

Trois Pièces pour Grand Orgue

1. Variations sur un thème de Clément Jannequin

“Cette pièce doit être jouée comme les Préludes dont parlait Couperin... ..avec fraîcheur et tendresse.” *Jehan Alain*

With this instruction Alain sets a melody from the early 16th Century. True to the spirit of Couperin's organ solos the 'Hautbois' and 'Cromorne' stops are featured in the melodies, though the blend of early (strict) harmonisation with Parisian chromaticism is entirely unique.

2. Le Jardin Suspendu

“Le jardin suspendu, c'est l'idéal perpétuellement poursuivi et fugitif de l'artiste. c'est le refuge inaccessible et inviolable.” *Jehan Alain*

A solemn chaconne is employed to give a repetitive and mystical setting to the above words. In the central section an accompanying line is written for the following registration: 'Flute 4 et gros Nazard 5 1/3 ou Quintaton 8 solo, which gives a high piercing tone, set against the soft voice of the melody.

3. Litanies

Originally composed as a humorous character-portrait, Alain was shocked by the tragic and violent death of a beloved sister into writing the following words which changed entirely the message of the piece:

“Quand l'âme chrétienne ne trouve plus de mots nouveaux dans la détresse pour implorer la miséricorde de Dieu, elle répète sans cesse la même invocation avec une foi véhémence. La raison atteint sa limite. Seule la foi poursuit son ascension.” *Jehan Alain*

As implied in the text, this movement is composed around a consistently repeated figure which undergoes many transformations. The different families of reed stops found on each manual are featured throughout.

Jehan Alain, born 1911 at Saint-Germain-en-Laye into a highly musical family. His father was organist and composer, while the other children were all musicians (Jehan's sister Marie-Claire was to become a famous performer and editor of her brother's compositions).

By the age of 11 he was deputising as organist (Saint-Germain); at the age of 18 his short career as a composer had begun, producing more than 140 works in the ten years before the outbreak of the second world war. In 1940 he died fighting alone in an heroic action that won him a posthumous award of the Croix de Guerre.

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