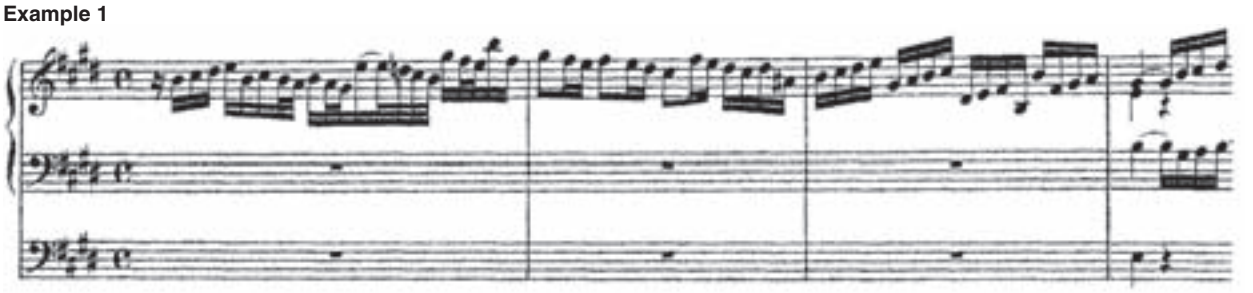
On Teaching
by Gavin Black

Buxtehude BuxWV 141 – Part 2: Fingering, pedaling, and practicing, part 1

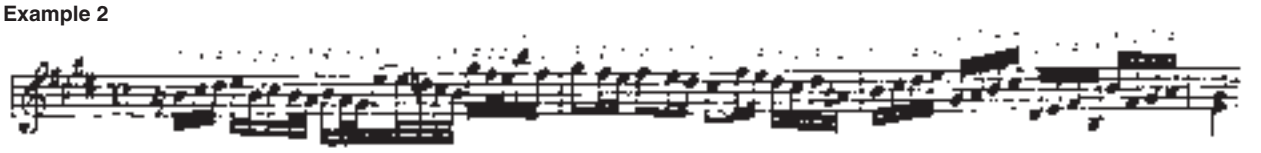
In this month's column, we will look at the opening section of the Buxtehude E major Praeludium in great detail as to fingering and pedaling, and outline ways of practicing that section. When we return to this piece, after beginning our look at the Boëllmann *Suite Gothique*, we will analyze the section that begins in m. 13 with regard to practicing and learning that section. These two sections offer several different textures and types of writing; each suggests a different approach to the very practical act of learning the notes. These textures include the one-voice opening, the multi-voiced but not strictly contrapuntal measures that immediately follow, and the rigorously contrapuntal—fugal—section that begins in the soprano voice in m. 13. Each of these textures recurs in this piece, and of course throughout the repertoire as well.

This and the next few Buxtehude columns will focus on the steps necessary to learn the right notes securely and efficiently. I will try my best to do this in a way that leaves open as many different interpretive possibilities as possible. In particular, I do not mean to take sides in any debate about how much to incorporate "authentic" fingerings and pedalings, or about what those are or might be in any particular case. That does not mean that I will not mention them or include them among the possibilities. As I hinted but did not quite state last month, I will not discuss any work on memorization. (I have, like many performers and teachers, somewhat mixed and complicated feelings about memorization, but I do not consider it to be a necessary or integral part of learning a piece well and performing it in a way that is both solid and artistically worthwhile. I will discuss memorization as an issue unto itself in a later column.)

Example 1



Example 2



Fingering

Since the opening of our Praeludium (see Example 1) is a monophonic statement of three rather long measures—49 notes—the first question that arises is which hand or hands should play it. (This foreshadows the most important practical question about any passage of keyboard music; namely, which notes should go in which hand. This question must precede detailed questions about fingering, and it is often overlooked or shortchanged by students. More about this later.) Since the passage is basically high—in the right hand region of the keyboard—and is probably not going to be played in a way that is prohibitively fast for one hand, it makes sense to start out by assuming that it is a right-hand passage.

However, it also makes sense to look for places where taking some of the notes in the left hand would make things easier. Each student can look the passage over and make this judgment for him- or herself. It might, for example, make sense to take the four sixteenth notes of the third beat of m. 3 in the left hand. These notes are lower than the rest and using the left hand to play them would put that hand in a good position to participate in playing the chord on the first beat of m. 4.

It is also possible to share the notes more or less equally between the hands, though I myself have not been in the habit of doing so in this passage. An advantage of sharing the notes between the two hands is that it is just easier to execute. This becomes more important the faster a player wants the passage to go. A disadvantage to dividing the passage up between the hands is that it gives more to think about in the learning process and to remember in playing, and probably takes longer to learn.

On a more positive note, an advantage to keeping the passage in one hand is that it is probably easier or more natural to project the overall rhetorical shape of the line when the shape and spacing of the notes is felt in the most direct physical way by the player. None of these considerations is absolute, and a teacher and student can think about them and work them out.

Just for the record, the fingering that I myself would use to play this passage is shown in Example 2. This is largely a common-sense and *hand-position-based* fingering. For example, the choice of 1-3 to begin the passage is entirely based on the way that my own fingers happen to fall over those notes, given my posture and my arm angle. (The arm angle stems from my preference for letting my elbows float out from my sides, which in turn is—for me—part of a relaxed posture.) The first four notes could just as well be played 1-2-3-4 or 2-3-4-5. The choice of 3 rather than 4 for the D-natural 32nd note late in m. 1 is designed to make it easier to reach the coming G#

with 4 (rather than 5). The point of playing that G# with 4, in turn, is twofold: first, to place the (long) third finger on the F# and the (shorter) second finger on the E; second, to make it easier then to reach the high B on the final half-beat of the measure with finger 5. (It would also be fine to play those notes—G#-F#-E—with 3-2-1.) For me, keeping the thumb off of raised keys is a guiding principle.

A reason for not playing the third beat of m. 1 with 2-1-2-5, etc. (but rather with 4-3-2-5, etc.) is that the gesture of turning the second finger over the thumb to play the G# moves the hand away from the upcoming (high) E, and therefore makes the playing of that note awkward—at least, that is how it works with my hand. In m. 3, the non-adjacent fingerings of each of the beat groupings are all designed to move the hand in the correct direction for whatever is coming up next.

This fingering is not intended to be a recommendation or even a suggestion: it is just how I would probably do it. There are many other ways. (Some of these might be *more* historically minded—with more disjunct or pair-wise fingerings—or *less so*—with substitution or more use of the thumb, even occasionally on a black note.) The important thing is that teacher and student work out a fingering that is appropriate for that student. Sometimes that process involves a lot of specific input from the teacher, sometimes little or none. A teacher should always look for ways to let the student assume increasingly more responsibility for working out fingerings. I tend to give very few specific fingering suggestions, but keep an eye out for spots where a student may not have succeeded in finding something that works well. In those cases, I will invite the student to analyze the spot again, perhaps with more input from me.

So in this case, once a fingering has been worked out, the most effective approach to practicing the passage is clear. That is, since it is only one line and one hand—at least, certainly one hand at a time—there is no concern about how to combine parts, and in what order. The plan is just to practice it. First, choose a very slow tempo: slow enough that playing the right notes with the planned fingering is actually easy. This might, for one player, be sixteenth note equals 60, for another 80, for another 45. For an advanced player or a good reader it might be faster, and it might be all right to think about a pulse for the eighth note even from the beginning. Anything is all right, as long as the student does not start with too fast a tempo. Then, having played the passage several times at this starting tempo, the student should play it several times a little bit faster, then a little bit faster still. At some point, the beat in the student's head will naturally shift from the sixteenth note to the eighth note, then to the quarter note. The crucial thing is not to get ahead of a tempo that honestly feels easy. This, if practiced rigorously, will lead to unshakeable security.

Meanwhile, the rest of the opening section is multi-voiced, a mix of not very strict counterpoint and homophonic writing. In this passage, the main practical question is which hand should play some of the inner-voice notes. As I mentioned above, this is extraordinarily important. I have seen students waste a lot of time or even make an easy passage almost unplayable by assigning notes to hands in an awkward way. This is usually caused by assuming too readily that the notes printed in the upper staff *should* be played by the right hand and those printed in the lower staff *should* be played by the left hand. In fact, there should never be such an assumption unless the two hands are meant to be on different keyboards, providing different sounds for different parts of the texture. In general, the two manual staves between them present a note picture, and we have ten fingers with which to play that note picture in the most reliable way possible.

In each of the measures in Example 3, there are notes in what is more or less the alto voice that are printed in the upper staff; some of these might be best played in the left hand. The notes that I have highlighted are those that I would choose to play in the left hand. Again, this is not by any means the only way to do it. The first criterion that I use in working this out is that "extra" notes should be placed in the hand that otherwise has less to do. That is at work very strikingly in mm. 7-8, and the beginning of m. 9, but also elsewhere. Sometimes hand choices are made based on the need to prepare what comes next. That applies here in m. 11, where I am not taking several notes in the left hand that could, or in a sense should, be in the left hand, so as to make it possible for the left hand to play the (tenor) E in the chord in m. 12. (There would be other ways to deal with this, involving substitution.)

Sometimes the notes of a passage in a middle voice can be divided between the hands just to make that passage easier—less inclined to get tangled. This is the case here in m. 5 and to some extent in m. 10. An overriding consideration is hand position: **how can notes be divided between the hands in a way that best allows each hand to remain in a natural, comfortable position?**

After the hand assignments have been worked out, the next step is to work out fingering. (In the process, some hand choices may be changed.) As always, fingering will depend in part on factors that differ from one player to another, including the size and shape of the hands, existing habits or "comfort zones," and artistic goals concerning articulation, tempo, and other matters. Example 4 shows a possible sample fingering for one of the more convoluted of these measures. As always, there is a lot here that could be done differently. For example, it could make sense to play the E that is the first note in the top voice of the first full measure with 5, or the D#/B right-hand chord later in that measure with 2/1. It would also be possible to take the A#-B in the first full measure with the left hand, probably with 2-1. The above is just one way of doing it.

Practicing

Once the fingering has been worked out, the next step is practicing. The principles of practicing are always the same, and they are both so important and so difficult psychologically (for most of us, certainly including me) that they can't be repeated too often: **break the music down into manageable units**—short passages, separate hands and feet; practice slowly enough; **speed up gradually and only when the unit being practiced is really ready for it**. In the case of the passage under discussion, one sensible way to divide things up might be as follows:

1) the right hand from the last few notes of m. 3 through the downbeat of m. 9

2) the left hand from the downbeat of m. 4 through the second beat of m. 9

3) the right hand from the first high B in m. 8 through m. 12

4) the left hand from the half note D# in m. 8 through m. 12, and

5) the pedal part, which I will discuss in its own right just below.

(Notice that the sections are designed to *dovetail,* not to bump into one another. This guarantees that practicing in sections will not cause fissures or awkward transitions to develop. This is quite important. It also applies to practicing across page turns.)

Each of these units should be played many times at, initially, a very slow tempo: as always, slow enough that it feels easy. For most students it would probably make sense, given the somewhat complex texture of this passage, to start with a beat—in the student's head or from a metronome—that will represent the 32*nd note*, so that each of the sixteenth notes will receive two of those beats. This 32nd-note beat might initially be at 100, or 80, or 120: whatever feels comfortable. Then each unit should be sped up gradually.

(Some musicians express concern that starting the practicing procedure with beats that represent very short notes—many levels down from the "beat" suggested by the time signature—will result in playing that lacks a sense of underlying pulse, that is too divided into small fragments. However, it is insecurity as to the notes, fingerings, and pedalings that is by far the greatest cause of rhythmically unconvincing playing. At the early to middle stages of learning a passage, the best thing that we can do to predispose that passage towards convincing rhythm is *whatever will get the notes learned the most securely*. The use of very small note values early in practicing is so removed from later performance, in time and in feel, that I have never known it to come back and haunt or influence the quality of a that performance.)

Some variation is possible in the mode of reconnecting the separate hands. In general, the slower you are willing to keep things, the more promptly you can let yourself put components of the whole texture together. There is some speed at which any given student could indeed skip the step of separating hands. For most of us, in moderately or very difficult passages, this tempo is very slow indeed, and in general it is not a good idea to aim to do this. (Not a good idea partly because it taxes our boredom threshold and partly because separate-hand practicing also allows us to hear things clearly.) In general, if each hand feels really solid at a certain tempo—ready in theory to be *performed* by itself at that tempo—then it is possible to put those hands together at a somewhat slower tempo. How much slower varies from one situation to another. The overriding principle is a familiar one: when you put the hands together, the tempo should be such that the results are accurate and the experience feels easy—no scrambling, no emergencies, no near misses.

Pedaling

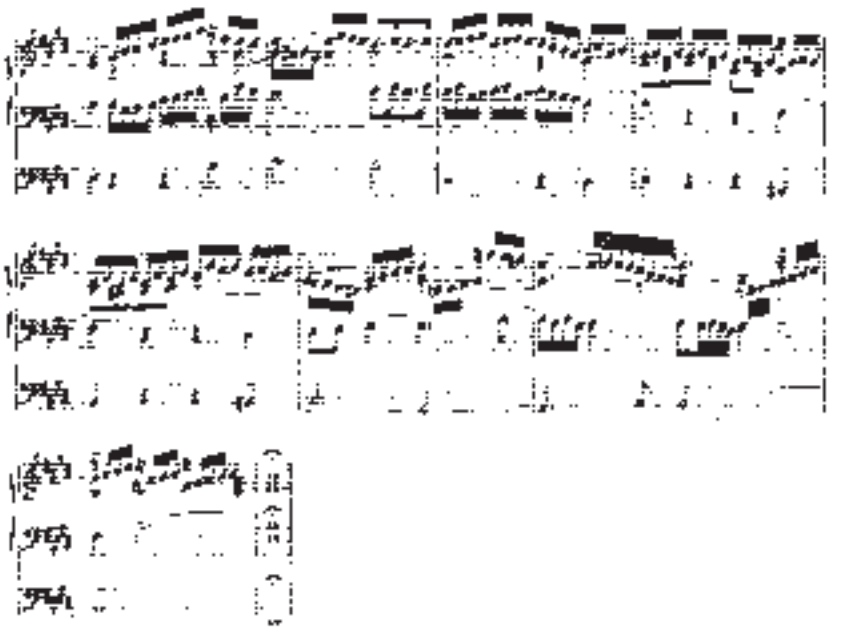
The pedal part in mm. 4–12 of this piece is simple though non-trivial. I would play the fifteen pedal notes with the following feet, all toes:

l-r-r-r-l-r-l-r-l-r-l-l-r-r-l

Other possibilities involve, for example, playing the first note of m. 5 with left toe (crossing over) or playing the second note of that measure with right heel; or playing some of the two-note groupings that span bar lines (between mm. 6–7, 7–8, 8–9) with one foot, either all toes or toe and heel. Once a student has decided on a pedaling, he or she should play through the pedal part slowly, not looking at the feet, until it is second nature. Since the note values are all long, getting the pedal part up to tempo will not take as long or go through as many stages as it would with some other passages. However, it is extremely important not to shortchange the practicing of even this fairly simple pedal line. This is all the more true because in general *lower* notes and *slower* notes play the greatest part in shaping the underlying pulse and rhythm in organ music. This pedal line is both.

When the pedal part seems very solid, then it is time to begin practicing it with the left hand. It is often true—for most players—that "left hand and pedal" is

Example 3



Example 4

the combination of parts that requires the most work. Therefore it should be started as soon as each of those parts is ready. It is also often true that once left hand and pedal is very secure, and the right hand part is well learned, and the two hands together are secure, then the whole texture will fit together without too much trouble. However, it certainly never hurts to practice right hand and pedal as well. In the case of this section, there are a couple of places where the strongest rhetorical and rhythmic interaction is between the something that is being played by the right hand and the bass line in the pedal. This is the case, for example, with the transition from m. 3 to m. 4, and also the middle of m. 10. Practicing the right hand and pedal together will draw the attention of the ears to these spots.

Next month we will start looking at the Boëllmann, concentrating on understanding the overall shape of the piece and looking for connections and contrasts. ■

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Music for voices and organ

by James McCray

Choral with solo violin

> Music religious hearts inspires;
> It wakes the soul, and lifts it high,
> And wings it with sublime desires,
> And fits it to bespeak the Deity.
>
> Joseph Addison
> *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day*

Whenever I program an anthem that uses at least one solo string player, I tend to have this rush of pomposity, but then I remind myself of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) that kept 14 court orchestras, and each one had 500–700 performers. Nevertheless, programming a work in which one or more strings are added to the church choir usually has very positive results. By the time of Buxtehude, in the middle of the 17th century, the violin was not only common, but also considered "the king of instruments." Furthermore, there are only six of his vocal works that do not use at least one violin.

With today's rapidly shrinking budgets, the possibility of having a small string orchestra to accompany the choir has become almost non-existent. The glory days of the Baroque, where a small orchestra was considered essential for the Sunday services, have long faded into history. And with that loss also went a musical style that demanded a higher quality of original repertoire, so the church has suffered on both levels. But it should be noted that many of today's congregations really have no desire for that "stuffy highbrow" music, and it is only a small minority who long for a return to those glory days of the past.

A violin, when played well, brings a special soothing beauty to the music. The emotion that a solo string can express is immediate and undeniable. Church clearly is a place where people are seeking comfort, so enhancing a choral work with that warmth of sound surely seems like a good idea. To assist with this, the reviews below all feature the use of a solo violin with choir, but do not require a full orchestra. Consider programming a choral work with an additional solo violin at least once or twice a year. Your congregation (and choir) will be delighted.

***In the Light of His Glory and Grace*, Mark Shepperd. SATB, keyboard, and violin, Augsburg Fortress, 978-0-8006-6426-8, $1.75 (M).**

The text and tune by Helen H. Lemmel (1863–1961) has been arranged by Mark Shepperd. The text is based on 2 Corinthians 4:18, with the choral parts on two staves and the violin part on a staff above them; a separate violin part is included on the back cover. The expressive music is syllabic with some minimal divisi. Neither the keyboard nor the violin part is difficult; this would be useful for most church choirs.

***Healer Divine*, Raymond H. Haan. SATB, organ, violin (or viola), harp (or piano), and optional assembly, GIA Publications, G-6386, $1.60 (E).**

There are four short verses, with the last using a descant for the women while the congregation sings the basic melody; their part is included at the end for duplication. A part for viola is included on the back cover, but is not in the choral score; violin and harp (piano) parts are available from the publisher (G-6386VLN, $2.00, and G-6386INST, $2.50, respectively). The organ part is on three staves and has registration suggestions. Each of the choral verses is only eight measures in length; easy, expressive music.

***Praise Him, King of All (Lauda anima mea Dominum)*, Antonio Caldara (1670–1736). SATB, 2 solo violins, and organ, Mark Foster Music Co. (Shawnee Press), MF 131, Print on Demand (M).**

The choral score has the two violin lines above the choral parts; their music also may be ordered separately (MF 131A and B). At times the violin doubles one of the vocal lines, which usually are contrapuntal. There are brief solo passages, often with some melismas. Both Latin and English texts are provided for performance. This motet is based on Psalm 145 and is among Caldara's most popular choral works; excellent music and highly recommended.

***Come Down, O Love Divine*, John Leavitt. SATB, keyboard, and violin, MorningStar Music Publishers, MSM-50-5401, $1.35 (E).**

After an instrumental introduction the men sing the first verse, followed by the full choir on the second verse. An instrumental interlude modulates for the third verse. The violin plays an obbligato, often in its upper register. Choral parts are on two staves and are set like a hymn. This is a useful Pentecost anthem.

***O Lord Be Gracious*, Carl Heinrich Graun (1703–1759). SATB, keyboard, and violin (or flute), Cantate Music Press, no number given, $1.50 (M).**

This, the opening chorus of Graun's cantata for the 11th Sunday after Trinity, was originally scored for small orchestra and chorus. The violin part is very easy, consisting of a cantus firmus in half notes; its music is on the back cover but is not indicated in the choral score. The text is in German and English and the choral music is very contrapuntal; the keyboard part consists of repeated, pulsating chords.

***How Can I Keep from Singing*, Taylor Davis. SATB, violin, oboe, and piano, MorningStar Music Publishers, MSM-50-2545, $2.25 (M).**

Subtitled *My Life Flows on in Endless Song*, this setting from the Luther College Music Series features an attractive folk melody that begins in unison and develops into four parts with the violin/oboe playing throughout. The choral music is on two staves with a relatively simple keyboard part. This is a sure winner that is not difficult.

***We Three Kings*, James Laster. SATB, keyboard, violin, and finger cymbals, Augsburg Fortress, 978-0-80006-6418-3, $1.90 (M).**

Here is that Epiphany work for next year; it combines the traditional melody and text with one by 19th-century poet/musician John Henry Hopkins. Choral parts are on two staves and are not difficult. The violin obbligato line is heard throughout, but the finger cymbals are used very sparingly; a very useful setting.

***Here, O My Lord*, Russell Schulz-Widmar. Two-part, keyboard, and optional violin (or oboe), Augsburg Fortress, 978-0-8006-6422-0, $1.50 (E).**

The two parts are in treble clef. There are four verses in this setting of the Horatius Bonar text, with the first in unison. The keyboard and violin parts are also quite simple, and this anthem could be sung by children.

New Recordings

***New Vintage—Music for Trumpet and Organ*. Keith Benjamin, trumpet; Melody Steed, organ; Gabriel Kney organ, 4 manuals, ca. 56 ranks, Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral, Kansas City, Missouri. Gothic Records, G-49127; <www.gothic-catalog.com>.**

Samuel Adler, *Clarion Calls* (1995); Donald Freund, *Breezeworks* (1997); Eugene O'Brien, *Brunelleschi's Machines* (1998); James Mobberley, *Icarus Wept* (1995–98); Stephen David Beck, *Eine Kleine Yiddishe Spaß* (1998).

The title refers to the concept of "new music in old bottles," since the recording consists of recent compositions by American composers, played by the familiar combination of organ and trumpet. Drs. Benjamin and Steed perform as a duo under the name "Clarion." The five mostly lengthy pieces were composed from 1995–1998.

Best known of the composers represented is probably Samuel Adler, whose virtuosic *Clarion Calls* begins the disc. Of its four movements, the exciting final "Celebration" is very effective. The single-movement, 13-minute *Breezeworks* by Donald Freund follows, commissioned by Clarion, as apparently were all numbers played here. It contains many ideas and is well worth hearing, both for the musical interest and the very accomplished musicianship of the performers.

Brunelleschi's Machines by Eugene O'Brien is intended to evoke machines of the Renaissance and later ages, according to the notes, realizing that the organ itself is a complex machine. The amazing *Icarus Wept* by James Mobberley introduces various tape sounds into the mix. Of the five movements played here, "Eleven Feet from the Sun" is self-explanatory. As for "Strap on Your Lobster" and "Getting Waxed," don't ask! I doubt if you have ever heard anything like this; I certainly had not.

Stephen David Beck's *Eine Kleine Yiddishe Spaß* (A Little Yiddish Joke) is patterned on traditional klezmer music. It certainly fulfills the composer's intent "to compose music very different from what one usually hears in church." Technique of the highest order is required for any one of the pieces on this remarkable CD, perhaps best enjoyed by listening to one or two of the lengthy compositions at a time. Both performers are to be congratulated for this considerable musical accomplishment.

***Joie de Vivre*, David Briggs, organist. The Presbyterian Church, Danville, Kentucky; 1999 Taylor & Boody organ, opus 35. Chestnut Music; <www.david-briggs.org.uk/rec.php>.**

Prelude and Fugue in C major, BWV 547; *Schmücke dich, O liebe Seele*, BWV 654; *'Little' Fugue in G minor*, BWV 578; *Concerto in A minor*, BWV 593; *Jesus Christus, unser Heiland*, BWV 689; *Trio super Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend*, BWV 655; *Kyrie Gott, heiliger Geist*, BWV 671; *Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland*, BWV 659; *Kommst du nun, Jesu, vom Himmel herunter*, BWV 650; *Toccata* [sic] *and Fugue in D major*, BWV 532.

CDs of all-Bach organ pieces certainly are in no short supply these days, played both by excellent performers, as is the case here, and by those who perhaps should not have bothered. The location of the instrument used here may be un-