

Practice Organs

1) What kind of organ?

Try to find a pipe organ with 2 manuals and a 30 or 32 note pedalboard, in good working condition. Other factors worth considering are:

- a) A comfortable and prompt action (the link between key and pipe); ideally mechanical or tracker action.
- b) Adjustable bench, especially if you are of short stature.
- c) Church heated in winter.
- d) Easy access arrangements.
- e) If the church has a busy timetable, a reliable booking system.
- f) Your security: church staffed or locked while you are practising.

It is well worth taking the trouble to find more than one practice organ so that you always have somewhere to practise. And remember that your playing, even if you are a beginner, deserves the best instrument available: a really good instrument speeds your progress and stimulates your musicality.

An electronic organ is useful for note-learning but do try to work on a pipe organ at least once every two weeks.

2) Local practice organs

- a) Contact your local churches. The best method is to walk your local area and take the contact details from the notice boards outside churches. Telephone the person advertised and enquire about organ practice facilities. (You might wish to base your questions on paragraph 1 above).
- b) Contact your local organists' association. You can find contact details on www.iao.org.uk These associations offer you opportunities to meet other local organists who will advise you on the best practice organs in your area.

3) A letter of recommendation

Please ask us if you need a letter to explain that you are a serious student and why you need regular practice facilities.

4) How much practice to do

Quality and frequency are more important than quantity. Aim for a minimum of three one-hour sessions a week (or shorter, more frequent units of time), supplemented by daily technique work and note-learning, maybe on your piano at home.

5) Practice fees

Most churches charge for practice; expect to pay between £2 and £5 an hour. If you cannot afford this, ask if you can offer something instead, for example playing for services, cataloguing the choir library, polishing the pews etc.

6) Electronic organs

Many of our students appreciate the convenience of an electronic organ at home. If you are thinking of buying one, take care to choose one with a sensible pedal action. Many electronic pedal actions speak as soon as you touch the note, making it impossible for your feet to prepare your pedal notes and thus ruining your technique. Please ask us for a fuller explanation if necessary. Manual key action is also important - try to find a firm action. For advice on purchase (new and second-hand) and maintenance of electronic organs we suggest you contact Peter Flatau at Abinger Organs, Little Hoe, Hoe Lane, Abinger Hammer, Dorking, RH5 6RH tel. 01306 730277.