

Practical example: Improvising in the style of George Frideric Handel

*Live organ improvisation during a BBC Choral Evensong broadcast
from St George's Church, Hanover Square (London) on 1st April 2009 at 4pm.*

1. Considering Form and Timbre

The **English Baroque Voluntary** is the most commonly used type of organ composition in the UK and consists – at least in most cases - of *two movements*: **slow & quiet – fast & loud**. Organs in Britain in the Baroque era had no (independent) pedal – therefore, composers like Handel would compose for manuals only. The chamber organ in St George's used in this recording is a copy of Handel's own house organ.

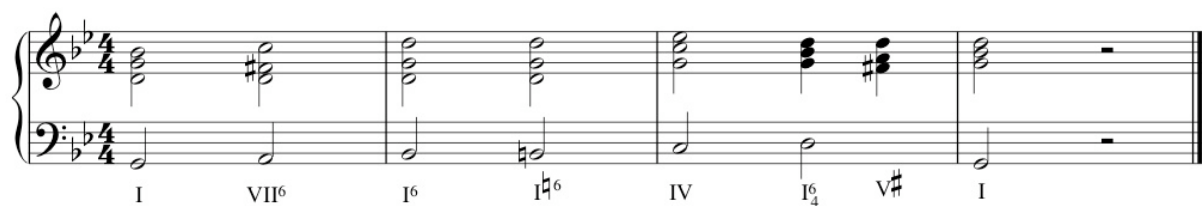
The following **registration** has been used for this recording:

- 1. *Andante*: Stopped Diapason 8
- 2. *Allegro Fugue*: Stopped Diapason 8, Open Diapason 8, Principal 4, Fifteenth 2

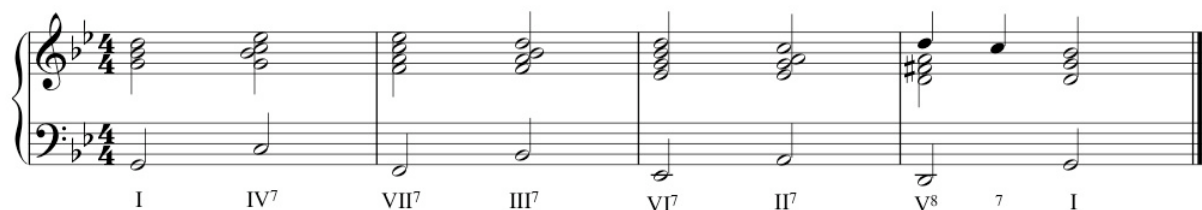
Although Handel did compose a small amount of organ music using the concept described above, he mainly focused as a composer and performer on **organ concertos**. However, I decided to use the traditional English Voluntary form as this seemed to work best on the organ available.

2. First Movement: ADAGIO

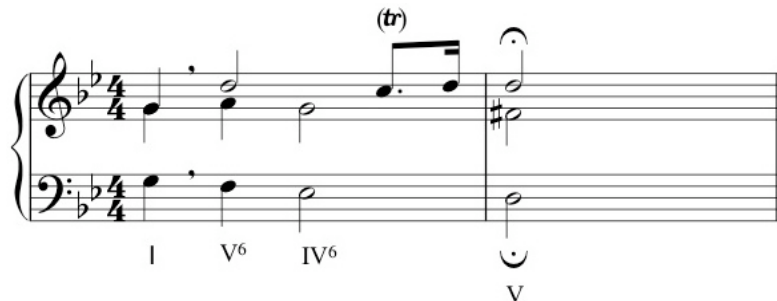
The **basic harmonic progression** was taken from Handel's Organ Concerto op.4 No.1 in G Minor:



A common feature of Baroque music in general is the use of **cycles of fifths** which lend themselves for developing motifs. **IDEAL for improvisations**: they do not require lots of the performer's concentration! In this recording, I used a series of (figured) seventh chords:



Another typical Handelian feature of such a slow movement is to **finish on an imperfect cadence**.



3. Second Movement: ALLEGRO FUGUE

The **subject** of the fugue is not originally by Handel, but is partly derived from his chorus "And he shall purify" (from Messiah).



The number of **voice parts** in both movements is (mostly) **two**.

Whilst practising in this style, I tried out different ways of **embellishing cycles of fifths** and playing the musical outcome in different keys related to G Minor. Although I did not use figuration models taken from Handel's work, I came up with something similar in concept. The following excerpt is taken from Handel's Organ Concerto Op.4 No.1. and gives a good idea of what I did on the recording:



In this movement, I used the cycles of fifths for **modulating** to the key of the next subject entry.

Finally, in the last major entry of the subject I make use of another typical fugal feature – the **stretto**.