



# Church Music Help Sheets

**“O” Series – for Organists  
Organ Music for Voluntaries**

**O6**

*This sheet is intended to help organists who have had little or no tuition in organ playing, but who are required to provide music other than hymns on a pipe or electronic organ in the context of Christian worship.*

Most church organists are expected to play “voluntaries” before and after a service of worship and perhaps at other times, such as during Holy Communion or during the offering.

If you search through your **piano music**, you will find that most of it is unsuitable for this purpose because (a) it relies on the sustaining pedal for effect (see Help Sheet O1) and (b) because the piano keyboard is so much longer than the organ manual that you hands run out of keys.

Concentrate your search on composers who wrote originally for the harpsichord but whose works are commonly played on the piano today, eg Bach, Handel, Scarlatti etc and you may turn up something really useful.

Another resource is your **hymn book**. A hymn tune which is unfamiliar to the congregation may make a good voluntary in the right place.

Sooner or later, however, you are going to want to extend your repertoire by **buying something new**. Unfortunately, few music retailers, even in the capital cities, hold stocks of good organ music for you to look at before you buy, but they will order for you provided you know exactly what you want, including the title and the name of the publisher.

Then how do you get to the stage of knowing exactly what you want? Three possible lines of approach are:

(a) Attend one of the National Church Music Summer Schools held in January each year and organised by the RSCM Australia branches in rotation. Representatives of Fine Music in Melbourne or The Open Book in Adelaide usually attend and arrange a display of church music for participants to browse in and buy. (The week-long Summer School programmes vary, but usually include some exciting choral singing and a choice of tutorials on various aspects of church music, including organ playing.)

(b) Borrow music from an organist with an interesting repertoire and assess whether your skills are adequate to master any of it. If so, order it through a retailer or direct from the publisher. Do not photocopy it! This is illegal.

(c) Internet. Many publishers of church music have websites. Visit them. If you see something that interests you, follow the instructions regarding whether you may download or must purchase it. Some of them are free.

**Footnote:** Unless you have pedal skills, the music you are looking for is organ music for “manuals” - not “keyboard”. There is plenty of this around. Although the organ pedalboard was invented a few centuries ago, it took some time to be included in instruments throughout Europe. Even today composers continue to write for manuals-only instruments (and hands-only organists) when it suits them to do so.

Copies of any of these Help Sheets may be obtained from the Secretary of RSCM Australia, ACT Branch:  
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Phone/Fax 6281 6666; E-mail: [act.sec@rscmaustralia.org.au](mailto:act.sec@rscmaustralia.org.au)

The ACT Branch has no objection to further copies of this Help Sheet being made for distribution to people who might be helped by them, provided they are made without amendment.

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