above the staff indicates right toe

### Exercise 2

Λ

### Exercise 3

○--a circle  
or U-shaped symbol indicates the heel

Continue by learning the pedal line of Hymn 142, "Sweet Hour of Prayer" (simplified for organ in three parts) as described near the end of Lesson 2.

\* RH plays soprano  
 LH plays alto  
 each played on different  
 manual, but with similar  
 registration

# Sweet Hour of Prayer

142

Simplified for organ in three parts

Arranged by Shinji Inagi

*Peacefully* ♩ = 42-48

1. Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer! That calls me from a  
 2. Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer! Thy wings shall my pe -

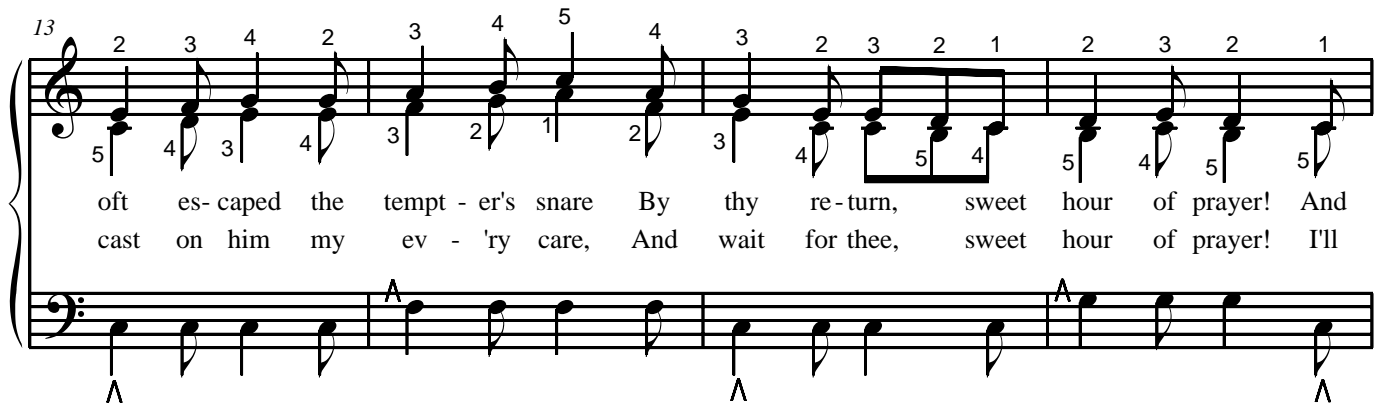
world of care And bids me at my Fa - ther's throne Make  
 ti - tion bear To him whose truth and faith - ful - ness En -

all my wants and wish - es known. In sea - sons of dis -  
 gage the wait - ing soul to bless. And since he bids me

tress and grief, My soul has of - ten found re - lief And  
 seek his face, Be - lieve his word, and trust his grace, I'll

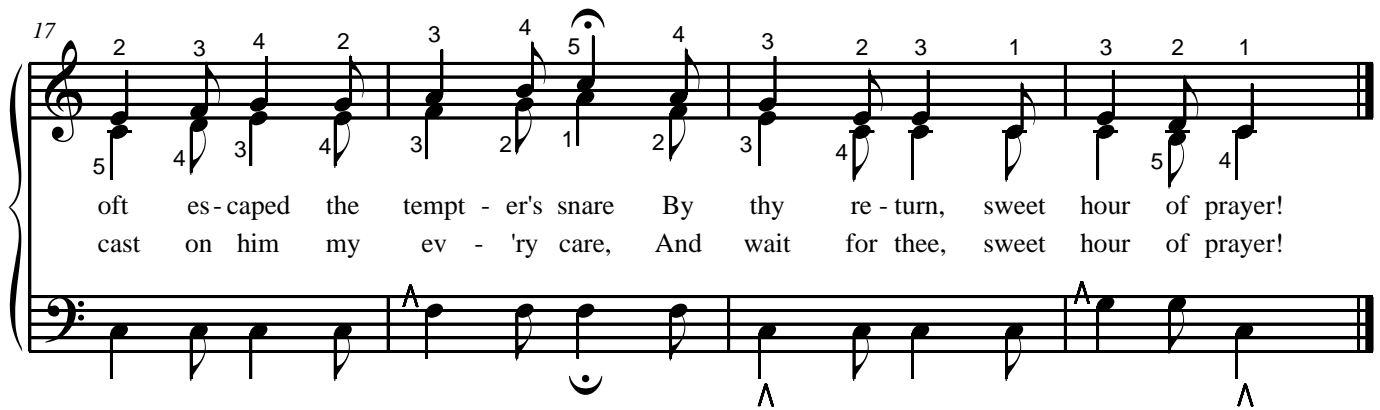
# Sweet Hour of Prayer

13



oft es-caped the tempt - er's snare By thy re - turn, sweet hour of prayer! And  
cast on him my ev - 'ry care, And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer! I'll

17



oft es-caped the tempt - er's snare By thy re - turn, sweet hour of prayer!  
cast on him my ev - 'ry care, And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!