The ORGANIST'S ETUDE

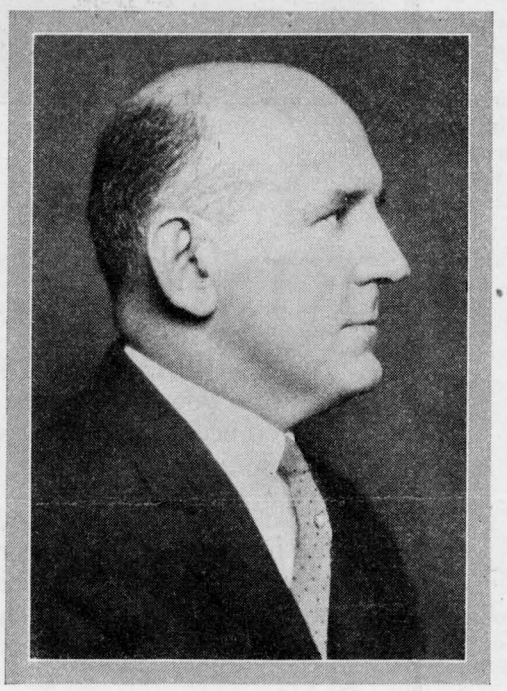
Edited for May by Ralph Kinder

Eminent Organist and Writer

IT IS THE AMBITION OF THE ETUDE TO MAKE THIS ORGAN DEPARTMENT "AN ORGANIST'S ETUDE, COMPLETE IN ITSELF"

Twenty Vital Points in Organ Study

By RALPH KINDER



RALPH KINDER

Ralph Kinder, organist and composer, was born at Stalybridge, England, January 27, 1876. At five years of age he was brought to Bristol, Rhode Island, where he became a chorister in Trinity Church. He studied organ and theory with the choirmaster, Rev. W. R. Trotter, and began acting as organist in 1888. He later had instruction from Hamilton Macdougall, and then went to London for a year of organ with Edwin H. Lemare and theory under Drs. Pearce and Turpin. Mr. Kinder has appeared as concert organist in almost all the States. Since 1899 he has been organist of Holy Trinity Church of Philadelphia; and his compositions for the church service are widely used.

I. *Don't Neglect Piano Practice*

ONE OF THE greatest shortcomings of many organ students is that the study of the piano is neglected. During my preparatory years, I studied piano much longer than the organ; that is, I had many more lessons on the piano than I had at the organ.

The digital technic that one must have for fine organ playing can be far better acquired at the piano keyboard than on the organ manuals.

The new type of organ, with its highly developed electric action, makes demands upon the wrist. In order to train the wrist to meet these demands, a special kind of technic must be acquired. This can be best accomplished through practicing scales and octave studies with the staccato touch. Altogether too few studies of this kind are given to the average pupil.

In fact I have found that scales in tenths, arpeggios in various forms and Czerny, Cramer, Mosheles and Chopin studies are even more valuable practiced on the piano than the prosaic studies of Rink or Stainer, practiced on the organ.

The boy or the girl who cannot play the piano well is not likely to get very far at the organ. A great many students foolishly put off their study because they have no organ to practice on. But practice time may always be very profitably spent at the piano.

II. *Slow Practice*

IN ORGAN study as in piano study the curse of practice is "hurry." The best pupils are those with temperament. Such pupils are impatient and anxious to get ahead, but they must be made to realize the enormous advantage of slow practice; particularly in organ playing, it is absolutely impossible to produce clear, artistic, systematic, finished playing if there is any suggestion of careless or hurried practice. The teacher can preach his head off with the impetuous temperamental pupil and still the pupil when playing alone will rush ahead and ruin his own chances.

The only scientific governor of such pupils is the metronome. Once the pupil is converted, his own common sense will show him that "making haste slowly" really has its significance—that he can actually get ahead far faster, with a little ticking monitor invented by Maelzel, than he can without it.

III. *Continual Review*

ONE OF the great blunders in organ study is the practice on the part of some students of permitting the works they have studied in past months to slip out of their fingers and out of their heads in favor of new compositions. The students should be able to play the compositions they learned last year just a little better this year. They should never be "wiped off the slate," as it were.

Review, review, review! Do not give all your attention to the construction of your musical building and permit the underpinnings to be weakened. An old piece should be played as often as a new one to insure real and worth-while progress.

IV. *Practical Knowledge of Harmony*

THE LACK of a good working knowledge of practical harmony obliges the student to take almost twice as long to get results as would be necessary if he took part of his time in getting down to hard, actual work to learn the backbone of music. This is of really great importance.

The mind should be trained in advance of the fingers. The various chords of music should be as familiar to the student in all their different spellings as his own name. Chords are musical words, and until the student can recognize them and instantly understand their relations and uses, he is still in the "alphabet stage" in musical progress. Harmony should be studied at the keyboard and with one who knows its *uses,* not just its theories.

V. *Organ Construction*

THE ORGAN is the most complex of all musical instruments. One may play the violin, the piano, and even the organ without knowing anything about the machinery inside the case; but, in the instance of the organ, such ignorance is a terrible handicap.

I wonder how many students realize the necessity of learning about the overtones or harmonics in music, in order that they may know why the organ builder used for example a 1-foot stop in his specification. The average student knows that a 5-rank mixture sounds five tones. Does he know which five tones or harmonics are intensified when he uses this mixture stop? Does the student know that there are eleven harmonics above a root note and also some harmonics below? The teacher who explains to his pupil that an 8-foot tone is the foundation tone in organ construction and that a figure other than an "8" on a stop is for the intensification of the harmonics of the 8-foot tone, has explained something about organ construction that is very essential to intelligent organ playing.

The student of the organ should, at any event, be able to make minor repairs, such as ending ciphers, for instance. If he does not know how to do this he may ruin a whole recital program or a church service. It is well, too, whenever possible, that he be present when the organ is being tuned. Much can be learned from the organ tuner.

VI. *The Importance of Silence*

SOME OF the greatest effects in organ playing are made by silence followed by sound. For instance, a gun fired on a mountain top will make far more impression than a gun fired in a foundry. Silence is the canvas upon which the musician paints. For instance, one of the finest effects in organ playing may be introduced just before the final chord of a great organ composition (let us say the Widor "Symphony Number VI," first movement) by a pause of, say, three seconds.

Most pupils have very little poise. They are afraid to make pauses long enough to effect climaxes. They rush from chord to chord, and their playing lacks character. "Silence is golden" in organ playing, even as in speech.

VII. *Purposeful Study*

IT IS very hard for some pupils to realize that the teacher gives certain studies with a definite design. He is inclined to think that everything that is given him is given him only to tickle his musical consciousness and to please his ear. Teachers, you know, prescribe studies like medicine. No really worthwhile teacher asks the pupil to do anything that he knows he can do well.

He picks out those compositions from which the student should learn the principles of good organ playing. The repertoire comes later.

VIII. *Learn Everything Well*

NO composition should be dismissed until it is absolutely mastered. One of the astonishing things about some organ pupils is that they want to rush on to new compositions long before they have mastered the compositions on which they are working.

Progress on the organ does not at all consist of getting a hodgepodge lot of half-learned pieces. It is far better to play one piece in a masterly fashion than a hundred in a bungled style.

Edward d'Evry, one of my teachers at the Brompton Oratory in London, started me on Reubke's *Ninety-Fourth Psalm Sonata,* and I worked on that by myself for fourteen years (not consecutively) before I performed it in public.

IX. *Appearances*

ORGAN students often make a great mistake in judging the performer or the student by his appearance. Often the student who comes to the organ studio in a five hundred dollar fur coat may look down on the student in a shabby ulster. The student should come to realize that all art is a great fraternity. The one thing that counts is ability.

Some students imagine that they can buy their way to success. The fact of the matter is the only currency that can buy success, particularly in as exhaustive a study as organ playing, is "work." In fact, the student who is thinking of his social importance, his means, his expensive clothes, his titles and his superior rights as an individual is often eclipsed by the humble student in very moderate circumstances.

X. *Praise Others*

THE STUDENT should learn from his fellow students and praise the aforesaid students for their effort. A prominent musician once said that he could tell a good musician, even before hearing him play, by his remarks about other musicians.

It is an old saying that those who do not mind their own business rarely have any business to mind. The worth-while students has enough on his own hands to succeed without spending any time picking faults in the work of others. If you can not find anything to praise, better keep still. More than this, if you want to do any criticizing, criticize your own playing. If you are really a worthy student you will find plenty to criticize.

XI. *Adaptability*

ONE OF the first things that an organ student must learn is adaptability. This is due to the nature of the demands likely to be made upon all experienced players. That is, while pianos in general are all pretty much alike, with some slight difference in tone and touch but with no radical keyboard difference, organs are

subject to an enormous variation in size, arrangement of the stops, couplers, pedals, manuals, and so forth. Moreover, the same organ played in two rooms might convey a wholly different acoustical effect. Therefore the student should learn to aim at similar effects on all of the organs he encounters. On an organ in a large building a passage might be played effectively staccato—whereas the same passage on an organ in a smaller building might sound more effective when played legato.

My own organ, for instance, has forty stops. Some of my pupils practice on a twelve-stop organ. They are urged to try to get the same effect on their organs as they achieved at the console of their teacher's organ. This may involve an entirely different touch and choice in registration, but it is mastery of just these things that makes the study of the organ so very fascinating.

XII. *Do Not Lose Your Poise*

OBVIOUS blunders are fatal in organ playing. Everyone, even the greatest master, makes mistakes—striking wrong pedals, pulling wrong stops, turning two pages at once, and so forth. But it is the legitimate part of the pupil's playing technic to know how to cover a mistake without any outward sign of annoyance. I have known pupils in public recitals who actually advertise mistakes by their disconcerted behavior. This, of course, is a great shortcoming. If the pupil makes a mistake, he has painted the notes on the canvas of time. They can never be changed, because the time is gone. The only thing to do is to forget the blunder and try not to make a similar error again.

XIII. *Anticipation and Preparation*

THE STUDENT must learn that two of the greatest secrets of organ playing are anticipation and preparation. He must make up his mind, long beforehand, just what stops he wishes to use and must plan to get them out in advance, so that, when he comes to the spot, he will not have to hold a chord with one hand for five minutes and also hold the audience in suspense in the meantime, while he fiddles around the console. He can aid this condition by regulating his personal affairs so that he is habitually forehanded. A careless, procrastinating character can hardly expect to become a successful organist. By this I mean that the person who is always putting things off and is never on time, always late, always postponing, is likely to develop in his own playing these same traits and really not understand what is the matter with him.

XIV. *Orchestration Makes Itself Evident In Organ Playing*

ORGAN students should aspire to orchestral effects. The organ is three-fourths orchestra. There are four families of tone-strings, flutes, reeds and diapasons. The theater organ has also added the percussions.

The analogy to the symphony orchestra is also apparent at all times. Lucky is the organ student who has had a good course in orchestration and has had the privilege of attending fine orchestra concerts continually. In these days the organ student has an enormous advantage in being able to hear fine orchestras over the radio or on the phonograph.

If he develops his text in this way he will learn to color his performance with judgment and beauty. He must, at least, be able to detect and identify the various instruments from their tone quality, so that he may simulate them in his playing when such effects are demanded.

XV. *Organ Touch*

THERE are three important actions in performing any note or chord: first, how the key is struck; second, how the key is held; third, how the key is released.

Far too little attention is given to this subject. With some it amounts to "hit the right key and let it go at that." With others it is as it should be—the correct organ touch *first*, the correct key *next*.

XVI. *Practice Difficult Passages*

THE STUDY of the organ is a huge undertaking. The student must economize upon his time. Over and over again I have noticed students who have practiced in such a way that they have wasted hours. Practice should be aimed at accomplishment and never at mere repetition. If the student can play a thing perfectly well he should not spend his time upon that; he should spend it mastering things that are obviously difficult.

We do not have to practice sleeping or walking, once we have mastered the ability. Why idle away precious moments at the organ in doing something that can already be done perfectly well? Concentrate on real difficulties and save valuable time.

XVII. *Rhythm and Accent*

ONE OF the great difficulties of organ students rests in proper rhythm and accent.

Rhythm in playing the organ is far more difficult than in playing any other instrument, because of the difficulty in making accents; and yet both rhythm and accent can be made at an organ as clearly as at other instruments. I often wonder if music is not lifeless when rhythm and accent are absent. Touch and accent are preached by me from Monday to Saturday, for without them the core of real organ playing has not been reached.

XVIII. *The Teacher Only a Guide*

THE BEST teacher in the world is at most a guide. The pupil's progress depends largely upon the time he spends in front of the keyboard of his own piano or organ, hard at work.

He should take home from the lesson a kind of mental photograph which should last at least until the next lesson. The pupil who goes to the highest priced teacher feeling that the teacher's reputation will make him a good musician without practice is wasting time and money.

XIX. *Originality an Asset*

THE teacher points the way; the pupil must travel by himself. Since no two organs are alike, the pupil must learn that the organ is an instrument of compromises. He must not take every registration mark, every note, every rest seriously. There is no instrument which calls for more taste and practical "horse sense" than the organ. Think for yourself! Act for yourself! Never fail to remember that the

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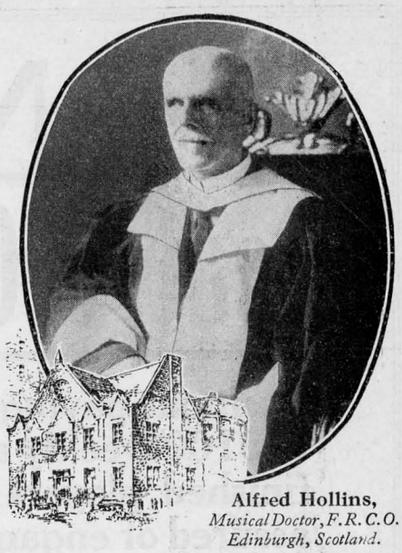

Alfred Hollins,
Musical Doctor, F.R.C.O.
Edinburgh, Scotland.

Alfred Hollins *says of the* Kilgen

"It was a great pleasure to give a recital on your fine Organ in the Third Baptist Church, St. Louis. The voicing throughout is good and even, and the action very prompt in both attack and release. I am also very glad to have had the opportunity of trying some of your smaller instruments, and I find the same care bestowed on every detail of these as well as in your larger and more important ones."

(*Signed*) Alfred Hollins.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Hollins, like many another famous organ master, was particularly impressed by the uniformity of tone and quality in *all* types and sizes of Kilgen Organs. For, in the least as well as the greatest, there is but one Kilgen quality—the best that three centuries of organ-building has taught.

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composer may never have seen your organ. It is, therefore, "up to you" to decide what stop to use and, perhaps, what key to play, and whether to make it a quarter or half-note.

XX. *Patience*

"PATIENZA," shouted the old Italian masters. Have patience! One cannot learn in two months that to which the teacher devoted two years. It is impossible. Yet some students foolishly attempt it. If results are not immediately forthcoming, let not the student be discouraged! Let him not be disconcerted! Let him keep right on working harder than ever! Time is short. Two or five years fly around befor one knows it. Let him console himself by looking back and seeing passages that he was unable to play two years ago easily performed to-day.

Great organ playing, man's great and seemingly endless work—it cannot be mastered like a new trick of cards.