

Reviews of Hymn-Based Compositions
Lance J. Peeler

New Music

A Boy Is Born in Bethlehem: Five Organ Pieces for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. Raymond H. Haan. Morning Star Music MSM-10-176. \$14.00

These enjoyable settings are of medium difficulty. They are accessible to play and hear, but some preparation is necessary because of the number of registration changes. PUER NATUS IN BETHLEHEM, the title setting, starts with quiet imitation in two voices, and finishes with arpeggios using the full organ. It would be good in a concert of Christmas music. I plan to use WIE SCHÖN LEUCHTET this Epiphany. It is a fairly simple, but pleasing, setting of the tune utilizing the zimbelstern to good effect. RICHMOND/CHESTERFIELD has a sturdy setting with a quiet, contrasting B section. HUMILITY starts quietly and builds to a reed-heavy crescendo, and then decrescendos back to a quiet conclusion. The setting of FREU DICH SEHR/GENEVAN 42 is wonderfully peaceful. This is a great collection for December and January.

Wondrous Birth: Seven Hymn Settings for Organ. David Sims. Augsburg Fortress 978-1-5064-1366-2. \$21.00.

This collection includes a solo setting, an introduction for congregational singing, and an alternate harmonization for each tune included. The tunes are MABUNE, WZLOBIE LEZY, KALINGA, UN FLAMBEAU, COLUMCILLE, BESANÇON, and RISE UP, SHEPHERD. Several of these are on the more unusual side in collections of Christmas music. They are of medium difficulty. My favorite setting in this collection is RISE UP, SHEPHERD, which combines the spiritual with Nicholai's tune WIE SCHÖN LEUCHTET. Some of the introductions might be confusing for a congregation without a choir's help, but they are quite nice. W ZLOBIE LEZY is presented in both F and G, and in both common forms, beginning on the downbeat and beginning with an anacrusis.

Stars: Eight Organ Settings. Emma Lou Diemer. Augsburg Fortress 978-1-5064-1364-8. \$17.00.

I usually greatly enjoy Emma Lou Diemer's settings, and these are no exception. They range from easy to medium difficulty. The tunes are CONDITOR ALME SIDERUM, IN DIR IST FREUDE, PERSONET HODIE, PUER NOBIS, STARS IN MY CROWN, THE FIRST NOWELL, WACHET AUF, and WIE SCHÖN LEUCHTET (which is the most difficult of these settings). The harmonies in THE FIRST NOWELL are reminiscent of Satie's Gymnopédie No. 1, which is a nice counterpoint to the familiar melody. CONDITOR ALME SIDERUM is mysterious sounding, but I left wanting it to be longer. The settings in this collection are excellent and ones that congregations will love to hear.

Festive Hymn Settings for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. Michael Burkhardt. Morning Star Music MSM-10-178. \$33.00

This is a collection of eleven hymns set for congregational singing. Many of these would be perfect for a lessons and carols service. Each tune receives an introduction followed by a harmonization for each stanza. Some stanzas are designed for part-singing, some for unison, and stanza three of "As with Gladness Men of Old" is designed to be sung in canon between the women and men. All settings include a reproducible page for the congregation with the

exception of JOSEPH LIEBER, JOSEPH MEIN and COLUMCILLE, “No Wind at the Willow.” “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” after a lengthy introduction uses FOREST GREEN for stanzas one and four, while two and three are set to ST. LOUIS. Some of the harmonizations might be difficult if your congregation is not a strongly-singing one, but I imagine most could handle them well.

A Wittenburg Collection: Lutheran Chorales for Organ. Karl Osterland. Augsburg Fortress 978-1-5064-1357-0. \$22.00.

This is a collection of nine chorales, ranging from a low-medium to a high-medium difficulty. EIN FEST BURG is the lengthiest, set as a Grand Partita, with each of its four stanzas receiving its own movement. These settings are all enjoyable to play and listen to, although I suspect that they would best serve in places where the chorale tradition is well-known—most of these would be unknown in my current church. My only qualm with this collection is that the editing seems a little uneven. Some of the pages have copyright and composer information chopped off at the bottom, and there are some index errors. None of the music is affected by these issues, though.

He Is Born: Six Organ Settings for Christmas. Mark A. Radice. Morning Star Music MSM-10-185. \$14.00.

This collection is a good resource for last-minute organ needs. Most of the settings are easily prepared or even sight-read. The title setting of IL EST NÉ, LE DIVIN ENFANT is especially nice, as is the setting of IN DULCI JUBILO, although I found myself wanting more of the latter. PICARDY receives four contemplations, three of which are similar in texture if not harmonies. QUELLE EST CETTE ODEUR AGRÉABLE has three short movements. AWAY IN A MANGER and a toccata on SICILIAN MARINERS round out the collection. Although these pieces are easily prepared, the phrasings and articulations make them quite musical.

Variations on Veni Creator Spiritus. David Briggs. Morning Star Music MSM-10-028. Organ Duet. \$17.00.

This set of theme and eight variations will require two capable players at the same console. Most variations will work fine with two manuals; variation six needs four to do it justice. The variations are largely delightful, if sometimes challenging, with an expansive harmonic language and passages that are just fun to play. Variation Seven is for pedals alone, which was challenging for the organist with whom I read these. The use of sixth chords to conclude several variations gives a somewhat old-fashioned sound, but this is easily remedied by omitting the sixth. Many of these variations would be good for preludes or postludes, but the whole set would best fit in a concert setting.

One of My Old Favorites

American Folk Hymn Suite. Michael Burkhardt. Morning Star Music MSM-10-835. Organ solo. \$9.00.

This is a three-movement suite on FOUNDATION, AT THE RIVER, and NETTLETON. Each movement is short (a minute and a half to two minutes), and useful when I need a brief piece for something. Played together, they make a nice prelude. FOUNDATION is rather sparkly with running sixteenth notes, AT THE RIVER use gentle strings, and NETTLETON uses interesting harmonic extensions to end each phrase. Whenever I have played it, congregations enjoy it greatly.

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