Paisley

The Use of Instruments and Instrumental Music in American Churches
THE USE OF INSTRUMENTS AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN AMERICAN CHURCHES

BY

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

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AMERICAN CHURCHES

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OF BACHELOR OF MUSIC

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Brief sketch of the history of the use of instruments in the churches of Europe from earliest times</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. History of the introduction of instruments into American churches.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Puritan horror of instruments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Need for an instrument to sing with.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use successively of pitch pipe, bass viol, etc., and finally the organ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Persistence even at present of idea of profanity of instruments.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Development of the organ and organ music in America.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Improvement in structure of the organ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Prominence given in church services to organ solos, voluntary, postlude, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Other instruments used in church services.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Extent to which they are used at present.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Desirability of using them in church.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Comparative values of the various instruments for religious services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Discussion of advisability of a larger proportion of instrumental music in the services than is now used.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. The opinions of some prominent organists in this country on the question.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Character of the instrumental music used in church services in America.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Discussion of the function of instrumental music in the services, its present uses, and the purposes it ought to fulfil.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Church music in America has undergone an interesting and rather remarkable development since its beginning. Its evolution to its present degree of artistic attainment has been rapid considering that it has had only about two hundred and fifty years in which to grow, and especially if one remembers that the first attempts at music in the churches of the colonies were almost barbarous in their crudity. Some of them could scarcely be called music at all, owing to the restrictions placed by the standards of the Puritan code of worship. The prejudice against all beauty and art in church music checked advancement for the first few years, but when, a little later, some daring reformers finally succeeded in giving voice to their protests, a struggle toward improvement was begun which has continued ever since that time, and which, in spite of its handicaps, has achieved some praiseworthy results. Students of the history of our church music recognize as perhaps the most prominent landmarks in its development, the efforts and influence of William Billings in the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth, the remarkable achievements of Lowell Mason. The first concerts of the Handel and Haydn Society were also valuable stepping stones.

Our church music cannot at the present time be accepted as a finished product. In its beauty and its suitability, many thoughtful musicians agree that there is yet much to be desired. Compare an American service with some of the im-
pressive services that may be heard in Europe, and a lack will be felt which American musicians should study to supply. Perhaps our church music is too heterogeneous. Perhaps it includes too many different kinds, and attempts to cover too wide a field. In our churches one may indeed hear many styles and classes of music. Often operatic airs are played for the organ voluntary. The anthems by the choir are sometimes operatic in style, and the vocal solos may be extremely theatrical in their treatment and rendering, or they may remind one of a love song by their sentimentality and emotional coloring. It is true that very solemn and dignified music is performed, some of it earnest and spiritually uplifting in its effect, but it is also true that much that is heard is light and superficial. And who has not detected the "rag time" rhythms in some of the newest Sunday School songs? It cannot be denied that these things exist in our church music at present. But perhaps the character of the music performed is the result of the public demand for just that sort. If the American people are receiving the kind of music in church that best satisfies them, should their wishes be the law, or should their taste be educated to something better? And along what lines and by what methods of procedure can the "something better" be realized? These are questions which organists, choir-directors, and influential musicians all over the country should reflect upon. The trouble is that not enough attention has yet been given to solving these problems.

One of the most vital issues in connection with our
church music is the question of the part which instrumental music should play in the services. In the days of the Puritans, an instrument was an unheard of thing in church. Now, the organ is such an important factor in the services that choir and congregation would scarcely know how to proceed without it. Have we carried our dependence upon instruments too far, or, on the other hand, are there desirable possibilities yet unrealized in their use as a means of furthering the beauty of the service and creating a spiritual atmosphere? Is a solo instrument, which does not bear a message in words, a hindrance in producing a spirit of worship, or may it be as much of an aid as a vocal performance?

To one wishing to answer these questions satisfactorily for himself, it may be of value to him to know definitely to what extent instrumental music is given prominence in churches in the United States, and especially to learn the views of some influential organists concerning the use of instruments in churches. Therefore we have written to various organists of reputation who may be considered representative, and whose opinions merit our attention. The answers received were from widely separated sections of the country in most instances — some from the extreme West, some from the East, and some from the far South. They also include a variety of denominations. The inferences drawn from them will therefore be fairly accurate.

In carrying out this study of instrumental music in American churches, we shall first recall briefly the part that
instruments, from the beginnings of civilization, have taken as an adjunct to worship, and also trace the history of their introduction into American churches. Then we shall quote the information received concerning the extent to which the organ, and the orchestral instruments are employed in church services, and shall discuss the desirability of more instrumental music than is used at present, the comparative possibilities of various instruments for church use, and the character of the music generally selected for performance in church, all in the light of the opinions given by the musicians to whom these questions are referred.
I. BRIEF SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE USE OF INSTRUMENTS IN THE CHURCHES OF EUROPE FROM EARLIEST TIMES.

In primitive religious ceremonies instruments seem to have served one or more of three purposes. They sometimes supplied a need in helping the singers keep on the right pitch; often they regulated the steps of the dance; or, if used alone, they were employed to act upon the nerves of the worshippers, in order to stimulate a feeling of awe and dread. The Egyptians, whose knowledge of musical science surpassed that of all other nations at the time of their highest civilization, used a great variety of instruments in their religious ceremonies, and had an elaborate service. In the Hebrew religious ceremonies, instruments played a very important part. The Hebrews had many kinds, belonging to all three types, wind, string and percussion, but their chief function was to augment the volume of sound made by the singing and shouting of many voices. The trumpets and horns, which were so prominent in the temple service, were used to inspire a feeling of awe in the presence of the Deity. The Greeks also had instruments of many sorts, but the stringed ones were most popular, and of these there was a great variety. The one best known was the lyre. Their religious ceremonies were rarely held within the temples. The dramatic performances of the Greeks were an important part of their religious observance, and of these the greatest were at the Dionysic theatre at Athens, connected with the worship of Dionysius. The musical part was done by the chorus, generally with flute players, who accompanied
the dances. Often the lyre was played during the progress of the action.

In the early Christian church, hymns existed almost from the beginning, but instruments were disdained because of their profane associations. Since they were used in connection with pagan rites, and in the degenerate Roman theatre, they were looked upon with horror by the Christians.

After the separation of the Eastern and Western churches, sacred music passed through many phases, with the development of the Gregorian chant, plain song, and liturgies, till it reached the polyphonic period, and during all that time, no instrument was used except the organ, and it barely supported the melody of the voices, in the simplest possible manner. With the rise of counterpoint, however, the organ necessarily had a more difficult part to perform. Its structure gradually became more complicated, and the profession of organ playing took on greater importance and prominence. But it was not till about 1600 that the organ took the place of trained singers in accompanying the unison song of the congregation.

By 1750, when Bach and Handel were bringing church music to the high point of development it then reached, the artistic importance of organ music and organ playing was quite generally acknowledged. The organ has been ever since the chief, and usually the only instrument used in church services.
II. HISTORY OF THE INTRODUCTION OF INSTRUMENTS INTO AMERICAN CHURCHES.

When the Puritans came to America, they brought with them the antipathy to formality and ceremony which accompanied the revolt against the established church. All that was artistic or lovely was forbidden because of its association with the corrupted Church of England. For this reason all beautiful music was banned, and instruments were at first absolutely barred out. The pitch pipe was the first aid to the choir leader, and a little later came the tuning fork. These were accepted without much opposition, but there was a bitter struggle before the 'cello or bass viol, the next instruments to appear in church, received sanction as a godly accompaniment to hymns. The flute, oboe, bassoon, clarinet and viola each enjoyed some favor in their turn. There were differences of opinion, however, and many heated arguments were engaged in to prove that certain of these instruments were fit for religious services, and that others were devices of Satan. The introduction of the organ came last of all. The discussion over it began about 1704 in New York, and the first organ was installed there in 1741, in Trinity Church. Its use spread slowly at first. The Episcopal churches were more progressive in their music than most of the others, for they had not the prejudice against everything English which caused an avoidance of instruments, and also of the better class of music. The antagonism to the use of instruments lasted in remote districts to the middle of the nineteenth century. Even
at the present time in some isolated rural churches, especially in those of certain severe religious sects, the small cabinet organ which one would expect to find, is prohibited as tending to detract from the sacredness of the service.
III. DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGAN AND ORGAN MUSIC IN AMERICA.

The modern organ is the result of hundreds of years of gradual development. It was apparently of Greek origin in the time of Alexandria's eminence as a center of culture, but was early appropriated by the Christian Church as an instrument peculiarly fitted for its needs. During the next thousand years its construction remained very simple. About 1500 the arrangement of the keyboard became not unlike that which we have now, and many details of construction were improved. The history of the evolution of the organ till it became the triumph of mechanical skill and ingenuity we have in the modern instrument is a story well known to most organists, at least. Some of the recent improvements are the electric action, the electro-pneumatic action, double touch, increased compass of manuals and pedals, greater superiority in quality of tone, and greater variety, especial development of the string-toned stops and reeds. There may now be five manuals, and many "fancy" effects can be produced which were not hitherto obtainable.

Since the organ is the instrument of the church par excellence, the first question that arises is that of the prominence which should be given to organ music in church services, especially to organ solo music. Let us therefore examine the answers received from organists telling how much organ music is regularly performed in the services of the churches in which they serve.
Oakland, California

The Christian Science Church has in its order of service an organ prelude lasting about ten minutes. There is the usual offertory and postlude. One organ recital had been recently given in the church, but the organist spoke of it as a very unusual event, allowed only after special action had been taken by the church board.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

At the Trinity Methodist Church the organist gives a recital in place of the regular evening service twice each year.

The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in the same city has an eight or nine minute prelude which is listened to, the organist states, not as an entertainment, but as a part of the service, as a means of worship. Before lectures given at the church the organ is played in a recital which lasts from thirty to forty-five minutes. This organist also sends the following data from two other churches in Milwaukee:

At the Wesley Methodist Church, sacred concerts have been given once a month. In these, besides a solo quartet and chorus, organ solos were given, and also organ and piano duets. This church has special organ numbers for special services.

The Emmanuel Presbyterian, a very large church, has at certain seasons, twenty minute recitals before the services.

Birmingham, Alabama

In the South Highland Presbyterian Church, there are occasionally half-hour organ recitals preceding the Sunday
evening song service, but no special organ music in the services.

Chicago, Illinois

The Fourth Christian Science Church has no special organ music. The organist writes that in the Christian Science churches in her vicinity no organ recitals are given, excepting occasionally when a new church is opened.

Buffalo, New York

In the English Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity sacred concerts are given, especially in the Lenten season, in which organ solos are used.

Los Angeles, California

The First Congregational Church has special concerts with organ solos on the programs.

Atlanta, Georgia

Both the Trinity Methodist Church and the Jewish Temple have frequent organ recitals, but no special organ music during the regular services outside of the voluntary, offertory, and postlude.

Buffalo, New York

The Trinity Church (Episcopal) has only the voluntary and postlude, and occasionally an offertory, but no other organ solo music.

San Diego, California

The organist of the First Christian Science Church
states that there is never any extra organ music in the services. At Christian Science lectures it is customary to have the organ played for about half an hour while the congregation are assembling. Organ recitals are rarely given. The organist has previously played in Christian Science churches in Boston, and he has never known of any extra organ solo music in the services.

Jacksonville, Florida

St. John's Church uses the organ only for preludes, postludes, and voluntaries, and to connect by modulation the different parts of the service. Organ recitals are frequently given.

Hartford, Connecticut

The organist of the Center Congregational Church reports no use of the organ except as an accompaniment, and for voluntaries and offertories.

Summarizing the data received from these fifteen churches:

None of them have any organ solo music within the regular services except the voluntary, postlude, and offertory.

Only one has special organ music in services that are of a special character, such, perhaps, as Christmas or Easter services.

Five churches have organ music in the shape of short performances before the regular service. They are played while the congregation is assembling, and vary in length from eight minutes to half an hour. These concerts are evidently longer
than the usual organ prelude, which generally consists of but one selection.

Lectures in Christian Science Churches seem often to be preceded by a half hour or forty-five minute organ recital.

Seven churches give sacred concerts at various intervals; one of them regularly once a month, some only at special seasons, and a few only when a new church is opened. These concerts are either organ recitals or concerts in which organ solos are part of the program. One church only allows an organ recital to take the place of the regular service, and this happens only twice a year, on Sunday evening.
IV. OTHER INSTRUMENTS USED IN CHURCH SERVICES.

Very little information was obtainable as to the extent to which the various orchestral instruments are used in church services. Evidently they do not appear at all in most churches, for many of the organists to whom inquiry was made did not seem to think it necessary to state whether or not these instruments were used, but merely gave their reasons for saying they would or would not approve the introduction of certain of them into the services.

Lewis A. Vantine, organist of the First Christian Science Church of Milwaukee, sent a report from his own and several other churches in that city. In regard to his own he makes no mention of any instruments except the organ. But he has had knowledge of Christian Science churches in the extreme West which have had both the violin and violincello used as solo instruments in their sacred concerts. The St. Paul's Episcopal in Milwaukee sometimes uses the 'cello and organ together for prelude, offertory, and postlude. The Emmanuel Presbyterian church has at times twenty minute recitals before the services, performed by violin, 'cello, and organ. At the Wesley Methodist Church, also in that city, musical services are held once a month, in which the piano, flute, trombone, violin, 'cello, cornet, clarinet, and harp, have each been used as a solo instrument as well as in ensemble. All Saints' Cathedral, a high Episcopal church, generally uses strings and kettle drums at its Easter service, and the two leading Catholic churches in
Milwaukee also use them.

In Jacksonville, Florida, the St. John's Church has for special services, as at Easter and Christmas, violins, 'cellos, and trumpets, in addition to the organ.

The Center Congregational Church, Hartford, Connecticut, occasionally has a violinist and a harpist, and sometimes both are used with the organ. They are employed also as an obligato for solo or tutti voices, in addition to their use in the regular voluntaries and offertories.

Old First Presbyterian Church in New York City does not use instruments, except the organ, with the regular services, but they are introduced for special events, and at organ recitals. The organist states that in New York City only a few churches use orchestral instruments regularly, and that those which do have them use generally the harp, 'cello or violin.

From these reports, the conclusion seems naturally to be that other instruments than the organ are seldom used in churches, and that when they do appear, the violin, harp and violincello are most often chosen. One sometimes hears the opinion expressed that the 'cello is more suitable for religious observances than the violin, because of its deeper, mellower quality, which better adapts itself to the style of sacred music, and also because of the associations which the violin is likely to hold in many people's minds, with the ball room and concert hall. Cornets and trumpets are most often used in large churches or with large gatherings of people, when
a far-reaching, carrying tone is desirable, both for solos, and to sustain and unify the congregational singing.

Several organists expressed their opinion as to the desirability of the use of orchestral instruments. The views of some of them are quoted below.

Charles A. Sheldon, Municipal Organist at Atlanta, Georgia, does not approve the use of these instruments in church worship, except on special occasions, when he would not consider them out of place.

John S. Camp, organist of the Center Congregational Church, Hartford, Connecticut, writes that "If a good violinist, 'cellist, or harpist is to be had, there is undoubtedly an enrichment of the service, if the selections are good."

Lewis A. Vantine, of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Milwaukee, believes that "The organ is especially the instrument of the church, and does not combine well with other instruments." But in the liturgical churches, and those "depending on music to create an interest", he would favor the use of other instruments, especially the violin, 'cello, and harp.

William Carl, of the First Presbyterian Church, New York City, would not approve the regular use of instruments other than the organ. He would, however, favor a musical service once or twice a month in which instruments might be employed. He considers them more effective if used sparingly, and only for contrast.
V. DISCUSSION OF ADVISABILITY OF A LARGER PROPORTION OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN THE SERVICES THAN IS NOW USED.

The question asked organists whether they would consider desirable an increase in the amount of instrumental music in the regular services, received a variety of answers. The inquiry took for granted the supposition that all obstacles, financial and otherwise, should be removed, leaving the organist free to put as little or as much music, by organ and other instruments, into the service as he might think most effective.

Seth Clark, organist of Trinity Episcopal Church, Buffalo, New York, says that much instrumental music is not favored in Episcopal churches, for the ritual allows no opportunity, and no room for it.

Lewis A. Vantine, of Milwaukee, sees no objection to more instrumental music or to the use of a greater variety of instruments in special cases which constitute a real reason for them. But for the regular services he does not consider an increase in the amount of instrumental music to be desirable.

Walter F. Skeele, organist of the First Congregational Church, Los Angeles, California, would approve more extensive use of instrumental music.

William Belknap, organist of the Fourth Christian Science Church in Chicago, does not believe that Christian Science churches should have more instrumental music. He makes an interesting statement, and one that I have since heard from several others who have had a like experience. He says that
the most impressive service he ever attended was that of the Russian (Greek) Church in Paris, where no instrument at all was used.

John S. Camp, of Hartford, Connecticut, would not wish to enlarge the scope of instrumental music much beyond present limits. "Too much music of this sort", he contends, "may detract from the unity of the service and draw the attention of the worshippers from the real object of the service. There is after all a difference between a concert, even sacred, and a service of worship."

Bertha M. Foster, organist of St. John's Church, Jacksonville, Florida, writes that she favors instrumental music in so far as it increases the beauty and dignity of the service. "Let it take the place of vocal music if it makes a more beautiful service." But she adds that the church is no concert hall, and all thought of personal display must be set aside.

As a result of our investigation, made by writing these letters of inquiry to American organists, we are obliged to reach the conclusion that the organ is the only instrument in common use in churches, and that its part in the service is generally limited to certain prescribed performances, the prelude, offertory, and postlude, and accompaniments to hymns, anthems, vocal solos, etc. Moreover, most of the organists disapproved the idea of broadening the scope of the instrumental music beyond those limits.
VI. CHARACTER OF THE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC USED IN CHURCH SERVICES IN AMERICA.

Waldo S. Pratt, in his book "Musical Ministries in the Church", discusses the question of the purpose of the pure organ music in the services. He says there can be no doubt that music without words "has much power of suggestion to the imagination and the associative faculties, and so is capable of decided emotional and moral values." It is on this assumption that such music has become a recognized factor in the services of the church. He points out the importance of the organ prelude as a means of establishing an emotional unity and putting the "heterogeneous and inert congregation" in a state of mind such that worship is natural, and spiritual instruction welcome. An ideal prelude, he asserts, should have "obvious beauty and strength"; its presentation should be so positive as to exert a magnetic control over the listener; and it must be of such a character as to create an elevation of spirit. He believes in the desirability of introducing short instrumental interludes as connectives between certain parts of the service, in order to give a little space for "moments of quiet meditation and self adjustment". At the close of his chapter on "The Organ and the Organist", the author speaks with regret of the shameful manner in which both ministers and congregations help to defeat the purpose of the organ music, especially the prelude and postlude, by their inattention. It is indeed small wonder if the music selected for the organ
solos is chosen hastily and without careful exercise of taste and judgment.
CONCLUSION.

The investigation we have made by our letters of inquiry concerning the instrumental music used in American churches furnishes some definite information which may be of value as a basis for the study of possible solutions of the problem of raising the standards of such music. The facts obtained may be summarized briefly as follows:

Organ music in church services rarely extends in amount beyond the prescribed voluntary, offertory, and postlude. Short organ concerts often precede the regular services, and sacred concerts which include organ solos occur at frequent intervals in many churches.

Very few churches use orchestral instruments regularly, though they are quite commonly employed for special services, and in the sacred concerts given in the churches. The instruments generally chosen in such cases are the violin, violin-cello, and harp.

Only two organists out of the total number of whom the question was asked expressed themselves in favor of the use of orchestral instruments in the regular services, and these two would allow them only on certain conditions. It is probably fair to conclude that most organists would not approve their regular use.

The question whether organists desire a larger proportion of instrumental music in the services was answered
negatively by all but one.

Our last question, that of the quality of the music now being presented, is one that cannot be answered with great definiteness, since musical standards vary so greatly, and the factor of individual preference hinders the setting up of any absolute values. Each musician should give the problem earnest consideration and form his own answer. There can be no doubt that out of all the music that has been written, music that is permanent and truly great, there is ample material suitable for church use, from which choice can be made with desirable results. The great need seems to be for a recognition of the importance of this part of the church service, so that better training, more serious thought, keener spiritual insight, greater wisdom and refinement of taste will be required of the musicians who perform in our churches.