BONNET—BOSSI—KARG-ELERT

THREE APERÇUS

By HARVEY B. GAUL

The schools of organ music that influence the world to-day are the French, the Italian and the German. Of the three, the French is the most important; the German follows; while the Italian, borrowing a little from the French and having a decided German leaning, stands midway between them. A generation or two ago the English school was dominant. To-day, due to the lack of forceful men, it hardly ranks with the continental schools.

As every school is created or moulded by leaders, these schools may be epitomized in the three generic names, Bonnet, Bossi and Karg-Elert.

These men and their respective schools represent freer writing, for one thing, freer form, thematic material, harmony, treatment and development, as against the excessive binary form of the mid-Victorian period. They have brought organ composition nearer to contemporary symphonic writing.

They are not only writers, but they are teachers, and above all, players. Under them organ technique has advanced. It is no longer a matter of lifeless legato, but approaches an orchestra performance, with light and shade, delicacy and force. The old legato is there, but there is something just as important, a decisive staccato.

To them the organ is greater than for mere cinema accompaniment. They are trying to put it on an honest concert level where an organ recital may not be ashamed to claim kinship with a piano recital.

Thanks to them and the generation they overlap, a near future will see the democratized organ elevated to the kingship of the early English and Post-Reformation periods.

BONNET

When Alexandre Guilmant was gathered to Abraham's bosom, he left the art of organ playing in France on a higher level than it had ever known before. He also left a score of scholars to carry forward the concepts of organ playing as wrought by Lemmens and César Franck, and developed by Guilmant. Chief among his pupils is Joseph Bonnet. The Elijahesque mantle has fallen on his shoulders, and to say he adorns it is saying little.

Joseph Bonnet was born in the romantic city of Bordeaux in 1884. His father was organist of St. Eulaie, Bordeaux. At an early age Bonnet was musically inclined. His father, quick to take advantage of the boy's aptitude, taught him more than the rudiments of his profession. Under his father's tutelage he became quite a finished performer, and all this before the age of adolescence. At fourteen, the post of St. Nicholas came open. Bonnet was given the position. Later, when the Church of St. Michael's became vacant, the appointment fell to Bonnet. It was at St. Michael's that he gave his first recitals. As a child recitalist he gained an enviable reputation. The clergy and laity of Bordeaux considered him little short of a prodigy.

After a brief tenure at St. Michael's, he felt the lure of Paris. Sooner or later every organist hears the call of the City of Light. He may go to study or he may go to play, but he returns happier and wiser. Bonnet went to study. He chose Guilmant, then in the zenith of his career, and the Paris Conservatoire, the greatest Alma Mater of music that the world has known.

After a few years study he achieved the Premier Award. The work chosen for that concours was the discouragingly difficult Fantasia on the Chorale in "Le Prophète," by Liszt. In passing let it be said that this virtuoso work is hardly known in this country — a regrettable fact, as it is a work after Liszt's heart, bristling with technical obstacles and replete with big moments.

The organistship of St. Eustache became vacant and Bonnet, after getting the Guilmant prize, decided to enter the competition — it was open to all the organists of Paris. At the close of the competition, Bonnet was chosen as the most skilful performer. All the competitors were Premier Awards of the Paris Conservatoire; and when one says that, one says they were the most efficient of the younger men of France.

One may be able to play organ at St. Nicholas, Bordeaux; but when one competes with Conservatoire Awards, *c'est quelque chose. Alors!* St. Eustache always enjoyed a reputation for fine organ music. Bonnet advanced it. Every American student in Paris spent his time between Widor at St. Sulpice and Bonnet at St. Eustache.

It is as organist of St. Eustache that Bonnet is known where-ever there is a "kist o' whistles." He has other distinctions besides his church position. Guilmant's death made him organist of the "Société des Concerts" at the Paris Conservatoire. He has given recitals at the Concerts Colonne and Concerts Lamoureux. An organ was specially installed for his appearance at the Concerts Colonne. He has travelled from one end of the continent to the other, giving recitals in Belgium, Austria, Hungary, England and Germany. He, like Widor, found Germany very cordial before the war.

He has just completed his second tour of the United States, where he gave recitals on different organs. (He says we have many *indifferent* ones and no two alike.) In 1910 a record was established in Paris. Bonnet gave a series of forty recitals, with a new program at each recital and no repetition. These were all played from memory, as Stokowski directs his orchestra — a truly phenomenal feat!

The ability to memorize enables him to concentrate on his instrument and his execution. Considering our varied organs, with their different consoles and un-uniform action, an organist is almost forced to memorize. There are some organists who spend their leisure time arguing as to the advisability of memorizing programs. Futile conversation! It is not a matter of advisability but of sheer ability. Bonnet carries in his mind's eye compositions that range from Clérambault to César Franck, from Martini to Mendelssohn. In his flawless execution, that extends even to highly colored trifles, he overcomes enough difficulties to end all argument.

Bonnet extemporizes felicitously, but he has not the fecundity that characterized Guilmant. His improvisation has more of the Widor style, brilliant, daring and essentially French.

His interpretation of Bach has the clean cut style that we have come to know as the French method. The French do not play Bach with the exaggerated tempo that Americans employ. They catch the mood of the fugue or toccata; all we catch is a metronome mark.

As a composer Bonnet has achieved wide recognition. For a man who has not written in the larger forms, he has been acclaimed one of the foremost writers. His opus-number is small as compared with Karg-Elert or Bossi. Some organists claim it does not exceed ten. However, the opus-number does not signify. (There was a certain organist who wrote 100 hymn-tunes and numbered them from one up to one hundred.)

Bonnet has three volumes containing twelve pieces each, and the Poèmes d'Automne and the Variations de Concert. The Variations de Concert are a set of bravura theme treatments, not at all like the Elgar enigma variations, but succinct and tangible variants.

The Poèmes d'Automne, opus 3 (in this country we know nothing about opus 1 and 2), is a set of three pieces: I — Lied des Chrysanthèmes, II — Matin Provençal, III — Poème du Soir. The Lied des Chrysanthèmes is an ingratiating work, — a lovely flowing theme with pleasant contrapuntal harmonies. The Matin Provençal is really a fantasia, with what might be a "Noël" for its central idea. The Poème du Soir is an appealing composition of its genre. It is a plaintive melody, freely arranged, and one might fancy it a folk-song, by reason of its directness.

The three volumes of twelve pieces each are important contributions to organ literature. They are titled on the cover "Musique Religeuse." This is something of a misnomer, as the contents are essentially recitalistic. The first volume contains much of importance and a few pieces that are negligible in interest. There is a dazzling Toccata, inscribed to Bossi; an Ave Maris Stella in three verses, virtually variations; a vivacious Intermezzo; a Fantasie sur deux Noëls (one of the Noëls is Adeste Fideles); a Légende Symphonique, very daring; a Rhapsodie Catalane, a courageous work, with a very difficult pedal cadenza in 6ths and 3ds and chords. It is by no means a work for the neophyte.

The second volume contains the Êtude de Concert, a show piece of the *n*th degree; a fragile Songe d'Enfant; a captivating Chant de Printemps; the favorite Elves, which deserves its popularity; and that tour de force, the Caprice Héroïque. This Caprice, conceived along broad lines, is fast becoming a programmatic war-horse.

The third and latest volume opens with In Memoriam (in memory of the Titanic heroes). It is a sombre, sonorous number, full of grave portent. It has been used by many American organists.

Ariel is of the scherzo type, vivacious and sprightly. It also enjoys quite a vogue.

There is an uneventful Magnificat, in six variant verses. It is set to a Gregorian tone and gives the impression of something uninspired. (It is to be desired French organists should stop writing down their improvisations to the Magnificat — most of them are unfortunate.)

There is a Chaconne that begins modestly, then works its way frenziedly up to big climaxes and subsides to a drawn out pedal note.

The last work in the volume is a Poème Tchèque. It is by far the most important of the twelve pieces. Strange to say, it is hardly ever heard here in America. It requires a positive technician to play it. There is no economy of treatment anywhere. Double pedals thunder the theme, passing chords enter where most writers would use passing notes; and in the end is a triumphant cacaphonic outburst. This Poème Tchèque, on what seems to be a real Czech theme, is one of the great contributions of recent years. It is designed for the recitalist and for the concert organ of the greatest dimensions.

Bonnet, like Karg-Elert, has his idiosyncrasies, and they are most pronounced. He is inordinately fond of triplets. They seem to be more in evidence than duples. He uses double pedals, and sometimes they are uneffective. Counterpoint motivates him, as it did Reger, but it is an unacademic counterpoint. It is literally melody against melody. While he has a penchant for chromatics, he does observe key and tonality. His thematic material *per se* is superior to either Bossi's or Karg-Elert's. In melody he is blithe and optimistic, whereas the other two men are very often unhappy in spirit and broken in melody. He also has a sense of humor that is lacking decidedly in the German school (see Max Reger) and is only superficial in the Italian (see Capocci).

Bonnet knows the concert organ and registers for it. Every shade of tonal effect is on his palette and when he calls for sustained fortissimos, with an occasional sforzando, he means specifically that. Furthermore, he approves of the crescendo pedal, which some of his English confreres with antedediluvian instincts spend so much time decrying.

As a teacher and player — performance over precept — he has been of great aid to his contemporaries of France and America. His style is that of the Lemmens-Guilmant school — cleanliness and vigor, mastered legato and staccato, and above all *exact note-values.* If there is one thing that the French organist, like the French philosopher, believes in, it is clarity. His thought and his work are absolutely pellucid. His mind does not work in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.

BOSSI

All professional roads lead to Italy. Architects, artists, and vocalists all make Rome a Mecca. The only man in the Arts who neglects Italy is the organist. Tradition tells him France and Germany, or, to sum it up in two names, Bach and Guilmant, offer the greatest opportunity for his peculiar study. To Bossi and a small coterie of men belongs the credit for establishing a school of playing and writing that bids fair to rank with the Franco-German schools.

Like Sinding and Sibelius, Bossi stands almost alone in his native land in the line of his endeavor. Other men are supporting him; but he, if not the pioneer, is at least the leader.

Marco Enrico Bossi was born at Salò near Brescia in 1861. His people were not rich, but professionally comfortable. His father was organist at Morbegno, and held rank as an accomplished musician.

Bossi at an early age evinced a desire for music, and especially the organ. His father, wiser than some, saw his latent genius and gave him his first lessons. When he was only ten, he started at the Liceo Musicale in Bologna. There he stayed three years, showing great promise. At the age of fourteen, he went to the Milan Conservatory, where he remained till he was twenty.

At the Milan Conservatory, he had composition under Ponchielli, the famous composer of "Gioconda"; and under Fumagalli, the virtuoso pianist-organist, he studied organ. At the Milan Conservatory Bossi is said to have had a most enviable reputation.

At the end of his conservatory life, he accepted the post at the Cathedral of Como. His duty was not only to play the organ, but to train the choir. Como really begins his career. Thence he rose step by step to national fame. While at Como, he wrote and played, until all Italy heard his name. His tenure at Como was ten years.

In 1891 he was appointed professor of organ and theory at the Naples Conservatory. In 1896 a more remunerative position was offered him as Director of the Liceo Musicale Marcello in Venice. With that position he assumed the chair of composition and was made conductor of the orchestral concerts in Venice, called the "Benedetto Marcello." Venice gave him inspiration and opportunity. Some of his greatest orchestral works were written there.

At the conclusion of his sixth year in Venice, the Directorship of the Liceo Musicale, Bologna, fell open. It was his first school and he remembered it affectionately, and the school remembered him. The result was that he was unanimously chosen as its head.

Bossi is a man who has the highest ideals about the art of organ writing. While he is a modernist in the structural and colourful sense, he believes in the solid traditions of a glorious past that reaches back to Palestrina. It must be said for the Italian school that it has not yielded to meretricious writing. (This is more than can be said of the French school.) Whether this is due to Papal influence is a matter of conjecture. One thing is certain: the nation that has brought forth the most tuneful operas, has also produced the most austere of modern organ music.

Bossi, like Lemmens, is the founder of a school of organ playing, his *Metodo di studio per l'organo moderno* being one of the acknowledged text-books. It is surprising that it is not used in this country as the companion volume to Lemmens, for in many ways it is its complement.

Bossi, unlike Karg-Elert, is a prodigious teacher. He has taught most of the young Italian organists, which in a way accounts for the Bossi cult.

As Italy was the birthplace of art, it was also the birthplace of opera. Bossi, under the tutelage and influence of Ponchielli, felt the call of the proscenium arch and at an early age began to write operas. Everyone in Italy writes operas, just as everyone in America writes moving-picture scenarios — and the success is the same in both countries. Like Handel, he discovered that opera was unprofitable, and after a few attempts gave it up. His stage works are "Paquita," a one-act piece, produced in Milan; "II Veggente" — also in one act — first performed at Milan, and "L'Angelo della Notte," in four acts, produced at Como. They fared moderately well, with more of a *succès d'estime* than of intrinsic value. One reason was that their melodic content, as contrasted with Leoncavallo and Mascagni, was not of a kind to endear them to the public taste.

Besides his operas, Bossi has written in every known form from song to symphony. It is his organ work, however, as it is said to be Gounod's church writings, that will make his fame enduring. While at Como, he produced a number of Masses, Motets, and Cantatas. The symphonic poem "II Cieco," written for tenor solo, chorus and orchestra, is a splendid work on a large scale. The "Inno di gloria," for full choir and organ, had several presentations in Leipzig. Strange to say, Leipzig likes Bossi as she does Widor — both have had cordial receptions there.

His large orchestra numbers are conceived along modern symphonic lines. The Overture and Impromptu are representative examples.

His violin sonata is accepted as of the César Franck standard. His most pretentious work is the oratorio "Paradise Lost," on Milton's poem. It has been given in this country.

Bossi's organ style, in a way similar to Karg-Elert's, lies chiefly in his harmonic structure. It is characterized by aggressive masculine chords. Rose-water and talcum powder compositions are not found in his catalogue. His themes are rarely ingratiating, unless we except his Aspiration and Elevation. He is what is called "tuneless." Certainly it would be difficult, even for an office-boy, to whistle his compositions. He weaves a fine contrapuntal fabric, working toward full organ climaxes. Fugal development interests him more than mere lateral melody. His sense of nuance and the facilities of the concert organ are ever in the fore part of his mind. He has the austerity of the early German school and none of the melodic fecundity of his compatriots — and that is his greatest fault. Staccato playing finds little sympathy in the Bossi school; his tendency is toward the old-fashioned legato.

His organ pieces are in all forms. The Pièce Héroïque is as interesting as César Franck's work, even if the second section does bear a faint resemblance to Dvořák. The Êtude Symphonique is a heavier composition, that requires most expert pedal technique. It is built on a plain-song theme and is a stupendous number. The Konzertstück in C Minor is another of his major works. Outside of its placid, somewhat tuneful middle movement, it is a work that will intimidate the doubtful technician. The Hora Gaudiosa and Hora Mystica are numbers that should be in every organist's library. The Hora Gaudiosa is of noble conception; the Hora Mystica is almost pure French in its impressionism. For exquisite harmonization, Maurice Ravel might envy it.

Then there is the curious Pastoral Scene, with an unusual Rondo and a vivacious Scherzo, *quasi* Widor, and a Trauerzug that strikes a new note in solemnity — highly wrought and of great difficulty. His *magnum opus* is the Concerto in A Minor, for organ and orchestra or organ alone. It is massive and is all that the title Concerto implies. There are many and diverse small numbers — pieces for the ordinary church service. While there are not as many as Guilmant wrote, they have the same salient qualities.

Bossi is not as prolific as some composers. His opus-number runs near 140. The average of excellence is high. He may be accused of being dull, but he is never banal. For the organist who worships at the shrine of Bach and Brahms, Bossi will seem a kindred spirit. For the person who is tired of the American-English-staccato-toccata style, the legato playing Bossi demands will seem almost like a religious experience.

KARG-ELERT

Ever since Jubal, "the father of all such as handle the harp and organ," began to make organ history there have been certain organists who have stood out preeminently among their fellowmen. From Buxtehude to Bossi, there have been one or two men whose mastery or idioms gave them that distinction which enabled them to survive their period. Yesterday we had Guilmant and Widor. To-day we have Bonnet and Karg-Elert. Tomorrow? Well, if the war will soon end, there are several men "somewhere in France" who will see to it that organ music flourishes, even to the uttermost ends of the earth.

Karg-Elert is in German organ music what Rachmaninoff is in Russian orchestral music. Both are moderns and neither is perverted with that undecipherable Futurism that enthralled the world before the year 1914.

Siegfried Karg-Elert was born in Oberndorf, in the year 1878. His paternal name was Siegfried Karg. In his early twenties some one with a predilection for theatrical press matter persuaded him that a monosylabic name would not resound to the posterities as fast or as great as a hyphenated one, so he added the Elert to his patronymic Karg.

Karg-Elert represents freedom of form and thought, with here and there a slight thread that holds him to that vast hierarchy of early organ writers.

Karg-Elert was one of a family of twelve. He was the youngest. His father, J. V. Karg, was an ardent Romanist; his mother, a Lutheran. The children were brought up in their mother's faith. The Kargs were poor and were able to give their children but few advantages. Karg-Elert as a child showed no aptitude for study. He was not a brilliant success, and the scholastic curriculum chafed him unutterably. As a music student, however, he gave symptomatic evidence of being almost a prodigy. When a boy of twelve, he had a remarkable treble voice. (It seems to have been a habit with the German contrapuntalists, beginning with the forerunners of Bach.) The attention of the Cantor of St. John's Church, Leipzig, was called to young Karg-Elert's voice and he was given a place in the choir. He is said to have distinguished himself valorously. From the early days at St. John's, composition was his passion, and he scribbled tunes and pieces with varying success. Finally, a patron was found who brought him financial aid, so that he was enabled to enter the Conservatory and the University of Leipzig. His teachers at the Conservatory were Jadassohn, the Abou Ben Adhem of Harmony, and Reinecke, the Apostle of Refinement. He studied piano, harmony, counterpoint and orchestration, but spent his time chiefly in composition.

In his early musical life he was a brilliant pianist with virtuoso proclivities, which may account for some of the inordinately difficult passages in his works. At the age of twenty-three he was appointed Professor of Piano at the Magdeburg Conservatory, which post he held with credit — and probably ennui.

During this period he wrote sporadic piano pieces and many songs. The songs show a fine sense of melody and the piano pieces invention. He wrote in all forms, big and little. He has to his credit operas, a symphony, and chamber-music in many combinations. His opus-numbers are well over one hundred.

While he started life as a pianist or rather soprano soloist, he, like Percy Grainger with his saxophone, has mastered a variety of instruments from clarinet to oboe. The organ, however, is his professed instrument, and it is the organ that brought his fame over-seas and made his name a household word wherever two or more organists gather together.

Carl Simon, the well known publisher of Berlin, was a friend and factor in Karg-Elert's life. It was he who saw the artistic possibilities of the harmonium, a hitherto little considered instrument in Berlin. Simon urged Karg-Elert to write for the Kunst-Harmonium. He wanted Karg-Elert to write for it as for a concert instrument and not as though it were a fireside and farmhouse instrument.

The Kunst-Harmonium is an art instrument. It is exceedingly expressive and has from one to three manuals and a great variety of stops. In character it is quite orchestral. Like the French harmonium, as written for by the great French organists, it is capable of artistic achievements. Needless to say, it is unlike its rural cousin, the American reed-organ. Has anyone ever written a meritorious composition for the American reed-organ? Did anyone ever hear of a meritorious composition being played upon it? If you did, keep it to yourself; no one will believe you. Yet it is possible — the age of miracles has not entirely passed. The operation, however, would have to start with the reed-organ, or "melojen," as it is called along the Monongahela River.

Karg-Elert wrote some of his finest works for the Kunst-Harmonium; they are not in the customary Berceuse style, i.e., melody in right hand, left hand, tonic, dominant, um-pa, um-pa, ad nauseam. He gave his harmonium compositions breadth, invention and variegated harmonic treatment. As, for instance, the Double Fugue on Bach, the Sonata, the Symphonic Variations. This is no pabulum for milkmaids and countryside boys. They are virile, masterly works that will put tax and practice on concert performers.

Karg-Elert went on several concert tours, playing his own compositions on the Kunst-Harmonium. He gave recitals in the chief German cities; and while he did not play the harmonium before the crowned heads of Europe, he did play for the uncrowned proletariat, and much to their edification. His harmonium recitals, we are told, were notable events.

In the field of organ transcription, he — like Guilmant, and many other qualified composers — found the soil fertile and the publishers suppliant. He has compiled and arranged a Wagnerian album; and, in passing let it be said, it is the best of the voluminous Wagner transcriptions. He has arranged the two Elgar symphonies, so that they sound almost as well on the organ as they do with the orchestra; and he has other transcriptions of lesser compositions. Few men have had his felicitous touch in the making of adaptations.

While his harmonium work was a signal success and his transcriptions of great worth, his forte lies in original composition. As organist at St. John's, he wrote many of his biggest and best works. The Sonatina (which is not a sonatina after the Clementi of our youth, but a big idea in short form) is a composition that requires considerable technique to perform. It has a Fugue, the subject of which is almost Handelian, and a number of cadences that suggest Liszt. There are also a number of little ascending scales that are reminiscent of Puccini. The Sonatina is altogether a fresh conception.

The many chorales (new wine in very old bottles) on the old hymns, are splendid examples of chorale treatment. Then there is the famous Passacaglia, originally conceived for the Harmonium; the titanic Chaconne; the Funerale, which is a magnificent concert number.

The evanescent Three Pastels are finely tinted pictures. The first two Pastels are chromatically embellished fragments, with shifting rhythms and heavily embroidered phrases. The last one, the Pastorale Recitativo Corale, is a fascinating, though somewhat curious,

composition; just why the middle movement is called Recitativo is something of a mystery. It really is a highly ornamental cadenza that might have been written by some journeyman violinist. The Corale is all that its name implies — imposing and pompous.

The Trois Impressions are three genre compositions that should be on every organist's five-foot shelf. Harmonies du Soir has a charming, undulating melody. Clair de Lune is an exquisite little poem, almost Mallarmé set in tones. La Nuit is an exotic cameo. They are rightly named Impressions — in treatment they are French, not German. Atmospherically they are Monet, Monet and Degas set for organ, an effect that only Bonnet and Karg-Elert have accomplished.

The twenty choral studies — Preludes, Postludes and Trios — are faintly reminiscent of Max Reger, with a touch of Guilmant. For diversified, dignified choral settings they are probably the best we have. The Choral Improvisation on In Dulce Jubilo is a composition in the grand manner.

Karg-Elert has his idiom just as surely as Strauss or Schoenberg. He is a melodist after the moderns, instead of the every-four-bars-a-cadence school. He has imbibed Wagner and is imbued with Debussy — witness the Pastels and Impressions. He has memorized Bach, and Reger is his own familiar friend — *vide* the Chorales-Chacone and Fugues. He is a chromaticist, but it is not the four-square chromaticism of Spohr.

His originality lies chiefly in his harmonic treatment — a kind of dissolving, kaleidoscopic, but continuous *melos.* He has his obsessions and they are apparent; for instance, the strange time-signatures. He is interested in the equation of five time; it is employed in every conceivable way up to 5-16ths. He uses 11-8 and all manner of 16ths from the elementary 4-16th to the highly congested 15-16ths. It is an extravagance where possibly simpler means might be found. He sprinkles a page with runs — sometimes over-obvious. As this is called the superlative age, possibly Karg-Elert feels he is justified; but to the innocent and sometimes ignorant performer, his mystifications are a trifle tiresome.

Karg-Elert knows the modern organ; he realizes its nuances, color and breadth, and he demands them in performance. While he sometimes snubs the small organ, he knows the ramifications of the concert organ. If Karg-Elert has done nothing else, he has helped administer a soporific and narcotic to the Merkel-Rheinberger school of organ music.

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