

CONTENTS

Ideas for Hymn Introductions p. 4

Introductions

ALLEIN GOTT IN DER HÖH (F, G)	1, 2	LIEBSTER JESU, WIR SIND HIER	30, 31
ALLES IST AN GOTTES SEGEN	3	MUNICH	32, 33
ANGELUS (D, E ^b)	4	NUN DANKET ALL	34
AR HYD Y NOS (F, G)	5	NUN DANKET ALLE GOTT	35
AZMON	6	NUN FREUT EUCH	36, 37
BEACH SPRING	7, 8	O GOTT, DU FROMMER GOTT	38, 39
CHRISTE SANCTORUM	9	O GROSSER GOTT (C, B ^b)	40
CWM RHONDDA (F, G)	10	O HEILIGE DREIFALTIGKEIT	41, 42, 43
DARWALL'S 148TH	11	OLD HUNDREDTH	44, 45, 46
DIADEMATA	12, 13	PATMOS	p. 11
ENGELBERG	14	POTSDAM	pp. 9, 10
ERHALT UNS, HERR	15, 16	RENDEZ À DIEU (F, G)	47, 48
ES IST DAS HEIL	17, 18	ST. ANNE	p. 10
FARLEY CASTLE (C, D)	19	ST. CLEMENT (F, G)	49
GOTT SEI DANK	20	ST. CRISPIN	50
HERR JESU CHRIST, DICH ZU UNS WEND	21, 22	ST. FLAVIAN	51
HERR JESU CHRIST, MEINS	23	ST. MICHAEL	52
HOLY MANNA	24	SLANE	53
HYFRYDOL	25	TWENTY-FOURTH	54
ICH SINGE DIR	p. 12	WENN WIR IN HÖCHSTEN NÖTEN SEIN	55
ICH STERBE TÄGLICH	26	WER NUR DEN LIEBEN GOTT	56
ISTE CONFESSOR	27	WESTMINSTER ABBEY	57
ITALIAN HYMN	28	WO GOTT ZUM HAUS (D, E ^b)	58
LAND OF REST	29	YIGDAL (Em, Fm)	59, 60

Index of Titles p. 108

IDEAS FOR HYMN INTRODUCTIONS

The hymn introduction: is there any part of the service that is more of an after-thought for the church musician? Organists—pianists too—usually focus their service preparations on preludes and postludes. And maybe they play through the hymns at least a few times before Sunday morning. But introducing the hymns? For many, the default is simply to play through the hymn once before launching into the singing. To be sure, that can suffice. But can we do better?

The purpose of this volume is twofold. First, it offers a ready collection of 60 hymn introductions, many of them fairly simple when it comes to level of difficulty, on 44 tunes that account for 117 different hymns in *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)*. Many of the settings are for manuals only and therefore can also be played on the piano. Introductions requiring the use of pedals are composed especially with those of limited experience in mind. (See the discussion below regarding the use of pedals.)

Second, these initial pages offer several practical suggestions on how organists—and pianists—can construct introductions of their own that are simple in design yet musically interesting. That, after all, should be the goal of any hymn introduction—to provide an inviting appeal to the men, women, and children who gather each Lord's Day to take up their joyful task of singing of Jesus Christ, which is the primary reason Martin Luther once gave for singing hymns: "that we should know nothing to sing or say, save Jesus Christ our Savior."^{*}

Finally, though not a main purpose of this volume, various suggestions will be offered along the way concerning performance, registration, and even, in a few cases, how best to practice a particular introduction.

PURPOSES OF A HYMN INTRODUCTION

A successful hymn introduction must, it would seem, do at least two things to accomplish the goal of inviting the congregation to sing with confidence. First, by the conclusion of the introduction, the congregants should have a good idea of the melody they are about to sing. Given the ever-decreasing ability of the average person to read music, one can never assume that everyone will recognize the tune just by looking at the title of the hymn, let alone reading the notes. Thus, the melody needs to come through clearly enough to signal to the congregants the tune they are about to sing. And if the melody is not that familiar, the introduction should sound out the melody even more clearly so that the singers will be confident enough to give it a try.

^{*} *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 53, *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 316.

Second, the introduction serves best when it is played at the same tempo as the hymn. It's not very encouraging, for example, to hear a sprightly introduction, only to have the organist then play the hymn stanzas at a lethargic pace. More often than not, the tempo of the introduction should serve as a clear indicator of how fast the hymn will be sung. In those rare occasions when the introduction must be played at a different tempo, the organist should consciously begin the first stanza at a suitable tempo and then stick with that tempo.

A final note regarding introductions and tempo: one will sometimes find published organ settings where the meter of the hymn has been changed, such as taking a hymn in 4/4 and transforming it to 6/8. While this may provide an interesting setting, it potentially risks confusing the congregation should the setting be used as an introduction, especially in cases where the melody is not well known. Similarly, if the melody of a hymn is significantly changed in the introduction, the congregation may be confused when it comes time to sing. With very familiar tunes, however, slight alterations usually do not present a challenge. (See Introduction 44.)

INTRODUCTION LENGTH

One could, I suppose, add a third purpose for hymn introductions—namely, to give the congregants time to locate the hymn in the hymnal! And that leads already to one of the first considerations in introducing a hymn: it's not always necessary to play the hymn in its entirety, especially when the melody is longer than a simple four-phrase hymn like OLD HUNDREDTH, the tune for the Common Doxology. In fact, when singing "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow" (*LSB* 805), which most everyone knows by heart, the briefest of introductions may suffice. (See Introduction 46.)

In order to craft even the simplest hymn introduction, a basic understanding of hymn meter is in order. Hymn tunes are divided into phrases with a defined number of syllables in each phrase. For example, the Common Doxology has four phrases with eight syllables in each phrase. The meter of that tune is expressed as 88 88. (You will find the meter at the bottom right corner of each hymn page.) As with the tune OLD HUNDREDTH, the simplest of hymn tunes most often consist of four phrases. In fact, so many tunes share three meters in particular that some rather uninspired names have been given to them: Short Meter (66 86), Common Meter (86 86), and Long Meter (88 88). In *LSB*, 75 different tunes use one of these three meters, providing tunes for 124 hymns! (See the meter index at *LSB*, page 1007.)

Because of the brevity of these tunes of just four phrases, more often than not the entire hymn will likely be sounded in the course of the introduction. Anything less may not give congregants sufficient time to locate the hymn. But when it comes to longer tunes, especially those with eight or more phrases, playing through the entire tune usually takes longer than is needed to find the hymn.

If one is going to play only part of the hymn tune to introduce it, it's imperative to be aware of the structure of the melody. And unlike the typical four-phrase tune, in which each phrase usually contains unique melodic material, tunes that have more than four phrases almost always have some degree of repetition. As an example, consider the tune AR HYD Y NOS (*LSB* 877, 894, 922):



A quick examination of this tune (meter: 84 84 88 84) reveals that lines 1, 2, and 4 (comprising phrases 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8) are exactly the same (with the letter *A* indicating the repeated melodic idea). The third line (phrases 5 and 6) presents new melodic material (*B*). The melodic material can be depicted thus: *AABA*. There are at least 40 tunes in *LSB* that exhibit a similar pattern. While the tune could be played through in its entirety to introduce the hymn, this would include considerable repetition. Quite often, in an effort to shorten the introduction, organists will skip the second line, resulting in an *ABA* structure. The problem with this approach is that it becomes rather noticeable that a portion of the tune is missing.

A solution that I find far more effective with *AABA* tunes, especially those that are quite familiar, is to begin the introduction not at the beginning but in the middle—at the *B* section, where the unique melodic material begins. This is often the high point of the tune. The result is that four phrases of the tune are heard; this is more satisfying than six, which is what occurs when the second line is omitted as described above. Also, after the interesting *B* material launches the introduction, the congregants hear the opening phrases of the hymn as the last line is played just prior to singing. (Introduction 5 demonstrates this approach for this particular tune.)

A number of introductions in this volume follow this pattern of beginning the introduction at the middle of the tune (or near it). (For several examples, see Introductions 13, 18, 24, 25, 28, 33, 37, 39, 40, 48, and 60.) Even if an organist does nothing more than play the hymn accompaniment as found in the hymnal by starting at the middle of such hymns, he or she will provide a fresh change from the default practice of always starting at the beginning and playing through the hymn in its entirety. One caution, however: understand that if a tune exhibiting this structure is not familiar to the congregation, then it may be wise to play through the entire hymn.

Before going further, another caution is in order. Unlike the previous example, the melodic material of many hymn tunes doesn't fit neatly on the page, with each phrase beginning on a new system. (For example, see *LSB* 700.) Always be sure to examine the hymn structure carefully so that you know where each phrase begins. You may even

1. ALLEIN GOTT IN DER HÖH (F)

Across the Sky the Shades of Night

All Glory Be to God on High

Manual: Flute 8', Principal 4', (2')

Pedal: Flute 16', Principal 8', Trumpet 8'

Attr. Nicolaus Decius, ca. 1485–after 1546

Setting by Paul J. Grime

The first system of music is in 3/4 time and F major. It consists of three staves. The top staff (Manual) begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The melody starts on a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, then a quarter note Bb4. The next measure has a half note A4 and a quarter note G4. The third measure has a half note F4 and a quarter note E4. The fourth measure has a half note D4 and a quarter note C4. The fifth measure has a half note Bb3 and a quarter note A3. The sixth measure has a half note G3 and a quarter note F3. The bottom two staves (Pedal) are in bass clef and contain whole rests for the first six measures.

The second system of music continues the piece. It consists of three staves. The top staff (Manual) begins with a circled measure number 6. The melody continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, a half note C4, and a quarter note Bb3. The next measure has a half note A3 and a quarter note G3. The third measure has a half note F3 and a quarter note E3. The fourth measure has a half note D3 and a quarter note C3. The fifth measure has a half note Bb2 and a quarter note A2. The sixth measure has a half note G2 and a quarter note F2. The bottom two staves (Pedal) are in bass clef and contain whole rests for the first six measures.

The third system of music continues the piece. It consists of three staves. The top staff (Manual) begins with a circled measure number 11. The melody continues with a half note E4, a quarter note D4, a half note C4, and a quarter note Bb3. The next measure has a half note A3 and a quarter note G3. The third measure has a half note F3 and a quarter note E3. The fourth measure has a half note D3 and a quarter note C3. The fifth measure has a half note Bb2 and a quarter note A2. The sixth measure has a half note G2 and a quarter note F2. The bottom two staves (Pedal) are in bass clef and contain whole rests for the first six measures.

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3. ALLES IST AN GOTTES SEGEN

*All Depends on Our Possessing
Jesus Comes Today with Healing*

Swell: Oboe 8', Flute 4'
Great: Flute 8', 4'
Pedal: Flute 16', 8'

Johann Löhner, 1645–1705
Adapt. Johann Balthasar König, 1691–1758
Setting by Paul J. Grime

The musical score is written for three parts: Great (Gt.), Swell (Sw.), and Pedal. It is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. The score is divided into three systems, each with a measure number in a circle at the beginning of the first staff.

- System 1 (Measure 1):** The Great part (Gt.) has a melodic line starting on G4, moving up stepwise to B4, then down to A4, G4, F4, E4, and D4. The Swell and Pedal parts are silent.
- System 2 (Measure 5):** The Great part continues the melody. The Swell part has a bass line with eighth-note patterns, including triplets and pairs, with fingerings 1, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1. The Pedal part has a single note D3.
- System 3 (Measure 9):** The Great part continues the melody. The Swell part continues the bass line with eighth-note patterns, including triplets and pairs, with fingerings 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 3, 1, 2. The Pedal part has a single note D3.

Because of the running eighth notes in the left hand, it may be challenging to play this introduction at the tempo of the hymn. Practice the left hand alone, focusing on attaining a smooth and unobtrusive accompaniment to the melody. After accomplishing that, add the pedal part next to gain confident coordination between left hand and pedal. Only after that is accomplished should the melody, which is the most familiar part, be added.

11. DARWALL'S 148TH

*Before You, Lord, We Bow
Christ Is Our Cornerstone
On What Has Now Been Sown*

Swell: Trumpet 8'
Great: Principal 8', 4'
Pedal: Flute 16', Principal 8', 4'

John Darwall, 1731–89
Setting by Paul J. Grime

The first system of the musical score is in 4/4 time. It features three staves. The top staff is for the Gt. (Great) organ, starting with a whole rest followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The middle staff is for the Swell organ, also starting with a whole rest and then playing a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff is for the Pedal organ, which remains silent throughout this system.

The second system of the musical score is in 4/4 time. It features three staves. The top staff is for the Gt. (Great) organ, starting with a whole note followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The middle staff is for the Swell organ, starting with a whole rest followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff is for the Pedal organ, which remains silent throughout this system.

The third system of the musical score is in 4/4 time. It features three staves. The top staff is for the Gt. (Great) organ, starting with a whole note followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The middle staff is for the Swell organ, starting with a whole rest followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff is for the Pedal organ, which remains silent throughout this system.

14. ENGELBERG

*All Praise to Thee, for Thou, O King Divine
We Know That Christ Is Raised
When in Our Music God Is Glorified*

Swell: Flute 8', Principal 4', 2', Oboe 8'
(box adjusted as needed)

Great: Principal 8', 4', Trumpet 8'

Pedal: Flute 16', Principal 8', 4'

Charles V. Stanford, 1852–1924

Setting by Paul J. Grime

Stately, not too fast



19. FARLEY CASTLE (C)

Eternal Spirit of the Living Christ
Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face
Lord of All Good

Manual: Flute 8', Principal or Flute 4'
Pedal: Flute 16', 8'

Henry Lawes, 1595–1662
Setting by Paul J. Grime



27. ISTE CONFESSOR

*Christ High-Ascended, Now in Glory Seated
Lord of Our Life
Only-Begotten, Word of God Eternal*

Manual: Flute 8', Principal or Flute 4'
Pedal: Flute 16', 8'

Antiphoner, Poitiers, 1746
Setting by Paul J. Grime

The first system of music is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of three staves. The top staff (Manual) has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a half note Bb4 in the second measure. The middle staff (Manual) has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a half note Bb4 in the second measure. The bottom staff (Pedal) has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a half note Bb4 in the second measure. The system continues with more complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

The second system of music is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of three staves. The top staff (Manual) has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a half note Bb4 in the second measure. The middle staff (Manual) has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a half note Bb4 in the second measure. The bottom staff (Pedal) has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a half note Bb4 in the second measure. The system continues with more complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

The third system of music is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of three staves. The top staff (Manual) has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a half note Bb4 in the second measure. The middle staff (Manual) has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a half note Bb4 in the second measure. The bottom staff (Pedal) has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a half note Bb4 in the second measure. The system continues with more complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

35. NUN DANKET ALLE GOTT

*Now Thank We All Our God
The Lord, My God, Be Praised*

Manual: Principal 8', 4', 2', (Mixture)
Pedal: Principal 16', 8', 4', (Man. to Ped.)

Johann Crüger, 1598–1662
Setting by Paul J. Grime

Stately

The first system of musical notation consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef, the middle in bass clef, and the bottom in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/2. The music begins with a rest in the top staff, followed by a series of chords and eighth notes. The middle staff has a whole rest. The bottom staff has a whole note. The system ends with a double bar line.

The second system of musical notation consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef, the middle in bass clef, and the bottom in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/2. The music begins with a measure marked with a circled 4. The top staff has a series of chords and eighth notes. The middle staff has a whole rest. The bottom staff has a whole note. The system ends with a double bar line.

The third system of musical notation consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef, the middle in bass clef, and the bottom in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/2. The music begins with a measure marked with a circled 7. The top staff has a series of chords and eighth notes. The middle staff has a whole rest. The bottom staff has a whole note. The system ends with a double bar line.

INDEX OF TITLES

Across the Sky the Shades of Night (F, G)	1, 2	Forth in the Peace of Christ We Go (D, E ^b)	4
All Christians Who Have Been Baptized	36, 37	Go, My Children, with My Blessing (F, G)	5
All Depends on Our Possessing	3	God Loved the World So That He Gave	50
All Glory Be to God on High (F, G)	1, 2	God of Grace and God of Glory (F, G)	10
All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall	55	God, Who Made the Earth and Heaven (F, G)	5
All People That on Earth Do Dwell	44, 45, 46	God, Whose Almighty Word	28
All Praise to Thee, for Thou, O King Divine	14	Gracious God, You Send Great Blessings	24
All Who Believe and Are Baptized	17, 18	Gracious Savior, Grant Your Blessing	25
Alleluia! Sing to Jesus	25	Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer (F, G)	10
Almighty Father, Bless the Word	44, 45, 46	Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face (C, D)	19
Almighty God, Your Word Is Cast	51	How Can I Thank You, Lord	38, 39
Awake, O Sleeper, Rise from Death	6	"How Shall They Hear," Who Have Not Heard (D, E ^b)	4
Be Present at Our Table, Lord	44, 45, 46	I Come, O Savior, to Thy Table	26
Before You, Lord, We Bow	11	I Lay My Sins on Jesus	32, 33
Blessed Jesus, at Your Word	30, 31	I Leave All Things to God's Direction	56
Christ Be My Leader	53	If Thou But Trust in God to Guide Thee	56
Christ High-Ascended, Now in Glory Seated	27	If Your Beloved Son, O God	36, 37
Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation	57	In His Temple Now Behold Him	57
Christ Is Our Cornerstone	11	Jerusalem, My Happy Home	29
Christ Sits at God's Right Hand (Em, Fm)	59, 60	Jesus Comes Today with Healing	3
Christ the Eternal Lord	12, 13	Jesus! Name of Wondrous Love	20
Christ, the Word of God Incarnate	24	Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness	50
Come, Let Us Join Our Cheerful Songs	34	Let Children Hear the Mighty Deeds	34
Come, Thou Almighty King	28	Light of Light, O Sole-Begotten	57
Crown Him with Many Crowns	12, 13	Lord, Bid Your Servant Go in Peace	29
Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice	36, 37	Lord God, to Thee We Give All Praise	15, 16
Dearest Jesus, We Are Here	30, 31	Lord, Help Us Ever to Retain	23
Eternal Spirit of the Living Christ (C, D)	19	Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant Way	51
Faith and Truth and Life Bestowing	24	Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now	21, 22
Father Most Holy	9	Lord Jesus Christ, We Humbly Pray	21, 22
Father, We Praise Thee	9	Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word	15, 16
Father, We Thank Thee (F, G)	47, 48	Lord of All Good (C, D)	19
For the Fruits of His Creation (F, G)	5	Lord of All Hopefulness	53

Lord of All Nations, Grant Me Grace (D, E ^b)	4	Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow	44, 45, 46
Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us	25	Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness	7, 8
Lord of Our Life	27	Preserve Your Word, O Savior	32, 33
Lord, Open Now My Heart to Hear	15, 16	Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing	p. 12
Lord, When You Came as Welcome Guest	29	Renew Me, O Eternal Light	23
Lord, Whose Love through Humble Service	7, 8	Salvation unto Us Has Come	17, 18
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling	25	Shepherd of Tender Youth	28
Mark How the Lamb of God's Self-Offering (F, G)	47, 48	Spread the Reign of God the Lord	20
My Soul Now Magnifies the Lord (D, E ^b)	58	Take My Life and Let It Be	p. 11
New Songs of Celebration Render (F, G)	47, 48	The Ancient Law Departs	pp. 9, 10
Now Thank We All Our God	35	The Day Thou Gavest (F, G)	49
O Blessed, Holy Trinity	41, 42, 43	The God of Abraham Praise (Em, Fm)	59, 60
O Blessed Light, O Trinity	41, 42, 43	The Gospel Shows the Father's Grace	21, 22
O Christ, Our Hope, Our Hearts' Desire	p. 12	The Law of God Is Good and Wise	15, 16
O God, Forsake Me Not	38, 39	The Lord, My God, Be Praised	35
O God, My Faithful God	38, 39	The Man Is Ever Blessed	52
O God of God, O Light of Light (C, B ^b)	40	The Star Proclaims the King Is Here (D, E ^b)	58
O God, Our Help in Ages Past	p. 10	The Temple Rang with Golden Coins	51
O Jesus, Blessed Lord, to Thee	44, 45, 46	This Is the Day the Lord Has Made	34
O Jesus Christ, True Lamb of God (D, E ^b)	4	Thy Body, Given for Me, O Savior	26
O Light Whose Splendor (F, G)	49	'Tis Good, Lord, to Be Here	pp. 9, 10
O Son of God, in Galilee	54	To Your Temple, Lord, I Come	20
O Word of God Incarnate	32, 33	We Know That Christ Is Raised	14
Oh, Blest the House (D, E ^b)	58	When in Our Music God Is Glorified	14
Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing	6	When in the Hour of Deepest Need	55
On Christ's Ascension I Now Build	36, 37	Where Charity and Love Prevail	54
On What Has Now Been Sown	11	Word of God, Come Down on Earth	30, 31
Only-Begotten, Word of God Eternal	27	Your Table I Approach	52
Praise Be to Christ (C, B ^b)	40		