

Marie Joseph ERB

ORGAN WORKS, VOLUME TWO

SONATA ON CHORALE THEMES FROM THE CATHOLIC LITURGY, OP. 70

20 ORGAN PIECES FOR LITURGICAL USE, OP. 73: EXCERPTS

SUITE FOR LARGE ORGAN, OP. 90

Jan Lehtola
organ of Tampere Cathedral

MARIE JOSEPH ERB: ORGAN MUSIC, VOLUME TWO

by William Melton

Family lore traced the ancestors of the Alsatian composer Marie Joseph Erb back to the twelfth century:

Originally from Graffenstaden, they were *vidâmes* of Strasbourg, then, from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, knights attached to Rathsamhausen. They were lords of the Waldsberg near Mont Sainte Odile, then *Stettmeister* and senators in Strasbourg, sometimes honoured by this city, sometimes fighting against it.¹

What is conclusively documented is that the family had been organists in Strasbourg since the eighteenth century.² It was there that the composer was born on 23 October 1858 to Anne Marie Erb, *née* Herrmann, and Marie Georges Erb, who was the director of the École St Jean and the organist of the Church of St Jean (built in 1477). The organ (of twenty ranks, two keyboards and pedal) which the father played, and on which the son began under his father's tutelage, was originally built by Stiehr and Mockers in 1820 and enlarged in 1878 by Heinrich Koulen.³

A formative musical event in Marie Joseph's youth took place on 22 June 1863, when his father brought the five-year-old to the first local rehearsal of *L'Enfance du Christ* conducted by its composer, Hector Berlioz. The boy's reaction to hearing the work performed with a massive 500-voice chorus is not recorded, but shortly

¹ Jane Erb, 'Marie-Joseph Erb', in *Un grand musicien français: Marie-Joseph Erb, sa vie et son œuvre*. Éditions Le Roux, Strasbourg and Paris, 1948, p. 7. *Vidâmes* were initially episcopal officers who later expanded their offices into feudal holdings. *Stettmeister* had been the chief magistrates of the free imperial city of Strasbourg since the thirteenth century.

² Véronique Muller, 'Les Ancêtres Alsatiens de Marie Joseph Erb (1858–1944)', *Bulletin du cercle généalogique d'Alsace*, No. 163, 2008, p. 424.

³ Johann Andreas Silbermann had furnished an organ for St Jean in 1762, but after the French Revolutionary take-over of the city the instrument was sold to Illkirch (and eventually to Mannheim).

afterwards Berlioz shared the audience response to the performance with his friend Humbert Ferrand:

People wept, they cheered, and they spontaneously interrupted several pieces. You cannot imagine the impression made by the mystical chorus at the end: ‘*O mon âme!*’ It was indeed the religious ecstasy I had dreamed of when I composed it. [...] At the last *Amen*, a *pianissimo* which disappears into a mysterious distance, there was unparalleled acclamation as sixteen thousand hands applauded. Then came a shower of flowers and demonstrations of all sorts.⁴

A more savage experience was the Siege of Strasbourg, which occurred in August 1870, after the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. When Marie Joseph was eleven, troops from the Duchy of Baden and Prussia bombarded Strasbourg extensively for a month, with the specific aim of terrorising the civilian population. The Erb family house was badly damaged, and the youngster’s birthplace, at the former Cloister of the Chevaliers de St Jean, was destroyed. Marie Joseph was later questioned about the siege:

‘Were you bombed?’ asked a little curly-haired man (he was B., later chapel master at St Sulpice).

‘We had a house bombed and burned,’ I answered.

‘Did you eat horse or rat? Did you live in the cellars?’

‘Yes, I ate horse, but not rat and we slept in our cellars.’⁵

Ten thousand people were left homeless, and the young man celebrated his twelfth birthday in a conquered city, the beginning of an occupation that would last for nearly 50 years.

After Erb finished his early education at a local finishing school, his father sent him to Paris and the renowned École Niedermeyer. Erb wrote of his arrival in 1874:

As soon as I entered the courtyard-garden of the school, my ears had been struck by a singular noise, a mixture of forging and tinkling bells, an annoying and uninterrupted

⁴ Hector Berlioz, *Lettres Intimes*, Lévy, Paris, 1882, pp. 251–52.

⁵ Marie Joseph Erb, ‘Mon entrée à l’École Niedermeyer’, *L’Alsace française*, Vol. 14, No. 50, 16 December 1934, p. 886.

noise. [...] This noise, which soon mingled with the sustained bass and treble of organ sound, became so loud that I looked at the supervising professor in amazement. He laughed and simply said, with two gestures, one to the left and one to the right: 'This is the study room, this is the organ room.' I have often reflected since on the rigid and terrible discipline imposed by the Niedermeyer School on the young artists it trained, which consisted of the following: in a large room, which also served as a theatre, were thirty or so upright pianos lined along the walls. Between these pianos were two long rows of desks, next to which, on long wooden benches, were seated some of the students immersed in their work of harmony, plainchant accompaniment, counterpoint, fugue or composition, while the other group practised furiously on the old pianos along the walls. It was an exercise in concentration, forcing the students to think only of their individual composing or playing in the midst of the hellish storm raging around them.⁶

Among Erb's teachers were Camille Saint-Saëns, Gabriel Fauré, Charles-Marie Widor and, most importantly, Eugène Gigout, who like Erb hailed from the eastern border (Lorraine). Gigout stood out even in a very talented generation of French organists like Widor and Alexandre Guilmant, Saint-Saëns stating bluntly: 'I regard him as the most impressive organist that I have ever known.'⁷ One of the hallmarks of Gigout's teaching was the intensive study of Bach fugues (which Erb would make a lifelong habit), and his further pupils would include André Messager, Albert Roussel, Maurice Duruflé, Germaine Tailleferre and the Alsatian Léon Boëllmann. On Erb's graduation in 1880, he was offered organ and teaching posts in Paris.

Against the wishes of the eminent director of this school, the unforgettable Gustave Lefèvre, who would have liked to keep me nearby and engage me as a teacher at his establishment, I had yielded, a docile son, to my father's urgings. In 1880 I took over his post of organist at the church of St Jean, a post which he had held in conjunction with that of director of the church primary school for more than 40 years.⁸

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Mark David Bailey, *Eugène Gigout (1844–1925): Performer and Pedagogue*, DMA Thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1988, p. 104.

⁸ Marie Joseph Erb, 'Ma première entrevue avec Ch. Hamm', *Cent ans de musique sacrée en Alsace 1882–1982*, Union Sainte Cécile, Strasbourg, 1983, p. 13.

The choice of Strasbourg over Paris proved a fateful decision for Erb's future prospects.

Erb's Strasbourg homecoming was initially disheartening. He endured a series of deaths, first that of his mother, then his youngest brother Charles in 1883, and finally his father in 1886. Some professional paths were stymied: conducting, long an ambition, was prevented by his extreme myopia, and local Conservatoire posts would long be denied him. In 1883, he took an additional job as organist at St Georges in nearby Sélestat. He also composed the first of sixteen masses (the *Messe en honneur de Sainte Odile*), and began generating instrumental and symphonic music at a formidable pace. The gifted Alsatian pianist Marie Jaëll recommended Erb to her teacher Franz Liszt, and several rewarding weeks were spent with Liszt in Weimar in 1884 (the young man's *Images et Legendes d'Alsace* for piano were composed afterwards and dedicated to Liszt).

The Abbé Charles Hamm partnered Erb in establishing the Union Sainte Cécile and its journal *Caecilia*. Erb toured Alsace and Switzerland giving piano and organ concerts and saw his early compositions both performed and published. A piano recital that he gave in Mulhouse served to inspire a local youth.

Hardly had the pianist begun to play, when the boy was thrilled by the solemn emotion, which so far he had experienced only when hearing church music. He was still quite enthralled when the first enthusiastic applause began. He sat motionless among the clapping people, and while his neighbours were chattering away again, rattling papers, and handing round sweets in their silly, empty-headed way, there still ran through his head the music he had just heard. [...] What did the music really matter to these dressed-up people who could not even express their gratitude for the beauty and greatness of what they had heard by the tribute of silence?⁹

These were weighty thoughts from a twelve-year-old at his very first concert, but then the boy was Albert Schweitzer.

In September 1887 Erb married Marie Cécile, *née* Adam. The couple produced a son, Jean, and a daughter, Marguerite Jeanne (later known as Jane). Erb's modest earnings were largely made up of his organist salary and payments from private pupils.

⁹ Jean Pierhal (*recte* Robert Jungk), *Albert Schweitzer: The Life of a Great Man*, Lutterworth, London, 1956, pp. 27–28.

Other leading Alsatian musicians had been engaged by the now German-dominated Conservatoire.

Marie-Joseph Erb, on the other hand, made numerous unsuccessful approaches to the municipal administration. Twice, in 1881 and again in 1890, the organist-composer applied for a position as organ teacher at the Conservatoire. In vain. He was told that because of his French training at the Niedermeyer School, it was out of the question.¹⁰

Erb then turned his gifts to the stage, composing several operas, and not without success. In Strasbourg early in 1900,

The municipal theatre saw a major achievement by Messrs Marie-Joseph Erb, the composer, and Gustave Stoskopf, the librettist, with their *Abendglocken*, an opera in two acts, [...] a lyrical drama full of emotion. Mr Erb, a composer of great talent, was able to give free rein to his musical inspiration, presenting us with a compelling work.¹¹

The opera was conducted by Felix Mottl in Karlsruhe before the year was out. Several other works for the stage, also based on Alsatian folklore, were well received by Strasbourg audiences, but their weak librettos were noted by critics. Meanwhile, Erb's symphonic works were performed by conductors who included Edouard Colonne, Gustave Doret, Robert Heger, Félix Mottl, Paul Paray, Hans Rosbaud, Carl Reinecke and Fritz Steinbach.

In 1901–2, an organ by Joseph Rinckenbach (of 36 ranks, three keyboards and pedal) was installed at St Jean under Erb's supervision. Called by Erb 'a masterpiece of the highest order',¹² it would serve as his main instrument for more than four decades. On 18 July 1903, the composer's son Jean died, and Erb lost his brother Georges the following year. In reaction to these and other personal tragedies, the bulk of Erb's creations in later life would be given over to the liturgy.

¹⁰ Myriam Geyer, *La vie musicale à Strasbourg sous l'empire allemand (1871–1918)*, École des Chartes, Paris, 1999, p. 53.

¹¹ Auguste Oberdorfer, 'Correspondances: Strasbourg', *Le Guide Musical*, Vol. 46, No. 9, 4 March 1900, p. 207.

¹² Médard Barth, 'Elsass "Das Land der Orgeln" im 19. Jahrhundert', *Archives de l'Église d'Alsace*, Vol. XV (Nouvelle Série), 1965–66, p. 355.

Albert Schweitzer had not forgotten Erb's positive influence, and after studies and early successes was able to join his erstwhile hero onstage in the first performance of Erb's Second Symphony for Organ and Orchestra ('Speravi'), Op. 77, in December 1909, at the Salle des Fêtes in Strasbourg.

A novelty, a symphony for orchestra and organ, specially written for the occasion by Mr Marie-Joseph Erb, the young and distinguished master from Strasbourg, was a great success in terms of both the work and the performance.

With a beautiful harmonic presentation and a distinctive main theme that is repeated throughout the orchestral framework in skilfully ordered combinations, this Symphony Op. 77, by Mr Erb, is interesting from one end to the other, and ultimately impresses by the majestic brilliance of its conclusion. Messrs Widor and Erb were wonderfully assisted by Mr Albert Schweitzer, the famous Alsatian organist and musician, who delivered the organ part masterfully [...].¹³

M. Welte & Sons of Freiburg were makers of the renowned Welte-Mignon orchestrions, organs and reproducing pianos. Erb's home in Strasbourg was less than 90 kilometres from the Welte factory, and he eventually made ten roll recordings of pieces for the firm. 'The repertoire he plays,' noted David Rumsey, 'is interestingly mixed, although the French school is clearly important and predominates.'¹⁴

It was not until 1910, thanks chiefly to the new director of the Strasbourg Conservatoire, Hans Pfitzner, that Erb was finally hired at that institution (first for composition and organ, and from 1919 also piano and music theory). Subsequent generations of piano, organ and composition students were enriched by his tutelage. When the future conductor Charles Munch was a young violinist studying at the Strasbourg Conservatoire, 'His lessons in harmony and counterpoint came from Marie-Joseph Erb.'¹⁵ The tall, reserved gentleman of modest personal habits introduced his students to his own deepest love, Bach, but also to the French harpsichord repertoire

¹³ Oberdorfer, 'Correspondances: Strasbourg', *Le Guide Musical*, Vol. 55, No. 51, 19 December 1909, p. 799.

¹⁴ 'Afternoons with Eugène Gigout', p. 10 (http://www.davidrumsey.ch/Gigout_article.pdf).

¹⁵ D. Kern Holoman, *Charles Munch*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2012, p. 9.

of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the early works of Debussy and Ravel. The progressive weakness of his eyes forced Erb to make as little use of printed music as possible; most of the time he improvised and so acquired a rare mastery. To hear him improvise on the organ was a memorable experience:

He did not know the hesitant meditations of the dreamer, nor the musical strolls to the confessional. He always consciously carried out the development, previously decided, of a musical idea. His improvisations were not bound closely to the written compositions; indeed, they often surpassed them as he rose to a higher level. When the last of the congregation had filed out, the empty church would vibrate with the most daring toccatas and the most elaborate fugues, all for the few initiates who were aware of this miracle and full of respect [...].¹⁶

A student characterised Erb the pedagogue:

The Master's technical knowledge, his long experience and his wisdom enabled him to teach in an astonishingly rich fashion. In addition to mastery of the subjects he taught, Erb had acquired serious training as a singer and violinist. In frequent talks he brought past periods in the history of music to life for his young pupils: with what enthusiasm, for example, he recalled his stay with Liszt in Weimar! To his pupils he was an affectionate and benevolent father, severe when necessary, but always fair. His punctuality was scrupulous, his temper serene and even. Differences would arise between him and his pupils when we would request that we work on one of his own pieces. Then he would modestly demur [...].

Once the period of study was over, friendly and cordial relations were established between him and his pupils, relations which, despite the difference in age, were inspired by the most open camaraderie and which nothing could disturb [...].¹⁷

The Great War brought sacrifice throughout France. Erb's inspiration, the Vosges Forest, was now the scene of massive troop manoeuvres and therefore off-limits. Still composition went on: the Requiem, Op. 87, was followed by the Mass *Dona nobis*

¹⁶ Ernst Bour, 'Notes éparées', in *Un grand musicien français*, op. cit., p. 93.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 92–93.

pacem, Op. 89. The end of the conflict brought a close to half a century of German occupation. Unfortunately, the new municipal bureaucrats were as discouraging as the old. Erb's petition to be considered for the directorship of the Conservatoire was disregarded, and he was given ever more classes without commensurate pay rises (a complaint that would be legitimised on his retirement when he was replaced with three separate instructors).

The General Congress of Sacred Music in Strasbourg from 26 to 31 July 1921 encouraged wider appreciation of Erb's religious music. His wife Marie Cécile died in 1923, an emotional wound that was compounded by the loss of her musical expertise. She had been a scrupulous cataloguer of her husband's works, and after her death Erb no longer bothered giving his works opus numbers. Erb later married his student Juliette Fey, and the couple produced a son, Jacques.

Erb's former teachers, including Eugène Gigout, would visit when passing through Strasbourg, and Charles-Marie Widor dropped by the Erb home to engage in long, reflective discussions. Erb was known for his support of other Alsatian composers and artists, which included long-time membership in the *Kunschthafe* – Alsatian for roundtable, from *Kunsch* ('art') and *Hafe* ('pot'). This society, initiated by Auguste Michel, a *fois gras* manufacturer, was aimed at invigorating disparate elements of Alsatian culture. The group began its evenings of dining and discussion in 1891, and brought together the regional poets, painters, sculptors, musicians, architects, lawyers, politicians, bankers and industrialists at Michel's *Schloessel* ('little castle') in Schiltigheim over a period of 35 years.

In 1934 a 'Marie Joseph Erb Festival' took place, and the Strasbourg Radio Orchestra under Maurice de Villers broadcast Erb's works. Erb retired from the Conservatoire in 1937, and in January 1939 he was awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honour. After the German invasion of Poland on 1 September and declaration of war, the entire civilian population of Strasbourg was evacuated and took refuge in the Dordogne. Erb left his manuscripts with a friendly cleric in Barr (Bas-Rhin) and joined his family in Périgueux. The war in the west began on 10 May 1940, and on 22 June France signed an armistice. In his south-west exile Erb played the organ part in a performance of his *Alsatian Mass*.

He impulsively returned to occupied Alsace and Strasbourg in October 1940, while local resistance groups were using St Jean as a station to smuggle out escaped prisoners of war.

Early in 1943, the now 84-year-old Erb endured a series of ailments. To convalesce, he went to Andlau at the foot of Mont Sainte Odile, the spiritual centre of Alsace, of which Odile is the patron saint. There he revived and began to compose again: a sixteenth mass for mixed choir was written in February 1944 for Canon Hoch of the Strasbourg Cathedral, and two *Élégies* for solo voices and mixed choir were dedicated to his pupil Pierre-Maternelle Andrès, who had been killed in the war. Erb's manuscripts had long been done in ink, and corrections remained rare. The composer was still in Andlau on 9 July 1944, when the sudden onset of pneumonia took his life. In his wallet was a note written in the hand of Cécile, his first wife:

The artist must be a man of science and patience. He must leave nothing to chance. Everything he does must be deliberate. One must be able to put up with ignorance, bad faith or envy. If you are concerned with pleasing the public, a monster with millions of heads, you will lose your personality and your independence. But by limiting your needs, you can work as you wish, and retain your own freedom of thought.¹⁸

The funeral took place at Erb's beloved Église St Jean, where he had been at home on the organ for six decades. He was buried nearby in the cemetery of St Gall de Koenigshoffen (now La Montagne Verte). A month later a bomb destroyed both St Jean and its organ, and 'the silencing of both the artist and then his instrument proved a particularly distressing coincidence for his friends.'¹⁹ On 23 November 1944, General Philippe Leclerc and the French Second Armoured Division brought Strasbourg again under French control.

The Diapason mourned 'Marie Joseph Erb, who died in 1944 and who deserves to be better known.'²⁰ An *Association des Amis de Marie Joseph Erb* was formed and commemorations of the composer were plentiful in Strasbourg, like the memorial

¹⁸ Anon., 'Marie-Joseph Erb', *Cent Ans de Musique Sacrée en Alsace 1882-1982*, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁹ N., 'Marie-Joseph Erb', *L'Alsace française*, Vol. 1 (Nouvelle Série), No. 3, March 1949, p. 13. The church was rebuilt in 1962-64, and a new organ by Curt Schwenkede was installed in 1967.

²⁰ Anon., 'Edouard Nies-Berger', *The Diapason*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (469), 1 December 1948, p. 2.

plaque sculpted by René Hetzel in 1969 that is displayed in the rebuilt St Jean. The Colmar International Competition for Chamber Music Ensembles (established in 1985) awards prizes annually, the highest of which carries the name of Marie Joseph Erb. 'His native Alsace', Jacques Feschotte noted, 'which he hardly ever left, undoubtedly gave him the best inspiration, both for symphonic poems, stage works, songs and for a wealth of choral works in which he employed folk songs.'²¹ Though largely forgotten elsewhere – including the latest published editions of the *The New Grove* and *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* – Erb's reputation in his home province is assured. Albert Schweitzer, like many Alsatians, continued to cherish Erb as man and artist:

What impressed especially those who had the privilege of coming close to Erb were his simplicity and his modesty. His very nature made it impossible for him to assert himself. He interested himself without prejudice in the musical creations of various schools and personalities, trying to judge them only in accordance with their innate worth. His criticism was never harsh. He believed that what was destined to endure would endure, and that the rest would of itself pass quietly into oblivion. He had a calm and wholesome wisdom from which he never swerved.

Such was Marie-Joseph Erb, as I knew him, and admired and loved him. I am sure that his memory and his works will always give him a place in the history of Alsatian art and in the hearts of the Alsatian people. As for me, I consider him the most remarkable of all the composers Alsace has produced.²²

Erb composed a noteworthy catalogue of music across all genres, including operas and other stage works (*Der glückliche Taugenichts* ('The Fortunate Wastrel'), 1893; *Abendglocken* ('Evening Bells'), 1900; *Vogesentanne* ('Fir Trees of the Vosges'), 1904; *L'Homme de fer* ('The Man of Iron'), 1928), symphonic pieces (three symphonies, suites, symphonic poems) and sacred works for chorus with orchestra or a *cappella*, which included the *Masses Grande messe à 6 voix en l'honneur de Saint Jean-Baptiste* (1908) and *Dona nobis pacem* (1914), a *Te Deum*, cantatas for Easter (1916), Christmas (1917),

²¹ Erb, Marie-Joseph, *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Friedrich Blume (ed.), Vol. 3, Bärenreiter, Kassel, 1954, p. 1464.

²² Marie-Joseph Erb, in Charles R. Joy, *Music in the Life of Albert Schweitzer*, Harper, New York, 1951, pp. 185–86.

Pentecost (1917), magnificats, offertories, motets, psalms and hymns. Erb also produced secular choral works, songs (in French, German and the Alsatian dialect), chamber music (three sonatas for violin, sonatas for cello and for horn, a string trio, two string quartets, a saxophone quartet and an octet for strings and winds) and many pieces for piano, both solo (*Images et Légendes d'Alsace, Suite 'En Alsace'* and a slew of shorter works) and four-hands. Though a number of these pieces remain in manuscript, many were issued by notable publishers, the number of which (and their geographical spread) is noteworthy. In Alsace they included Le Roux and Wolf of Strasbourg and Gloess and Salvator of Mulhouse, and in wider France Delrieu of Nice and Costallat, Durand, Hamelle, Leduc, Schola Cantorum and Sénart of Paris. Publishers in adjacent countries included Hug (Zurich), Schott (Brussels), André (Offenbach), Feuchtinger (Stuttgart), Coppentrath-Paweleck (Regensburg), Schwann (Dusseldorf), Fürstner (Berlin) and a long list from Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, Fritsch, Junne, Kahnt, Leuckart, Reinecke, Schubert and Simrock. Further afield Erb was issued by Universal of Vienna, Joseph Williams of London, Hansen of Copenhagen, Real Collegio of Valencia, Holy Heart of Halifax (Canada), Boston Music of Boston (USA) and Fischer of New York.

During his lifetime Erb was best known for his sacred music and, particularly, his works for organ. The iconic academic Hugo Riemann noted his 'valuable organ compositions'²³ and an edition of Erb's organ works was welcomed by the editor of the journal *Musica Sacra* as 'a substantive enrichment of the repertoire.'²⁴ A summary of Erb's meaning to the organ was given by the organist-scholar Norbert Dufourcq, a professor of music history at the Paris Conservatoire and long the organist at Saint Merri in that city:

The varied and unique work of the Alsatian organist has a special place in the French literature of the modern organ. It contributes to the rebirth of our national school, avoids remaining fixed in academic formulas, takes into account the evolution of forms and style, and maintains the instrument's noble mission.²⁵

²³ Hugo Riemann, *Musik-Lexikon*, Max Hesse, Berlin, 1916, p. 289.

²⁴ Franz Xaver Haberl, 'Neu und früher erschienene Kirchen- und Orgel-kompositionen', *Musica Sacra*, Vol. 20/41, No. 5, 1 May 1908, p. 54.

²⁵ Norbert Dufourcq, 'L'Œuvre d'Orgue', *Un grand musicien français, op. cit.*, p. 81.

A complete listing of Erb's organ creations follows: *1ère Sonate sur des motifs liturgiques*, Op. 70 (1905); *Prière sur le motif du 'Pater'* ('Gib' uns heute unser täglich Brot') for organ and violin, Op. 71 (1906); *20 Pièces*, Op. 73 (1907); *80 Pièces Brèves sur des thèmes grégoriens*, Op. 74 (1907); *Douze Postludes*, Op. 75 (1908); *2ème Sonate Mater Salvatoris*, Op. 82 (1912); *Angélus* for organ and violin, Op. 82b (1912); *Suite liturgique*, Op. 83 (1913); *Méditation* for organ and cello, Op. 88 (1911); *Suite*, Op. 90 (1919); *Duo* (1916); *Offertoire pour faire suite au Crédo du V ton* (1926); *Cinq Pièces* (1926); *8 Postludes sur des airs de cantiques populaires – Sorties*, 1926 (1926); *3ème Sonate Veni Creator* (1927); *Symphonies grégoriennes*, two vols. (1936); *1ère Sonatine* for organ and cor anglais (1940); *2ème Sonatine* for organ and cor anglais (1940); *Trois Pièces* (1941); two *Capricci* (1941); *Quatre Pièces* (1941); *Fantasia* (1943).

The *Sonate sur des motifs liturgiques* or *Sonate über Choralthemen der katholischen Liturgie* ('Sonata on Chorale Themes from the Catholic Liturgy'), Op. 70, was composed in 1905, published by Junne-Schott of Brussels in 1911 and dedicated to Erb's teacher and friend Eugène Gigout. William S. Newman judged this piece, the composer's first organ work, though with the relatively late opus number 70, 'a pleasing, readily playable organ sonata in Franck's idiom'.²⁶ Less tepid praise was given by the Strasbourg Conservatoire professor Alphonse Foehr, who proposed that 'M.-J. Erb created a new style in organ literature with his remarkable First Sonata on Liturgical Themes. In this work he combines the severe diatonicism of the plainsong with free chromaticism in a very successful way'.²⁷ The first movement, *Maestoso e lento* [1], in common time, is prefaced by a two-bar incipit with an initial rising triad in the fifth psalm tone and a short *ff* introduction that ends in a fermata-held G major ninth chord. An *Allegro* begins in bar three, *mf* in F major, with the initial triadic motif in the bass adopting the semiquaver motion of the accompaniment, which continues almost uninterrupted throughout the movement. A more subdued *Poco più tranquillo* follows, which then increases in dynamics, chromaticism and rhythmic complexity before fermatas precede a truncated

²⁶ William S. Newman, *The Sonata since Beethoven*, Norton, New York, 1972, p. 551.

²⁷ 'Le style de Marie-Joseph Erb', *Un grand musicien français, op. cit.*, p. 100.

return to *Tempo I*. A *Molto tranquillo* in A flat major enters in soft string stops and *Vox coelestis*, before a tempestuous *Tempo I* with ever-heightening chromatic tension gives way to the ultimate *Listesso tempo*. The latter is marked *Maestoso*, in F major and a broad $\frac{3}{2}$ metre, with the ongoing mid-register semiquavers sandwiched between the triumphant *fff* triadic motif in both treble and pedal. Jean Huré commented that ‘The first movement displays singular solidity of form, as well as a good deal of fantasy in the structure.’²⁸ A shorter, meditative *O Crux, ave, spes unica* (‘Hail to the Cross, our only hope’, from the seventh stanza of the sixth-century hymn, *Vexilla Regis Prodeunt*) [2], is introduced quietly, *Molto moderato e espressivo* in E minor and common time. Chromaticism is heightened along with a slow *crescendo* to *forte* (*recht voll*; ‘quite full’) at *Breit* (‘Broadly’) but subsides as *Tranquillo* and then *Molto Tranquillo* return to E minor and the last *pppp* chord. As Huré discerned, ‘In the second movement, *O Crux, ave, spes unica*, the chromatic blends delicately with the diatonic, though we know how difficult it is to achieve such a fusion smoothly. The mystical melancholy which emanates from the piece is seductive.’²⁹ In the third movement an incipit in the fourth psalm tone (*Finalis*), *Allegro moderato* [3], and in A minor and common time, begins with semiquaver triplets in the right hand increasing the sense of movement above the incipit theme in the bass. At *Molto tranquillo* the hushed *pp* dynamic is displayed in *dolce* string voices and *Vox coelestis*, a repose that continues until the return of an agitated *Tempo I* and a *Doppio piu lento* which ends in an A major fermata-held chord, *fff*. The *Epilog* [4], *Lento – piu vivo*, begins in $\frac{6}{4}$ and undergoes rapid change though a *Quasi recitative, Animato* (in $\frac{4}{2}$) and *Poco largamente*. The opening incipit of the first movement is again intoned at *Molto largamente* ($\frac{3}{2}$), before the piece closes on a powerful F major chord, *ffff*. The music historian Norbert Dufourcq concluded:

Following the example of Widor and Guilmant, it is in the sonata that M.-J. Erb is at his best: a sonata in only three movements, with two *allegros* framing an *adagio* [with a final

²⁸ Jean Huré, ‘M. J. Erb. Organiste et Compositeur’, *Lorgue et les organistes*, Vol. 2, No. 17, August 1925, p. 4. Huré (1877–1930) was not only an organist himself but a composer of some stature (though public recognition has hardly come his way), with an output that includes three symphonies and other orchestral pieces, much chamber music, a few scores for stage, some songs and a handful of works for organ and for piano.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

epilogue]. [...] The dedication to Gigout reveals the author's wish to continue the effort made over the last twenty years by the man who was one of the first to revive the tradition of the liturgical organ. One can admire the rigour of the plan followed by the symphonist-organist, as well as that of the development. But in the area of harmonic language, Erb was more advanced than the Parisian organists; he did not hesitate to make the conquests of certain 'impressionists' his own, and thus to subvert the received tradition within the church. The writing remains firm, however, classical in certain respects, and if the registration chosen remains conventional, one admires the firmness of thought, the ease of the musician who can claim, in the same way as a Louis Vierne or a Tournemire during the same era, from whom he was taking the mantle, or [Charles-Marie Widor,] the composer of the *Gothic* (1895) and *Romane* (*Romanesque*; 1900) symphonies.³⁰

The *Zwanzig Orgelstücke zum Gebrauch beim Gottesdienst* ("Twenty Organ Pieces for Use in Church Services"), Op. 73, consisting of 'preludes, interludes, postludes, etc.', were published in 1908 by L. Schwann of Düsseldorf. The collection is dedicated to Father Marie François-Xavier Mathias, the organist of the Strasbourg Cathedral and a lecturer in church music at the University of Strasbourg. Six of the twenty pieces are recorded here, beginning with the first, *Praeludium über 'O salutaris hostia'* ('Prelude on "O saving sacrifice"') [5], from a Eucharistic hymn by Thomas Aquinas. Marked *Moderato* in common time and in the Mixolydian mode on G (with flattened seventh tone), the piece displays gentle canonic imitation throughout, moving *allargando e diminuendo* to *Lento* and (in modern parlance) a G major close, *ppp*. The second piece of the twenty is *Postludium über 'Pange lingua'* ('Postlude on "Sing, my tongue"') [6], from a hymn for the Feast of Corpus Christi, again by Aquinas. *Andante serioso*, in $\frac{3}{4}$ and in the Phrygian mode on E (with flattened second, third, sixth and seventh tones), the postlude builds in continual quavers towards a *fff fermata* on E major. No. 3, the *Alla Marcia bei Trauungen* ('March-style, for Weddings') [7], begins *Andante moderato* in common time and G major. The stately opening and closing surround a more reticent *Più tranquillo*,

³⁰ Norbert Dufourcq, 'L'Œuvre d'Orgue', *Un grand musicien français, op. cit.*, pp. 79–80.

resulting in ABA (song-form). This *Alla Marcia* was one of ten roll recordings that Erb made on the Welte-Mignon reproducing piano in Freiburg.

The fourth number of the set, *Méditation über 'Dies irae' und 'Lux aeterna'* ('Meditation on "Day of Wrath" and "Light Eternal"') [8], draws upon two texts from the Requiem Mass, deftly coping with its two pre-existing themes (the first being a sequence and the second a communion antiphon) within a mere 37 bars. The well-known *Dies irae* theme begins *Grave ma non tempo* in canonic fashion, in $\frac{6}{4}$ and D minor, with accompanying quavers adding heightened dissonance. Bar 20 yields to a F major setting of *Lux aeterna*, now co-existing with the *Dies irae* theme, which appears in bass octaves. A *Molto rallentando* and *diminuendo* precede the final chord in D major, *pianissimo*. *Zum Offertorium oder als Nachspiel* ('As an Offertory or Postlude') [9], No. 6, is marked *Moderato*. The genial first theme, in A major and common time, gives way after eighteen bars to the D flat major second theme in slower minims. Song-form is revealed by the return of the A major opening, and the short coda at *Più lento* (where strings are indicated in both manuals) furnishes a pedal point on A which subsides to an A major close, *pp*. The twelfth number, and the last included here, is *Impromptu über 'Puer natus est nobis'* ('Impromptu on "Unto us a child is born"') [10], the introit for Christmas Day. The opening theme with its upward fifth begins *Allegro moderato*, in $\frac{2}{4}$ and C major. The theme is underpinned by rolling semiquavers in the bass, which move to the treble when the first theme appears in bass octaves. An eight-bar pedal point on C precedes a tonally unstable phase that brings statements of the theme in D flat, then D and A flat major (*Più tranquillo*). After a repeat of the unstable section, the first theme returns at *Tempo I*, which makes short feints to D major (the dominant of the dominant) and G (the dominant) before landing in C major with redoubled authority. Frequent repetitions of the fifth motif and five bars of C pedal-point, *Molto lento* and *rallentando*, precede a majestic *fff* plagal cadence at *Largamente*, with its widely spread final C major chord. The *Cäcilienvereinsorgan* commented: 'The present collection offers modern compositions of a very high artistic standard, which will give pleasure to every skilful organist who loves not only to play a musical work

technically flawlessly, but also to penetrate its spirit'.³¹ Franz Xaver Haberl, director of the Kirchenmusikschule in Regensburg, observed:

These easy to moderately difficult organ pieces, for the most part written for two-manual instruments and provided with numerous stops, are a real enrichment to the repertory of Catholic organists. The pieces, which include *O salutaris*, *Pange lingua*, German hymns and also shorter interludes, are finely crafted and particularly interesting from a rhythmic point of view. Most of the numbers can also be performed on the harmonium. The solidly original compositions can be recommended highly to all organists, not excepting masters!³²

For *The Musical Observer* the *Suite pour Grand Orgue*, Op. 90 (1919), was 'deserving of the serious attention of capable organists as the writing of the various parts, its construction, originality and individuality disclose unusual gifts on the part of its author'.³³ It was dedicated to Joseph Bonnet and published by Boston Music Cie in 1920. The opening *Alleluia* [1], a lengthy *Allegro* of eighteen pages, begins with a tonally unsettled introduction in $\frac{6}{8}$. Even when the first, joyous theme in D major appears, marked *Allegro vivace*, it quickly devolves into tonal uncertainty. A repeat of the introductory material is followed by the same cheerful D major theme before a muted section in B minor begins in slower note-values at *L'istesso tempo*, and this ghostly minor region is repeated. The return of the first theme in D major ends in a wild mix of demisemiquavers (*Un poco meno ed a piacere*), which then yield to an imposing *Hymne alsacien*, *Maestoso* in D major, which is reprised after a contrasting *Più vivo* in A major. On the final page, at *a tempo maestoso (tutta la forza)* in $\frac{9}{8}$, the opening is restored before a codetta, *sempre più allargando* in $\frac{3}{4}$, erupts in semiquaver septuplets that preface the final fermata-held D major chord. As Norbert Dufourcq wrote, 'In the first piece we have a brilliant *allegro* [...] written with great concern for architecture and clarity of plan. The theme

³¹ Anon., 'Nova von L. Schwann in Düsseldorf', *Cäcilienvereinsorgan. Fliegende Blätter für kath. Kirchenmusik. Anzeigenblatt*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 15 February 1908, p. 7.

³² Haberl, *loc. cit.*, p. 54.

³³ Anon., 'Seven Worth-While Vocal Novelties', *The Musical Observer*, Vol. 19, No. 5, May 1920, p. 82.

of the hymn of the lost province is proclaimed with all the faith of an old Alsatian.³⁴ For Jean Huré, 'The first movement, *Alleluia*, with its rhapsodic opening and its pronounced rhythmic development, is perfectly sustained. It is a work of real virtuosity, yet oddly makes no concessions to technique. It is pure music, with passages that are infectiously enthusiastic.'³⁵ *The Etude* held simply that '*Alleluia!* by Marie Joseph Erb, would [...] give a brilliant conclusion to a recital.'³⁶

The *Pastorale* [12] 'which follows is a pleasant reverie', Huré wrote, 'as if an ancient shepherd is improvising on his pipe. The development of the initial idea is extensive, but avoids straying into pointless chatter or falling into scholastic pedantry.'³⁷ It is in extended ABA form, beginning *Molto tranquillo* in common time, and in an A major key which is often shaded with the relative minor, F sharp, The hushed demisemiquaver opening gives way to a slower, *forte* B section in E flat major, *Un poco più mosso*. The contrast continues with a passage marked *Largamente, ben misurato* adding heightened chromaticism through the return of the opening at *Tempo I*. Tonal instability remains the rule until the last four bars, which conclude in serene, *pppp* F sharp major. *Andante espressivo* ('Lament') [13], also in song-form and in common time, begins in A flat major, though quickening accidentals soon propel it far afield. A secondary theme appears, *Molto tranquillo*, with a *ben espressivo* crotchet melody in the left hand in a key that veers from A minor to C major and back, with the initial A flat major regained at *Tempo I*. A brief section in E flat major (the dominant) only emphasises A flat as the pre-eminent key, and after *molto rallentando* and *morendo* the movement ends on a fermata-held A flat major chord, *pppp*.

The finale of the Suite, *Ite, missa est* ('Go, it is sent' (i.e., 'The Mass is finished')) [14], is based the last words of the Mass. *Moderato* and in common time, with the subtitle 'Improvisation', it opens with a *cantus firmus* in D major in the left hand and a flurry of arpeggiated demisemiquavers in the treble, and is reprised *ff* and *Ben moderato*

³⁴ Dufourcq, *loc. cit.*, p. 78.

³⁵ Huré, *loc. cit.*, p. 4.

³⁶ William C. Carl, 'Music for the Christmas Organ Recital', *The Etude*, Vol. 40, No. 12, December 1922, p. 862.

³⁷ Huré, *loc. cit.*, p. 4.

(with the *cantus firmus* in the treble and the swift accompaniment in the bass). Heightened dissonance precedes the indication *Listesso tempo, moderato*, in B major and $\frac{6}{4}$, as *Benedicamus Domino* ('Let us bless the Lord') – the same text that historically signalled the end of the Mass before it was itself replaced by *Ite, missa est* – appears in a homophonic rendering. A third appearance of the opening occurs at *Tempo I*, again in D major and common time, the accompaniment now in sextuplet quavers before a *codetta, Largamente*, leads to harsh semitone dissonances and a widely spread D major finish, *ffff*. 'In the last piece', wrote Norbert Dufourcq,

we again find the qualities of balance, power and clarity: deft arpeggios are entrusted to the manuals, while the theme of the *Ite missa est* is removed to the pedal. This is the form of the classical 'full chorus', which is halted in its evolution by the appearance of the *Benedicamus Domino*, treated as a chorale. These two ideas make up a beautifully soaring ensemble, for M.-J. Erb is a lyricist who also delights in grand frescoes of sound.³⁸

'The finale, *Ite Missa est*, is admittedly an improvisation', Huré wrote, 'but one that avoids any hint of confusion. It is a dizzying piece of brilliance and spirit in D major, which concludes in thrilling majesty.'³⁹

William Melton is the author of Humperdinck: A Life of the Composer of Hänsel und Gretel (Toccata Press, London, 2020) and The Wagner Tuba: A History (edition ebenos, Aachen, 2008) and was a contributor to The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia (2013). He did postgraduate studies in music history at the University of California at Los Angeles before a four-decade career as a horn-player with the Sinfonie Orchester Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle). Further writings include articles on lesser-known Romantics including Felix Draeseke, Friedrich Gernsheim, Henri Kling and Friedrich Klose, and he has researched and edited the scores of the 'Forgotten Romantics' series for the publisher edition ebenos.

³⁸ Dufourcq, *loc. cit.*, pp. 78–79.

³⁹ Huré, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

International organ virtuoso Dr **Jan Lehtola** is one of the most successful and progressive Finnish organists of his generation. The orchestras with which he has appeared include the BBC Philharmonic, Finnish Radio Symphony, Tapiola Sinfonietta, Lahti Symphony, Helsinki, Turku and Tampere Philharmonic, as well as the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra and the St Michel Strings, and conductors including Juha Kangas, Ludovic Morlot, Kent Nagano, Sakari Oramo, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Leif Segerstam, Muhai Tang and Osmo Vänskä, amongst others. He has performed at many international festivals, among them the Lahti Organ Festival, Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival, Time of Music in Viitasaari, Tampere Biennale, Musica Nova Helsinki, Turku, Mikkeli, Mänttä and Hauho Music Festivals and the annual Festival of New Organ Music in London. He has also given recitals in leading European concert-halls, such as the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg and in countless cathedrals and churches, among them La Trinité in Paris, the Berlin, Riga and Tallinn Cathedrals, St Thomas Church in Leipzig and St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey in London.

Jan Lehtola collaborates regularly with composers and has given more than 180 world and regional premieres. He has had works written for him by Harri Ahmas, Kalevi Aho, Atso Almila, Adina Dumitrescu, Thierry Escaich, Naji Hakim, Matti Heininen, Paavo Heininen, Carita Holmström, Juha T. Koskinen, Olli Korttekangas, Juha Leinonen, Jouko and Jyrki Linjama, Jukka Linkola, Paola Livorsi, Pehr Henrik Nordgren, Axel Ruoff, Martin Stacey, Riikka Talvitie and Adam Vilagi. In 2003 he organised the first International Naji Hakim Festival in Helsinki. He was the Artistic Director of the Organo Novo Festival in Helsinki from 2007 to 2016 and Chairman of the Finnish Organum Society from 2009 to 2014. He is Chairman of the Helsinki Musiikkitalo Organ Association and Artistic Director of the international organ concerts in Musiikkitalo.



Photograph: Thomas Tenkaman

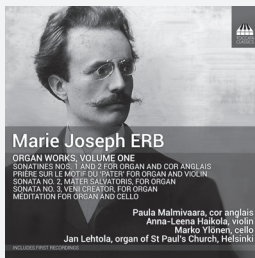
Jan Lehtola has recorded for the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) and can be heard on more than 60 commercial recordings (on the Alba, BIS, Fuga, IFO, Jubal, Ondine, Pilfink and Toccata Classics labels) in repertoire including works by Bach, Hakim, Paavo Heininen, Jouko Linjama, Mendelssohn, Oskar Merikanto, Rautavaara, Saint-Saëns, Schumann and Widor.

He studied the organ in Helsinki (with Olli Porthan and Kari Jussila), Amsterdam (with Jacques van Oortmerssen and Jean Boyer), Stuttgart (with Ludger Lohmann), Lyons (with Louis Robilliard) and Paris (with Naji Hakim). He graduated from the Church Music Department of the Sibelius Academy, gaining his diploma with distinction in 1998. In 2000 he gave his Sibelius Academy debut recital in Kallio Church, Helsinki, and in 2005 received a doctorate for his dissertation on Oskar Merikanto as a transmitter of European influences to Finland. Jan Lehtola is a University Lecturer at the Sibelius Academy. He is also active as a lecturer and a teacher of master-classes.

www.janlehtola.com



Jan Lehtola plays Marie Joseph Erb on Toccata Classics



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“The playing of organist Jan Lehtola and the three instrumentalists, especially English hornist Paula Malmivaara, is simply superb, and they are captured in beautifully deep, resonant, yet clear sound.”

Fanfare, March/April 2024

THE MAIN ORGAN OF TAMPERE CATHEDRAL

Tampere Cathedral is one of the most important National Romantic cultural monuments in Finland. Designed by Lars Sonck, it was built between 1902 and 1907. The interior decorations were created by two of the most distinguished painters of the period, Magnus Enckell and Hugo Simberg. The first organ installed at the Cathedral was built by the Lahti Organ Factory and completed in 1907. This instrument, however, was found to be so deficient that it was rebuilt by the Kangasala Organ Factory under Aarne Wegelius in 1929. A complete restoration of the organ was undertaken under the supervision of Jan Lehtola in spring 2021. This is one of Finland's most important and largest Romantic organs to be preserved in its original guise.

I, C-a³

Principale 16'

Principale 8'

Principale minore 8'

Ottava 4'

Ottava 2'

Mixtura 2²/₄ + 2 + 1¹/₃ + 1

Corno camoscio 8'

Flauto 8'

Bordone 8'

Flauto doppio 4'

Cornetto 8+4+2²/₃ + 2+1³/₅

Tuba 8'

Corno 8'

Clarino 4'

II (swell), C-a³

Principale 8'

Flauto armonico 8'

Quintaten 8'

Unda maris 8' (2 ranks)

Bordone 8'

Dulce 8'

Bordone 16'

Dulciana 4'

Flauto traverso 4'

Corno camoscio 4'

Quinta 2²/₃

Piccolo 2'

Terza 1³/₅

Settima 1¹/₇

Cimbalo 2+1+1¹/₂

Corno di bassetto 16'

Tromba 8'

Clarinetto 8'

Vox humana 8'

Corno armonico 4'

Tremolo

III (in swell), C-a³

Principale 8'

Ottava minore 4'

Flauto traverso 8'

Flauto camino 8'

Gamba 8'

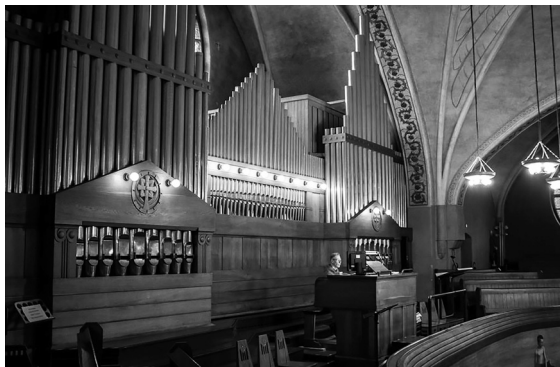
Gamba vibrato 8'

Salicionale 8'

Voce celeste 8' (2 ranks)

Corno notte 4'

Violino 4'



Photograph: Tampere Biennale

Flauto ottavante 4'
 Quinta $2\frac{2}{3}$
 Flautino 2'
 Flageoletta 1'
 Armonia eterea $2\frac{2}{3}+2+1\frac{3}{5}+1$
 Cornetto $8+4+2\frac{2}{3}+2+1\frac{3}{5}$
 Bordone amabile 16'
 Fugara 16'
 Fagotto 16'
 Tromba armonica 8'
 Oboe 8'
 Corno inglese 8'
 Clarino armonico 4'
 Corno 4'
 Tremolo
 Celesta 8'

Pedal, C-f
 Principale 16'
 Subbasso 16'
 Violone 16'
 Ottava 8'
 Violoncello 8'
 Flauto 4'
 Cornetto $5\frac{1}{3}+4+3\frac{1}{5}+2\frac{2}{7}+2$
 Bombarda 32'
 Trombone 16'
 Baritono 8'
 Bordone Grande 32' (octave transmission)
 Fugara 16' (transmission from 3rd manual)

Bordone amabile 16'
 (transmission from 3rd manual)
 Fagotto 16' (transmission from 3rd manual)
 Clarino armonico 4'
 (transmission from 3rd manual)
 Tubular pneumatic action
 Four free combinations,
 operated with pistons and/
 or pedals
 Standard couplers plus octave couplers
 General crescendo



Recorded on 16 November 2022 in Tampere Cathedral, Finland
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Producer: Jan Lehtola

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MARIE JOSEPH ERB Organ Works, Volume Two

Sonate über Choralthemen der katholischen Liturgie, Op. 70 (1911)

26:48

- | | | | |
|---|-----|--|------|
| 1 | I | <i>Maestoso e lento</i> | 7:43 |
| 2 | II | <i>O Crux, eve, spes unica (Molto moderato e espressivo)</i> | 6:00 |
| 3 | III | <i>Allegro moderato</i> | 9:02 |
| 4 | IV | <i>Epilog (Lento)</i> | 4:03 |

*Zwanzig Orgelstücke zum Gebrauch beim Gottesdienst, Op. 73**

- | | | | |
|----|--------|---|------|
| 5 | No. 1 | Praeludium über 'O salutaris hostia' | 2:29 |
| 6 | No. 2 | Postludium über 'Pange lingua' | 2:10 |
| 7 | No. 3 | Alla Marcia bei Trauungen | 4:03 |
| 8 | No. 4 | Méditation über 'Dies irae' und 'Lux aeterna' | 3:31 |
| 9 | No. 6 | Zum Offertorium oder als Nachspiel | 3:30 |
| 10 | No. 12 | Impromptu über 'Puer natus est nobis' | 4:13 |

Suite pour Grand Orgue, Op. 90 (1920)*

35:46

- | | | | |
|----|-----|----------------|-------|
| 11 | I | Alleluia | 13:06 |
| 12 | II | Pastorale | 8:41 |
| 13 | III | Cantilène | 7:08 |
| 14 | IV | Ite, missa est | 6:51 |

TT 82:32**Jan Lehtola*****FIRST RECORDINGS****organ of Tampere Cathedral**