

SUFFOLK ORGANISTS' ASSOCIATION

SERVICE PLAYING NOTES

PREPARATION!

Know the church and the organ in advance unless it's your regular venue. Contact the church for a visit prior to the service to make sure the organ is working and where keys, etc., are if needed. This would be a good time to practise your voluntaries, too.

Negotiate your fee in advance and the method of payment if required.

Ask for hymns and their tunes in advance so that they can be practised if necessary.

Arrive in good time – possibly 30 minutes before the service starts. Check with the officiant/celebrant any possible changes or special liturgical arrangements, changes of hymns, hymn tunes, etc.

If there is a choir, negotiate with them any local customs which might need to be taken into account, e.g. processing.

Check whether hymns will be announced or not or whether verses will be omitted.

EXECUTION!

Pre-service music needs to set an atmosphere. Never play loudly before a service, even if the congregation chatters through the music.

Be sure to follow the Order of Service carefully to avoid coming in at the wrong moment. Find the next hymn soon after playing the previous one so it is ready.

Aim to create good liturgical flow. Use the organ to good effect and to communicate the character of the Season or particular Sunday.

Be prepared for 'off the cuff' alterations by clergy and for them to stray from the official Order of Service – this can be a minefield!

For hymn-playing, see below. If music is required during Communion, play very gently and quietly so that it doesn't impinge on the delivery of Communion nor distract those at prayer at this important moment.

If you need to improvise, e.g. for a post-Gospel fanfare, try to reflect the narrative and content of the Gospel reading. Not all Gospel extracts need loud and

triumphant music. Try to make all improvisations interesting and not just ‘musical wallpaper’.

Ensure that your closing voluntary is an appropriate – and not too long – piece, not just a chance to show off your latest ‘party piece’!

INSPIRATION!

Music can make an enormous contribution to worship, but it can also be a distraction and even an annoyance to some people. While being advocates for good music and fine organ-playing, we need to remember that many people are not churchgoers who go because they love music. Make sure your own contribution is competent, polished and confident and you will win the doubters over.

NOTES ON HYMN-PLAYING

1. Ensure that the tune matches the words (mood, style, metre, length) if you need to choose an alternative tune.
2. Check whether there is a version of the tune in a lower key if the set tune goes above E flat.
3. Play the play-over manuals only, possibly on the Swell.
4. Play the play-over at the tempo which the ensuing verses will be sung.
5. Aim to vary the registration to match the character of each verse.
6. The final verse can often be the loudest – but not always!
7. Keep the beat going between verses so that the singers/congregation know when to come in without a gathering note.
8. Even if the congregation seems to drag, keep the tempo going – they will catch up!
9. Avoid playing too slowly – most churchgoers are not naturally singers and have little singing technique, breath control, etc.
10. Remember that, for most churchgoers, hymns *are* church music so the experience of singing hymns needs to be enjoyable and satisfying, not a battle with the organ nor a physical struggle!