

ORGAN SHOES

Most organists wear special shoes to help them play better and reach more keys. You may find shoes that work for the organ at a thrift store, at a dance store, or online at organmastershoes.com. If you don't have organ shoes, use stocking feet. Avoid bare feet (they stick) or dirty street shoes (they can scratch the pedals).



UPPER

The upper is flexible and lightweight, made of leather or a suitable synthetic. Because it fits snugly to the foot (usually requiring laces or a strap), it follows the toes easily as they bend upward or downward. The uppers slide against each other without sticking.

HEEL

The heel is about an inch high (or a little higher) and is wide enough so that it does not slip down between the natural keys. It does not produce much of a knocking noise when playing, and its surface slides easily over the keys with out leaving marks. A leather surface is usually best.

SOLE

The sole is made of a thin, flexible material such as soft leather, and it does not to extend beyond the sides of the foot. The sole slides easily and quietly from key to key.

ARCH

At the arch, the heel and sole are offset, allowing a single foot to reach two natural keys a third apart. Shoes with a "bridge" between heel and sole are not ideal.

"Do I really need organ shoes?"

is one of the first questions asked by new organists and one that often crosses the mind of experienced "shoe less" organists. My answer is "yes," for the following reasons.

REDUCED MUSCLE TENSION

Organists who play with good organ shoes are more comfortable using their heel to maintain a legato line. Facing more muscle tension, organists who play without shoes sometimes avoid using the heel and may be more likely to break the legato line as they hop from key to key with the toe.

IMPROVED PLAYING SURFACE

Organists who play without shoes can feel the keys better than those with shoes. But the toes and the bones behind them form an uneven playing surface. A thin, flexible sole such as soft leather evens out the point of contact with the key and distributes it over a slightly larger area.

EASIER SKIPS

Using the toe and heel of a single foot to reach skips of a third can be difficult for organists without shoes-especially those organists with flatter feet. Instead, they may hop between heel and toe, breaking the legato. But an added heel and the resulting raised instep makes legato skips much easier.

PROTECTION

In a quick jab for a key, unshod feet can easily crack the toes into the sharps. Also, repetitions in normal practice routines can produce blisters. Organ shoes offer a degree of protection. The upper and sole form an effective bumper for the toes. The sole(or a stocking) places a layer of sliding material between skin and key, making blistering highly unlikely.

In conclusion, organists who are not accustomed to good organ shoes may experience a period of adjustment, but these benefits are well worth the effort.

DON COOK is associate professor of music (organ, carillon) at Brigham Young University and AGO National Councilor for Education.

GETTING STARTED WITH THE PEDALS

with Jim Carter

The Basics

- Why organ shoes?
- Toe or heel?
- Right foot or left?

NOTES

Getting Started - It's not that scary!

- Play pedal on the last chords (V-I):
171 With Humble Heart
- Play the main pitches, one for each foot:
7 Israel, Israel, God is Calling
- Try two pitches for each foot:
3 Now Let Us Rejoice
- Simplify awkward jumps/reaches:
274 The Iron Rod
60 Battle Hymn

The Process of Practice

- Work through pedals alone
- Write down markings as you go
- Play it several times, changing what doesn't work
- Work it with hands and change if needed
 - 7-step method
 - Repetition by Phrase
- Be consistent in pedaling (and fingerings)

Some More Advanced Hymns With Challenging Pedal Passages

- 177 'Tis Sweet to Sing the Matchless Love
- 175 O God, the Eternal Father
- 62 All Creatures of Our God and King
- 66 Rejoice, the Lord Is King!

Questions?