

REVIEWS

RECORDINGS

JOSEPH JONGEN: COMPLETE ORGAN WORKS, Vols 1 and 2. Anton Doornhein, organist. Organs: IV/142 Ernst Seifert (1905–1907, 1926) and Romanus Seifert (1979–81, 1987, 2005–) in Sankt Marien Basilica, Kevelaer, Germany; II/66 grand organ by Pierre Schyven & Cie (1874), Salomon van Bever (1906/1912), and Patrick Collon (1975–78) in Notre-Dame Church, Laeken, Belgium; II/14 choir organ by Salomon van Bever (1906), restored by Etienne de Munck (1996) in Notre-Dame Church, Laeken, Belgium. D.E. Versluis Classical Music Productions DEV-JJ1022 (Vol. 1, 2 CDs) and DEV-JJ1023 (Vol. 2, 2 CDs); www.deversluis.nl or info@deversluis.nl. Those who know Joseph Jongen (1873–1953) only through the handful of his organ works that remain in the active repertoire (*Sonata Eroica*, *Toccata*, *Choral*, *Chant de May*, *Symphonie concertante*) are in for a delightful treat upon hearing this, the first complete recording of the revered Belgian's output for organ and harmonium. Like César Franck, Jongen began his musical career with aspirations of becoming a concert pianist. This ultimately gave way to a career centering on the organ; he was to become the most highly regarded organist in Liège, in addition to being an influential pedagogue and teacher. As a composer, Jongen was influenced by diverse compositional styles, from Saint-Saëns and Guilmant to Brahms and Wagner to Vierne and Debussy. He was firmly rooted in the 19th century and articulated a profound distaste for the acrid conceptions of his contemporaries such as Stravinsky and Schoenberg. Although Jongen's music bears stylistic resemblance to those who influenced him, it is in no way derivative. After listening through the entire oeuvre, one can readily discern a subtle yet definitive style that is uniquely Jongen's. This is music of soaring melody borne upon rich harmony.

Jongen produced a large body of works for chamber ensembles, orchestra, and piano. (The piano works outnumber those for organ, and have been recorded complete by Diane Andersen and Steven de Groote as *Joseph Jongen: L'intégrale pour piano* on Pavane Records ADW 7478/6, 6477/9.) Jongen con-

tinued to perform as a pianist, a fact that can be discerned in many of his organ works. John Scott Whiteley's invaluable book, *Joseph Jongen and His Organ Music*, has made possible the present recording of the complete works, many of which have remained obscure until now, several being unpublished.

The repertoire presented in the four discs featuring Anton Doornhein's superb performances represents three main categories: original organ works, works for harmonium or organ, and transcriptions. Rather than follow a chronological or categorical format, the works are intermingled to create more interesting programming on each disc. The transcriptions, mostly written in the 1890s, include two popular works of J.S. Bach: the "Prelude" from the *Sonata* (for solo violin), BWV 1006 (also familiar as the "Sinfonia" from *Cantata 29*), and the "Air" from the *Orchestral Suite in D*, BWV 1068. Mendelssohn is represented by an "Andante" and a "Song Without Words," and Grieg by three movements from the *Holberg Suite* and *Peer Gynt*. Two rare, substantial finds are the *Prélude de l'Oratorio "Saint François"* by Belgian composer Edgar Tinel and *Fugue d'Orchestre* by Jean-Théodore Radoux, Jongen's composition teacher at the Liège Conservatorium. Jongen proves to be an effective transcriber who knows how to transform the given material idiomatically into the medium of the organ.

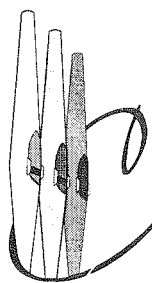
The harmonium works (including the Grieg transcriptions) are diminutive in scope, yet attractive. Jongen did not fully exploit the subtle capabilities of the harmonium in the manner of Karg-Elert. He always indicated, as did Vierne, that they could be played on the organ. Here, they are performed on the small, beautiful van Bever choir organ of Notre Dame in Laeken.

The original organ works number more than 30. They reveal a wide-ranging wealth of creativity that is only partially demonstrated in the best-known works. The *Prélude et fugue*, Op. 121, is a rousing, virile, exciting work, much in the same vein as the famous *Toccata*. The *Fugue (dans le style de J.S. Bach)*, W88, is an impressive exercise in counterpoint from Jongen's student days that evokes the spirit of Bach's *Fantasia and Fugue in G Minor*; one can hear this as a gifted 19th-century composer emulating Bach, or how Bach might have composed if he had lived in the late 19th century. The *Pièce pour grand orgue*, W28, recalls the sturdy, optimistic spirit of Guilmant. There

are plentiful moments of lovely, quiet repose, subtle color, and endearing melody, the best-known example being *Chant de May*. There are three *Pastorales*, several pieces suitable for the liturgy, and short tone poems.

Anton Doornhein is an exemplary performer of this music, possessing a temperament and technique compatible to Jongen's unique requirements. He performs with affection, assurance, conviction, and stylistic affinity. The chosen instruments are ideal for Jongen's music. Sonorous, rich in timbre, endowed with abundant tonal resources in the French Romantic-Symphonic idiom, they allow us to hear Jongen's music in a truly idiomatic manner, bathed in glorious acoustical environments. The occasional mechanical noise of the Schyven instrument does not spoil the beauty of the music or the playing. The huge Seifert instrument (which, at the time of the recording was awaiting the restoration of 36 additional ranks!) is glorious. On this, the largest organ in a German Roman Catholic church, Doornhein's performance of the celebrated *Sonata Eroica* comes off with amazing splendor, making this a truly definitive performance. These are landmark recordings, documenting a composer whose wealth of musical treasures for the organ awaits rediscovery. This is music of immediate appeal, here perfectly united with instruments and performer.

THE WORLD BELOVED: A BLUEGRASS MASS. VocalEssence Ensemble Singers; Lisa Fuglie, Sonja DuToit Tengblad, sopranos; Brian Ohnsorg, tenor; Charles Kemper, accompanist; Monroe Crossing; Philip Brunelle, conductor. Clarion Records CLR931CDs; www.clarionrecords.com; www.vocalescence.org. "Expect the unexpected" is Philip Brunelle's long-standing motto; surely he and his forces live up to it in this unique, refreshing production featuring a Mass setting in bluegrass style. Brunelle's friend, Mike McCarthy, came up with the idea. Carol Barnett was chosen as the composer, and Marisha Chamberlain contributed the libretto. The result is an intriguing cross-pollination of art music and bluegrass. The text juxtaposes elements of the traditional Mass text, combining the traditional Greek/Latin and modern English dialect, with personalized commentaries and expressions of faith. The Gloria, Credo, and Benedictus dispense with traditional texts altogether. Interposed between these movements are four ballad verses, each retelling a biblical story, such as Eve's partaking of the forbidden fruit. The Mass is prefaced and concluded by a refrain sung by unaccompanied solo soprano: "They say God loved the World so dear, He set aside His crown And cloaked Himself in human shape; They say that . . . He came on down." Barnett has clearly mastered the bluegrass idiom; her setting abounds with snappy rhythms, twangy harmonies, and authentic instrumentation, all informed by a thoroughly grounded musicianship. This is bluegrass with an air of sophistication. The ensemble Monroe Crossing (fiddle, mandolin, string bass, guitar, banjo) is a leading proponent of bluegrass, being the only bluegrass band to be nominated as "Artist of the Year" by the Minnesota Music Academy. In 2007, they were inducted into the Minnesota Music Hall of Fame. They perform the Mass with gusto and expertise. Philip Brunelle's VocalEssence



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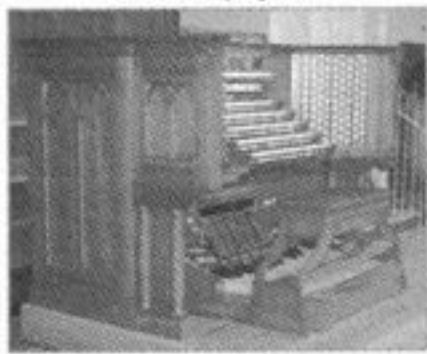
FLORENCE MISTRIC PLAYS: Vol. 1: East of Berlin. Rudolph von Beckerath organ of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cleveland, Ohio (IV/65, 1956). MSR Classics MS 1270; www.msrecd.com. The featured instrument is historically significant in that it was the first large mechanical-action organ to be installed in North America following the rise of the Organ Reform movement. The recording was made prior to its restoration, documenting its first half-century. In spite of needed attention, the instrument sounds robust, incisive, colorful, coherent, and clear; the recording shows little evidence of its five decades of use. The only regrettable issue is the dryness of the acoustic; however, this does serve to heighten the clarity of instrument and music. Florence Mistic, who co-founded Music Near the Market in 1994 to showcase the world-famous organ, has chosen a program that is well suited to it. Her choice of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, in her own arrangement, may seem unlikely. However, rather than the romantic-virtuosic approach usually associated with this score, she performs it in a classically oriented manner, with clear, crisp phrasing and articulation that match the stylistic parameters of the instrument and provide refinement and clarity to the music. Her carefully controlled rhythms reveal every detail of the score, although the playing sometimes seems stiff and pedantic. There are times, especially in the fast movements, where more abandon and brilliance would have been welcome. Mistic chooses registrations that are appropriate to each tableau and consonant with the classical character of the instrument, which serves to underscore the temperament of the music surprisingly well. With this performance, one hears the familiar score in a new, revealing way. For the remainder of her program, Ms. Mistic includes a wistful, exotic *Prelude* by Paul Ben-Haim, an émigré to Palestine. Miloš Sokola's vigorous *Toccata* is played with strength, clarity, and precision. The most compelling performance is that of the *Prelude and Fugue in G Minor* by Estonian Peeter Süda. The BACH motif figures prominently in this substantial, well-constructed work. Replete with emotional energy, it concludes with a whisper. This disc is a welcome documentation of one of America's most significant instruments, revealing its flexibility in familiar and unusual repertoire.

ORGAN ODYSSEY. Mary Preston, organist. *The Lay Family Concert Organ of Meyerson Symphony Center, Dallas, Tex.* (IV/84 Fisk Opus 100, 1992). Reference Recordings RR-113; www.ReferenceRecordings.com. In

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his program note for this recording, Michael Alan Fox reminds us that it was Calvin Hampton who raised the concern that organs built on American Classic and European Baroque principles lack the brawn to hold their own with a large symphony orchestra. Despite all of their assets, these instruments fail to supply the foundational tone and sheer power generated by instruments built between 1880 and 1930, for which many organ parts in orchestral scores of that time were written. Since its installation more than 15 years ago, Fisk's Opus 100 has been a revelation of the art of symphonic organbuilding in modern times. It inaugurated the widespread revival of concert hall organbuilding and restoration that we are cur-



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