

KARG-ELERT: *3 Symphonic Chorales, op 87; Sacred Songs 1+2, op 66; Psalm 1*
Elke Völker, org; Andrea Reuter, s; Robert Frank, v
Aeolus 10431—71 minutes

Apart from a small handful of pieces, the works of Sigfrid Karg-Elert (1877-1933) tend to be on the fringes of the standard organ repertory—far more so than those of his contemporary, Max Reger (1873-1916), whose overall stylistic diction is very similar. I was surprised at how few recordings of Karg-Elert's works are listed in the ARG cumulative index.

It could be that his stock is on the rise. Priority is in the process of bringing out recordings of his complete organ works played by Karg-Elert specialist Stephan Engels. The present disc is the third in a series played by Elke Völker for Aeolus. The series bears the title "Ultimate Organ Works", but there is not a clue in the accompanying booklet as to what the title may signify.

Donald Metz reviewed the first two volumes in the series (Aeolus 10121 & 10171: March/April 2007) together with a volume in the Engels series (Priory 830). He praised Völker's performance and the quality of the recorded sound, but he characterized the music itself as "murky", a verdict seconded by David Mulbury. I suppose I was already prepared for Karg-Elert's overripe post-Wagnerian harmonic diction, so the density of the music did not bother me. (Of course, my task was to sit through one disc, not three.) On the contrary, given the composer's idiom, I found the music cleanly etched and persuasively performed by Völker and her colleagues.

The instrument in this case is a four-manual by Georg Stahlhuth at St Martin's Church, Dudelange, dating from 1912. A failed attempt in 1962 to turn it into a baroque organ was remedied in 2001-2 by a restoration of the German romantic Stahlhuth tonal design, together with voices from the French and English romantic traditions. I find the recorded sound dazzlingly beautiful. It is rich and uncompromisingly romantic but not at all turgid or unclear, even with the sumptuous room reverberation. Völker's performances are passionate but consummately disciplined. They convey an intensity and urgency that is intrinsic to the music, and sometimes an atmosphere of serenity tinged with melancholy, but never merely a self-indulgent wallowing in sentiment.

I must confess that all these works are new to me. The Three Symphonic Chorales, Op. 87 (1911) are based on familiar Lutheran hymns. The first ('Ach Bleib mit Deiner Gnade') is a set of variations. The second ('Jesu, Meine Freude') is a substantial three-movement

structure whose opening movement is subtitled 'Inferno'. II is a canzona, and III a fugue with chorale. The third symphonic chorale ('Nun Ruhen Alle Wälder') begins as an organ solo, but about half way through a solo violin enters with the chorale melody followed soon after by the solo soprano. The two songs from the Op. 66 set of three (1906 and 1909) also include the violin. The program ends with an extended setting of Psalm 1 (c 1915) for high voice and organ. Breitkopf & Härtel declined to publish it at the time, and it did not appear in print until 1996. It is a discursive but broodingly impassioned setting with a vehement organ introduction.

In the works involving voice and violin I suspect that some of the levels may have been artificially manipulated, as it is so easy for a large pipe organ to swamp a single violin or solo voice. Be that as it may, everything is distinctly audible. Soprano Andrea Reuter and violinist Robert Frank are excellent. I would not hesitate to recommend this recording to anyone interested in the repertory.

GATENS

KAUDER: *Quartets 1-4*

Euclid Quartet—Centaur 2840—71 minutes

This is the first time I have heard any of the 17 string quartets by the Czech composer Hugo Kauder (1888-1972), who spent his professional life as a violist and composer in Vienna and then lived in New York from 1940 on.

The first quartet, written in 1921, sounds heavily influenced by the music of Richard Strauss. Once the Strauss influence fades (after 11 and the modal writing and the counterpoint (or as his friends called it "Kauderpoint") begins, his string quartet music becomes a cornucopia of fantastic fugal writing, folk songs and dances, and gorgeous modal melodies. The writing is rich, with generous melodic material given to the inner voices, particularly to the viola; and he is extremely creative and inventive while always using a tonal musical vocabulary.

There is a Renaissance clarity and quality to his counterpoint, and a glance at the scores of some of his string quartet scores reveals that in Renaissance fashion he chose to write without measure lines, giving only a slash to indicate where the downbeat would fall.

Hearing Kauder's superb music adds a completely new dimension to my perception of the kind of music that was being written in Vienna in the 1920s. I imagine that Kauder's Viennese dodecaphonic contemporaries envied his Bachian ability to write counterpoint that is both brilliant and beautiful.

Much of Kauder's music has been published, but very little of it has been recorded

(this is the only professional recording I know of). A few years ago I heard a performance of a choral piece by Kauder that made a profound impression on me, and I wondered then why I had never heard of him. Maybe, now that tonality is appreciated once again, it is time for a recording "Renaissance" of Kauder's music. There are more than 300 works, both vocal and instrumental, to choose from; and these four quartets, played beautifully by this very fine quartet, are an excellent start.

FINE

KLENAU: *Lay of the Love & Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke*

Bo Skovhus, bar; Czech Philharmonic Choir;
Odense Symphony/ Paul Mann
Dacapo 6220532—71 minutes

MARTIN: *Lay of the Love & Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke*

Christianne Stotijn, a; Winterthur Orchestra/ Jan van Steen—MDG 901 1444—58 minutes

These are two quite different settings of Rilke's well-known prose poem, yet both were composed in the 20th Century. Paul von Klenau (1883-1946), a Danish composer who spent much of his time as a conductor in German opera houses and concert halls, wrote his setting in 1918-9. The Swiss composer Frank Martin (1890-1974) was a modernist who flirted extensively with atonal music but is best known for a lean compositional style that employs modern harmonies and much contrapuntal writing.

Rilke's prose poem was written in 1906 and tells the story of his ancestor, Christoph Rilke von Langenau, who was killed in battle against the Ottoman Turks in 1663. (Cornet, in Rilke's poem, refers to a standard bearer.) Langenau, as he is referred to in the poem, is shown on the march, making friends with a "little French Marquis", writing a tender letter to his mother, feasting, and falling in love with the countess of a castle where he has been quartered. The Countess initiates him sexually. When he wakes up, the castle is burning. He grasps the flag, mounts his horse, and plunges into battle. He is killed and his standard is destroyed by fire. Next Spring, a messenger from his commander brings the news to his weeping mother.

Klenau's setting uses a large symphony orchestra, a chorus, and a baritone soloist who narrates the verses in a composed-through, parlando style. The music is neoromantic, grandiose, and often lugubrious. Pfitzner, Reger, and Schillings (all of whom Klenau knew) wrote similar music; Strauss's music, similar stylistically, is much more colorful and inventive, as is Mahler's. But Klenau's is gener-