



A Wealth of Accompaniment Options

By Michael Schultz

Church acoustics consultant Scott Riedel is in the habit of saying that an ideal geometric shape for a worship space looks like a shoe box turned on its side. Horizontally it has a definite long and short axis, and vertically it has enough ceiling height to provide a proper reverberation. Carpet is minimal, if not absent. If newer, the floor might be tile or finished concrete; if older, it likely is hardwood planks. I've been in a few sanctuaries like that, including the one I first frequented as a young child. Today, when I take a seat in a live acoustic space like that, I look forward to enjoying one thing in particular—you can hear the people sing.

Liturgical ensembles

These days, more often than was the case a decade or longer ago, the seat I take in the worship space is occasionally a 24" high, four-legged stool. A guitar is on my lap and a music stand in front of me. Nearby are an amp, a piano, and a mic stand or two for the cantor(s). I occasionally play with the ensemble at Trinity Lutheran in Waukesha, WI, or I'm on the road for a conference or Bible class, sampling psalms, hymns, and ritual music from the new hymnal resources.

Years ago, it was rare for me to participate from my four-legged stool. While serving as a parish pastor for 24 years, my guitars and amp most often stayed at home. Part of that was for personal reasons. I had no desire to "feature myself" as far as playing guitar for worship. Nor were either of the two congregations I served necessarily ready for that kind of instrumentation. They had been in "organ-only" mode for virtually all of their existence. Piano was not used for congregational singing, and I would still say that, in most cases, a single acoustic guitar, even when amplified, is not well-suited to lead congregational singing.

But there was another issue, one that Don Chapman (hymncharts.com) wrote about: "In 2002, as a new music director at a church plant, people in my congregation were complaining that I wasn't

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including hymns in my praise sets. I wasn't including them because back in those days, there weren't any! So I started arranging my own." I don't have raw data to cite, but anecdotally, I get the impression that two to three decades ago, Lutheran musicians who played instruments other than the organ were in some cases channeled toward commercial Christian arrangements, in great part because those were the only arrangements available for their instruments. There were, of course, a few hymns found in Lutheran hymnals, known by Lutheran worshipers, sung across a broader swath of Christianity, and arranged for ensemble instruments. But twenty years ago, just a few.

The scope of this article does not cover the difference between commercial worship songs and familiar hymns. But if it did, a key point would be the difference between songs that are more suited to trained singers and hymns that can be sung by the whole assembly. I, of course, have a bias, and it's not just *against* worship songs that tend to be more soloistic and *in favor of* hymns that are familiar and were written for group singing. I am strongly biased toward having the congregation predominantly (not exclusively) sing the hymns, psalms, and ritual songs that have been curated and published by our church body.

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In recent decades, that's where the rub has been. Liturgical ensemble arrangements of "our" materials have not been available in any kind of abundance at all. By no fault of its own, our publishing house has not published individual hymns arranged for a liturgical ensemble. In the past, the few resources in this genre were typically found in collections in which some titles would not be found in our hymnal. Such a small supply of resources can, of course, result in the same kind of overboard repetition that some Lutheran congregations have run into with non-Lutheran arrangements—twenty songs that get repeated every six or seven weeks. I hope that's not an inaccurate caricature; it's what I have heard that some of our congregations have discovered. Oddly enough, it's the very same thing that congregations can run into when using liturgical ensemble arrangements of our curated and published materials—there isn't enough to go around, i.e., to go around a whole church year's worth of worship planning.

The new hymnal project will change that. And that's not just because we think it's a good idea to balance organ-led services with piano/guitar/ensemble-led services. That's not just to put to good use the skills of the pianist/guitarist/instrumentalist the Lord has brought into our membership (though we certainly want to be good stewards of such gifts). That's not just because some think that the ensemble can sound more upbeat or because they subjectively prefer it over the organ (and why wouldn't we want to keep them happy?). No, our plan to provide a wealth of curated materials for a liturgical ensemble is because God's grace in Christ has made us want our sacrifice of praise to be the best it can be.



The icons on pages 2 and 3 come from a collection that will be used throughout new hymnal resources.

One element of "best" can be objectively defined. *Can you hear the people sing?*

With organ music, the servant on the bench needs a keen sensitivity toward the interrelated items of organ registration, worship space acoustics, number of people in the sanctuary, intended mood of the service, and worshipers' familiarity with the materials that are on the musical docket. All of that and more will come under consideration as the organist goes about his or her task of supporting the song of the assembly. It's no different when the liturgical ensemble is providing the worship music. Sufficient rehearsal, congregational cueing (especially for introductions or inter-stanza turnarounds), dynamics governed by number of worshipers present, attaining the proper mix through the soundboard, mic levels and overall volume level of amplified voices and instruments properly adjusted, small ensemble or large—there are plenty of things to look out for. But one consideration rises to the top of the list: can you hear the people sing? The Lord has good hearing. Be it barely audible or raising the roof, he will always hear the praise of his people. The question to ask is, "Can the people hear each other?"

Can the people hear each other?

Whether you bring together two musicians or ten in an ensemble, share with them that our goal is to let the people's song be heard, because that's where the general scripture truths and the specific gospel message reside—in the lyrics of the assembly's song. Instrumentalists need sensitivity to volume control and willingness to be a team player (aka, trusting the sound tech to get the mix right). Cantors need to understand (and also the congregation by educating them on this point) that they are not singing primarily *to* the assembly or *for* the assembly but *along with* the assembly. Instrumentalists and vocalists serve to strengthen the assembly's song.

So back to the opening paragraph of this article. I'm in a sacred space where music is going to lift the life-giving gospel around the room, direct it into ears, and anchor it in believing hearts. I look forward to hearing a room full of people singing the gospel. To pull this off with an organ, there are pallets and pallets of music to enliven the pipes and fill the room with the godly music of saints and angels. God be praised for that! Three volumes of our new hymnal products (*Accompaniment for Hymns*, *Accompaniment for the Psalter*, *Accompaniment for Services*) will bring together an abundance of those organ arrangements for the hymns, psalms, and rites we have compiled. By comparison, rather than pallets and pallets, it seems we may have not much more than a partial filing cabinet drawer of arrangements for the liturgical ensemble. Let's see what we can do to address this situation.

Accompaniment Editions

As you may have noticed from mock-ups at christianworship.com, the accompaniment editions are 8.5x11, portrait orientation,

spiral-bound. For the most part, they contain only keyboard arrangements. In a number of cases, however, there are both organ settings and piano settings. For a majority of the hymns that were originally written for piano, an idiomatic organ or general keyboard arrangement was added. For some of the hymns that are regularly played on organ, an idiomatic piano arrangement was added. (See below about many more piano arrangements, along with auxiliary instrument arrangements, available in *CW: Musician's Resource* [CW:MR]).

In addition to upscaling and reformatting the pew edition hymns to fit on a letter-sized page (which, incidentally, make the music easier to read for some), many of the hymns in *Accompaniment for Hymns* have multiple keyboard settings: alternate key; alternate setting; modulation to a festive final stanza; soloed organ setting; alternate piano or organ arrangement. For a total of 683 hymns (656 in the pew edition and 27 appearing only in *CW: Service Builder*), *Accompaniment for Hymns* offers an additional 447 auxiliary keyboard settings of the various types just mentioned. Similarly, *Christian Worship: Psalter* includes 470 musical settings of the 150 psalms. *The Accompaniment for the Psalter* offers 93 additional keyboard settings. Some of the piano arrangements in these accompaniment editions will have corresponding instrument files in CW:MR.

Besides accompaniments for the lectionary psalms that appear in the front of the hymnal pew edition, *Accompaniment for Services* includes the keyboard scores for all of the ritual music. This includes The Service: Settings 1-3, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline. Settings 2 and 3 of The Service and the Compline setting have both a complete organ setting and a complete piano setting. The piano arrangements of Setting 2 (*Mass of Creation* by Marty Haugen) are simplified piano arrangements, intended to make the piano setting accessible to the vast majority of pianists. More complex arrangements will be available in CW:MR. Auxiliary brass/timpani arrangements for the organ setting and auxiliary ensemble arrangements for the piano versions of Settings 2 and 3 will be available in CW:MR. Additional settings of The Service, available only in *Service Builder*, will be similarly resourced with organ and piano settings and auxiliary instrument files available in CW:MR.

Accompaniment for Hymns offers an additional 447 auxiliary keyboard settings of various types.

Additionally, a greatly expanded aspect of ritual music in the new hymnal suite of materials is the music of the Gospel Acclamation. (See a sample at christianworship.com/resources in the "look inside" section.) Formerly called the Verse of the Day, the Gospel Acclamation consists of an opening and closing alleluia refrain with a seasonal or proper verse of the day in the middle. *Accompaniment for Services* provides 230 pages of Gospel Acclamation music. Each of the three settings of The Service has its own Gospel Acclamation setting, and there are an additional 21 Gospel Acclamation settings for the entire church year. All of these acclamations are



written for general keyboard (organ or piano). Some acclamations use additional instruments. For example, Irish Alleluia, published by GIA and arranged by Richard Proulx, has a version for organ, brass, and timpani, but it can be performed just as well with piano, guitar, and other instruments. A 7x10 spiral bound edition (*Christian Worship: Gospel Acclamations—Cantor's Edition*) will be available for presiding ministers, cantors, choir members, and instrumentalists. (This edition allows users to avoid illegally copying the keyboard edition for singers and other musicians.)

Musician's Resource

Most of the music for the liturgical ensemble will reside in *Christian Worship: Musician's Resource*. The NPH website will add a section dedicated solely to searching for, reviewing, and purchasing auxiliary keyboard and instrumental music that supports the hymnal and psalter. Thousands of pages of music will be available at this location.

For example, the most basic liturgical ensemble is a piano accompaniment with another instrument playing the melody. If that other instrument is a clarinet or trumpet, additional music is needed since these are pitched at B-flat rather than C. To match keyboard music, trumpet music has to be raised a whole step. If the keyboard music is in F Major, the trumpet part must be in G Major. We have already done the foundational work on over 500 hymns, so that the various instruments which play at different pitches have a musical score to work with the pew edition setting of the hymns. Each SATB hymn ends up with 16 pages of transpositions. That means we already have 8000 pages of instrument transpositions for the pew edition hymn settings.

But most of the *Musician's Resource* is comprised of arrangements that go beyond the pew edition settings. Not always but most frequently, the liturgical ensemble is looking for music that has been arranged with other instruments in mind, not just "SATB hymnal versions." The *Musician's Resource* will include a variety of these resources: vocal descants; instrumental descants; lead sheets; alternate choral stanzas; alternate harmonizations; full



A small liturgical ensemble provided music for a COVID-era Easter service recorded in the seminary chapel. That video is still available here: <https://wels.net/together-at-the-empty-tomb-this-easter>. The socially distanced musicians performed in an empty chapel without a congregation present.

Another excellent companion video to the topic of this issue is at welscongregationalservices.net/worship-led-by-a-modern-ensemble. Some of the new songs and arrangements in both videos are included in the new hymnal project.

modern arrangements; modulations (transitioning to a higher key for a festive final stanza; roughly 5% of the hymns in *Accompaniment for Hymns* have such an optional modulation).

More often than not, the liturgical ensemble is looking for full modern arrangements. One strong advantage of these arrangements is how they can fit almost any size ensemble. These arrangements may have parts for eight different instruments, but they also work if you have only piano and guitar. We are aiming to offer a full modern arrangement for every hymn, and eventually more than one. Since CW:MR will be a living resource, we can continue to add to it long after the hymnal has launched in the fall of 2021.

Christian Worship: Supplement (2008) included Divine Service II, a service that made use of metrical canticles. These are songs of the liturgy where the text has been recast as rhymed verse and the tune is that of a familiar hymn. *Christian Worship: Service Builder* will include several dozen metrical canticles for those who wish to build such a service. Our goal is to arrange also these metrical canticle hymn tunes for liturgical ensembles. Such arrangements can, of course, serve double duty for both a hymn text and a metrical canticle.

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Looking forward

Liturgical worship makes use of the church year with its appointed lectionary and propers, it has a regular celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar, and it follows a historic order which includes the ancient texts of several songs that tell the story of our deliverance through Christ. We use the term *liturgical ensemble* because the ensemble is supporting the congregation as the congregation participates in the liturgy. The ensemble may consist of anywhere from two to ten or more instrumentalists and anywhere from one to four or more cantors. So the term *liturgical* helps establish some healthy parameters: this is a group that assists the assembly in singing the ritual music (canticles), the Psalm of the Day, the Gospel Acclamation, the Hymn of the Day, and other selected hymns.

It would sadden me if I were writing this article solely because there might seem to be a trend toward piano/guitar/instrument ensembles and away from organ accompaniment. With a fitting registration, the organ does a magnificent job of supporting the song of the assembly. The many organ resources that are queued up for our new hymnal will continue this fine heritage. I wholeheartedly support both organ accompaniment and ensemble accompaniment. I also do not hesitate to say that we need and are preparing more resources for the latter. I look forward to having a six-stringed instrument on my lap and an abundance of music on the stand before me, composed for a liturgical ensemble. I look forward to accompaniment editions and a *Musician's Resource* that put those ensemble scores in front of a host of WELS instrumentalists, affording them the high privilege of leading God's people in song.

And soaring high above all that music, I most look forward to hearing assembled voices clearly singing that Jesus Christ is the LORD, Our Righteousness (Jer. 23:26).

Correction

The printed version of the previous issue, *Worship and Outreach*, was missing its second paragraph. Please reference the online version at worship.welsrc.net if this issue is used for group discussion or in a Bible class setting.