

In the wind . . .

by John Bishop



John Bishop

What's in a name?

or,
Say what you mean.

JULIET:

O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou, Romeo?
Deny thy father, and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

ROMEO [Aside]:

Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

JULIET:

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is not hand, not foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.¹

This might be one of the most recognizable moments in all of Shakespeare's plays. What childhood is without some recognition of Romeo's wherefores? And how many times has the sweet-smelling rose been misquoted?

I spend a lot of time writing. Each month I spend most of a day writing this column. Before I start, I've settled on a subject and have rattled it around between my ears for several days. In my work with the Organ Clearing House, I spend considerable time writing to describe the scope, details, and terms of proposed projects. The committee of a church might ask me to write up a description—I wonder how many committee members realize that the exercise might take a couple days of desk time.

Because I spend so much time working with words, I'm sensitive to (often annoyed by) their misuse—especially when that misuse finds its way into what might be called the official lexicon. Here's an example. The word *anniversary* is defined as “an annual

event.” (I'm taking all my definitions of English words from the *American Heritage Dictionary* published by Houghton Mifflin Company in 2000.) By extension, *annual* is synonymous with *yearly*. So when I first heard someone refer to the “five-year-anniversary” of something, I thought it sounded funny. Considering the root meanings of those words, isn't that something like saying “five-year-year?” I think it's correct to say *fifth anniversary*. It's clear, concise, and it's not redundant. But I guess I'll lose that battle. Even commentators on National Public Radio routinely get this wrong—according to them we've just had the *sixty-seven-year-anniversary* of the attack at Pearl Harbor. (If you agree with me about this, help me start a revolution.)

Any specialized field has its own language. My brother is a scientist and university professor working in genetic research. During his last visit, he was busy with a student's dissertation—I glanced at a couple pages and knew instantly that if those were the secrets of the universe they'd be safe with me. I couldn't understand a single sentence.

The organ is one of those specialized fields rife with jargon. My spell-checker lights up like the proverbial Christmas tree when I type a stoplist. (In fact, it doesn't even approve of the word *stoplist*.) My brilliant brother would be just as lost trying to understand what I wrote as I was with his student's paper. As I've gotten to know the pipe-organ jargon—thirty-five years in the vineyards will at least get you started—I've realized how specific and how misused it can be. For example, a drawknob marked *Prestant 4'* means something very specific, and if I find one on an organ installed in a chamber with no façade, I consider it a misnomer.

The name *Prestant* comes from the Latin *prestare*, which translates roughly as “to stand in front.” So by definition a *Prestant* comprises the pipes of the façade. If you take the name literally (and I suggest we should), a *Prestant* does not stand behind anything. If the layout of the windchest has other stops in front of that four-foot *Principal*, call it something else—there are plenty of choices. But wait! If the division in question has a *Principal 8'* you can't use *Principal 4'* because *Principal* implies the principal pitch of the division, and a division can only have one *Principal*. If there's a *Principal 8'* you call your four-footer *Octave* because that's what it is. Sometimes a rose by any other name isn't quite a rose. Or more accurately, a rose is a rose is a rose, but to equate with this organ-babble, horticulturists would need different words for the rose in front and the rose in back, even if both were red.

Werkprinzip is a precise organ term that describes an organ that explains itself. In such an organ you can tell by looking at the façade what the various divisions are, where they are located, and what their principal pitch is. In the Pedal you might have *Principal 32'* and *Octave 16'*, in the *Hauptwerk* (literally “main work” or principal division) you would



Klais organ, Hallgrímskirku, Reykjavík

find *Principal 16'* and *Octave 8'*, and in the Positiv, *Principal 4'* and *Octave 2'*. In all three divisions, you could replace the name *Principal* with *Prestant* if the pipes were in the façade.

If the Positiv division is located on the balcony rail behind the organist's back, you could call it Rückpositiv (German) or Rugwerk (Dutch) as *rück* or its variations means “back.” A German hiker carries a Rucksack. (The German language has some exquisite precision in its nouns—for example, a *Handschuh* (“hand shoe”) is a glove.) The hole in this theory would be the organ with a Positiv division on the balcony rail and a detached and reversed console. In that instance the organist would be facing the altar and therefore Positiv, with the bulk of the organ behind him. In that case I suppose we'd coin the name *Vorpositiv*.

The photo above is a postcard from our daughter, whose travel plans included a layover in Reykjavík, Iceland—such a good girl to go into a church and buy a postcard! It shows the Klais organ in the Hallgrímskirku in Reykjavík, a great example of a *Werkprinzip* organ. Assume that the door beneath the organ is about eight feet tall and use it for scale.

With that, we know that the tallest pipes in the side towers are the Pedal *Prestant 32'*, the three towers of the upper case house the pipes of the Great (*Hauptwerk*) *Prestant 16'*, and the façade of the Rückpositiv is the *Prestant 8'*.

After I wrote the previous paragraph I went to the website of Klais Orgelbau in Bonn and found the specification of the organ (<http://www.orgelbau-klais.com/m.php?tx=86>). I'm proud to say that I got it just right, except that Klais publishes that the name of the division played by the lowest manual is *Positiv* (correct, although Rückpositiv would have been more explanatory), and those out-in-front *Principals* are called *Praestant*, also correct—simply a variation on *Prestant*.

In a three-manual American Classic organ such as those built in the mid-twentieth century by Aeolian-Skinner or M. P. Möller, we expect to find two enclosed divisions, Swell and Choir. Can we have Swell shutters in front of the Choir division? I think we should call them *Choir shutters*. Or if it's bulky to have two different kinds of shutters in the organ, let's simplify it and call them all *expression shutters*. I'm reminded of a succinct comment made to me by friend and mentor George Bozeman in 1976. I was preparing to play a recital on the Bozeman-Gibson organ in Castleton, Vermont, and George was coaching me: “If they named the division after hearing you play, they'd have called it *Crush*, not Swell.” His simple comment still informs my playing.

Individual organs are conceived and designed based on national and historic styles. We easily recognize the difference between a nineteenth-century French organ and a seventeenth-century Dutch organ. A stoplist that begins *Prestant 16'*, *Octaaf 8'*, *Roerfluit 8'* implies something different from one with *Montre 16'*, *Diapason 8'*, *Flûte à Cheminée 8'*. Both describe *Principals* at sixteen and eight and an eight-foot Chimney Flute, but one is Classic Dutch, the other romantic French. In this context it would be technically correct to have *Montre 16'* and *Roerfluit 8'* in the same organ, but in my opinion it

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would be a messy cross-reference that could imply stops that don't belong in the same organ.

In French, *haut* means "high" and *bois* means "wood." *Haut* also implies excellence. *Haute cuisine* is food cooked to a high standard, *haute école* (literally high school) refers to expert horsemanship. And by the way, the English word *haughty* ("Scornfully and condescendingly proud") comes sarcastically from the French *haut*. *Hautbois* is literally the "high wood" of the orchestra—in English we say *Oboe*. We wouldn't be surprised to see *Hautbois* and *English Horn* on the same stoplist, but *Hautbois* and *Cor Anglais* would be more linguistically precise.

As I write, I'm checking myself by flipping through various stoplists, and as I'm in a literal frame of mind I find many inconsistencies—instances of multiple languages used in the same instrument—and I realize that it is often intentional. After all, many organbuilders work hard to instill eclecticism in their instruments. They mean to imply the French charac-

teristic of the *Hautbois* with the originally American invention of *French Horn* or *English Horn* (both invented by American organbuilder Ernest Skinner). They mean to have both Swell and Positiv divisions in the same instrument, though the names imply differing origins.

This allows the organist the flexibility to play baroque or romantic music with authentic registrations, assuming of course that the skill of the organ's voicer provided a roster of stops that blend well with each other even if they are representing different historical and geographical styles. The rich harmonic development of the baroque Roerfluit would not blend well with the creamy Skinner Diapason, but both stops can be modified in character to approach each other in style.

The purist will say that this diminishes the quality and effect of the organ. If an instrument tries to cover too many styles it may fail at all of them, following the adage *Jack of all trades and master of none*. Conversely, installing a singularly spe-

cialized instrument in a modern church may not be serving well the needs of a congregation. After all, there is more to life than Sweelinck and Scheidemann, and while the modern churchgoer may be happy to hear one or the other once in a while, too much and too often will start to wear. Reminds me of A. A. Milne's (1882–1956) touching reference to the haughtiness of assuming that someone likes something:

*What is the matter with Mary Jane?
She's crying with all her might and main,
And she won't eat her dinner—rice pudding again—
What is the matter with Mary Jane?*

*What is the matter with Mary Jane?
I've promised her dolls and a daisy-chain,
And a book about animals—all in vain—
What is the matter with Mary Jane?*

*What is the matter with Mary Jane?
She's perfectly well, and she hasn't a pain;
But, look at her, now she's beginning again!—
What is the matter with Mary Jane?*

*What is the matter with Mary Jane?
I've promised her sweets and a ride in the train,
And I've begged her to stop for a bit and explain—*

*What is the matter with Mary Jane?
What is the matter with Mary Jane?
She's perfectly well and she hasn't a pain,
And it's lovely rice pudding for dinner again!
What is the matter with Mary Jane?*

Have I gone off the deep end, equating Scheidemann with rice pudding? I hope you get my drift!

These reflections on terminology may seem fussy, but pipe-organ jargon is a highly developed and precise language. If organbuilders use it thoughtfully as they create new instruments (or rebuild old ones), they provide insight for the musicians about how the organ is laid out internally. If the musicians use and understand the terminology well, they play their instruments with a deeper understanding of what's going on inside—of how the sounds are made and how they blend.

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But accurate use of the jargon is not the most important thing. I refer back to this column in the October 2008 issue of *THE DIAPASON* in which I urged my fellow organists to listen. Listen to how the stops blend. Build your registrations because they sound good. You can and should be informed by knowledge of various historical styles of organs and organ music, but if you always and only play by established rules of registration, you'll likely be dipping back into the rice pudding. A composer may have specified a list of stops, or research may tell you that a Cornet is the combination of stops of five pitches (8', 4', 2½', 2', 1½'). But does it tell you that all five should be flutes, or can you substitute a principal at 2' for a brighter sound? If the five stops together produce a dark and heavy sound, try the various combinations. Leave out the four-foot. Try substituting something else for the eight-foot flute. No one will clap you in irons. It has to sound good.

§

With all this huffiness about precise language, a glaring error in the December 2008 issue of this column (page 12) sticks in my craw. I wrote about riding the subway in New York listening to a woman with an electronic keyboard grinding out some of the great classics of church music, and I referred to the Broadway Express as the "1" train. In fact, the Express trains are the "2" and "3." The three lines run on the same tracks up and down Broadway, but the "2" and "3" stop only at express stops (42nd, 72nd, 96th, 168th), while the "1" fills in the blanks. If you want to go from the Church of St. Mary the Virgin (marvelous Aeolian-Skinner organ) on 46th Street to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine (a great rick for the organ-tourist), you can take the "2" or "3" from 42nd (Times Square) to 96th and transfer to the "2" or "3" for two stops to Cathedral Parkway (110th Street). The transfer is easy—you get off one train, walk about fifty feet across a platform on to the express train. Then you walk two blocks north on Broadway, turn right onto 112th and walk a quiet block past housing for Columbia University, facing the façade of the cathedral the whole way. I hope my mis-speak didn't lead anyone astray. ■

Notes

1. William Shakespeare (1564–1616), *Romeo and Juliet*, excerpt from Act II, Scene II.

On Teaching

by Gavin Black



Practicing I

When I was a graduate student at Westminster Choir College in the early eighties, there was a piece of graffiti written over the door leading to the basement corridors where the organ practice rooms were found. It said: **Take Responsibility: Really Practice!** I was always impressed by that. For one thing, it was the only graffiti that I had ever seen, or have ever seen, that had *practicing music* as its subject. But also it seemed to point to a real truth about practicing and about the act of being a musician. Unless you do what it takes both to develop your overall skills to the fullest and to learn—really learn—the pieces that you are working on, you haven't really taken responsibility for your contribution to the world of music, or for your contribution as a musician to the world.

Failure to practice enough or in the right way can have a number of consequences. The most basic one is that a given piece will be learned only partially or with inadequate security, and will fall apart in performance. The lesser case of this is that a piece will be insecure enough that it can only be kept from really falling apart by a kind of tense focus on getting the right notes. This will in turn make the performance sound tense and will rule out, or at least limit, any freedom or spontaneity. Inadequate practice can both force the performer to fall back entirely on consciously chosen interpretive gestures—rather than allowing those gestures to be modified on the spur of the moment to reflect the

conditions of the particular performance or a new feeling or idea—and make the execution of those interpretive gestures tentative and unconvincing.

Learning a piece extraordinarily well—by practicing it well and practicing it enough—greatly increases (perhaps paradoxically) the chance that the performance of that piece can have the feeling of an improvisation to it. One hallmark of good improvisation, in music, public speaking, conversation, or anything, is that the next thing that happens comes without hesitation. This is what practicing makes possible in playing an already-composed piece. Furthermore, practicing, even if it is primarily aimed at making the practical side of the mastery of a piece as secure as it can be, also involves repeated exposure to the whole picture of what is going on musically in the piece. The performer who has the ability to play a given piece accurately without having really practiced it (that is, someone who is a really good sight-reader) always runs the risk of giving an offhand and superficial performance of that piece. (I hasten to add that this certainly does not always happen, but it can happen and sometimes does.)

Analysis and study of the musical content of a piece can happen before, during, and after the process of rigorously practicing the notes. The particular kind of contrapuntal analysis that I wrote about in several recent columns is intended to take place for the most part before the practicing of the complete note-picture of the piece with appropriate fingerings and pedalings. However, since it is carried out largely through playing, it is also a form of practicing, and part of its purpose is to make the subsequent practicing both easier and more effective.

Analysis along other lines—melodic analysis of non-contrapuntal (melody-and-accompaniment) passages, harmonic analysis, etc.—can be done prior to the start of nitty-gritty note practicing, and also ought to make that practicing easier and more effective. This happens, of course, because if the mind already knows to some extent what is coming next—and if that is also, according to some musical logic, what *ought* to come next—then the fingers will tend to find it more directly, with less hesitation or fumbling. Then, during practicing, the sound and feel of the notes will reinforce whatever was learned by analysis, if that analysis was sound, or perhaps suggest ways in which to modify it.

Real practicing also ought to be (most of the time) fun and (always) absorbing. It should also be the case, as much of the time as possible, that a player finds efficient, effective practicing to be deeply satisfying because it so clearly leads to real accomplishment. A teacher can greatly help a student to feel this way by making the relationship between practicing and real learning very clear, and by teaching practice techniques that work.

Indeed, practicing that does not seem to be working—where there is a goal but that goal is not getting any closer, or where there isn't a clear goal and over time nothing much seems to be happening—is so discouraging and demoralizing that experiencing too much of it will often lead to a student's giving up, discovering that he or she isn't really that interested in the instrument after all. This is a shame, because without the experience of practicing well, a student actually doesn't know what the instrument is, what the repertoire is, what the experience of playing music can be.

So, what is good practicing? What works under what circumstances? Part of the answer, as it applies to organ and harpsichord, comes from J. S. Bach. He said about organ playing that:

"All one has to do is hit the right notes at the right time, and the instrument plays itself."

When I first read this comment, I assumed that Bach was being flippant, either in a way that was meant to be dismissive to whomever he was speaking with, or in a way that was meant to be funny and modest. However, I have since realized that he probably meant something specific. In most musical situations, the performer has to create aspects of the content of the musical sound directly. This is obviously the case with singing, since the performer creates and controls everything about the sound, both sonority and intonation. With non-fretted string instruments, the performer has complete responsibility for intonation, and with bowed string instruments, responsibility for shaping the sound of the note over its entire duration. With blown instruments, the player likewise has the job of creating and sustaining the sonority, and has some responsibility for intonation.

Organ and harpsichord come much closer to fitting the following description: if anyone or anything pushes the key down, the note will sound. (This is also true of the piano except in the very important area of volume, and it is surprisingly untrue of the clavichord, but that's a subject for another day.) Of course on some organs and most harpsichords, the player can influence subtleties of the beginnings and ends of notes—attacks and releases—by subtle variations in technique. This can be very important artistically, but it does not define as big a proportion of what the player has to do or to think about technically as similar subtleties do with some of the types of instruments mentioned above. I believe that Bach was pointing to this distinction: other musicians have to create their sound and tuning, we keyboard players just have to push the keys down and the instrument does the rest!

This means, first of all, that the physical act of playing—the thing that we are practicing when we practice—can be thought of in simple mechanical terms, more so with keyboard instruments than with most others. This leads to another fruitful paradox. The more we approach the act of practicing as if it were a simple *mechanical* task, the more *artistic* control we will end up having over the end results of that task.

Also, and most fruitfully of all, the physical act of playing organ or harpsichord can be slowed down to any extent whatsoever without changing its essential physical nature. This, again, is not true of most means of producing music. A singer or wind player can only slow down a little bit without changing the relationship between the musical note-picture and the act of breathing. This is a crucial change. A player of a bowed string instrument cannot slow down too much without changing the relationship between the note-picture and the bowing. This is almost as crucial. An organist or harpsichordist can slow down any passage any amount and still be executing a genuine slow-motion version of the final desired result, however fast that result might be intended to be.

In general, any physical gesture that someone can execute at a given speed, can be learned to be played faster: much faster, if the process of learning is ap-

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