Jehan Alain: Selected Organ Works

Mark Weston Unkenholz

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DEPARTMENT Music

Degree Master of Arts

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Date July 25, 1978
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First of all, I would like to thank Robert Wharton for counsel­ling me and encouraging me with his continued interest throughout this project. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. William Boehle and Dr. David Stocker.

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This project is a study of selected organ pieces (from the 24 published) of French composer Jehan Alain (1911-1940). Although a catalogue of works of Alain lists 93 titles, the works for organ represent the composer's major field of concentration during the last six years of his life. Alain, who died during World War II at the age of 29, made a significant contribution to the twentieth-century organ repertory despite his short lifetime.

The procedure of study was, first, to examine existing secondary sources—a biography by Bernard Gavoty, and an article on the performance of Alain's organ music by the composer's sister, Marie-Claire Alain, a concert organist. Secondly, the writer obtained and studied a doctoral dissertation by Richard Travis Bouchett, and lastly learned to play the pieces in order to analyze in detail selected organ works.

Alain's pieces possess a quality of individuality which distinguishes them from his contemporaries. His works are not liturgically oriented, but possess a secular inspiration. Many of his compositions are improvisatory in nature, and show evidence of the influence of Gregorian chant, e.g., free rhythm, modality, and linear writing. Alain further experimented with timbre, and called for unorthodox combinations of organ stops and mutation stops.
The basic ingredients of Alain's music are quite common, but it is the manner in which he uses these ideas that results in a style that is uniquely his.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Without a doubt a written work is but a weak representation of the style of the man himself. But from having heard this man play or improvise, the interpreter first, then the listener, will know what vivaciousness, what inner rhythm, what charm over and above the sound can be drawn from his striking outlines that musicians able to judge have considered as works of genius.\(^1\)

This succinct and poignant summation written by Jehan Alain's brother and sister serves, perhaps better than any other, as an assessment of Alain the artist.

For this writer there remains the task of discovering the personality of the man as artist, the assembling of those inherent musical characteristics which make his compositions and therefore his style unique, and the answering of the inevitable question "why" through a complete analysis of selected organ works.

\(^1\)Olivier Alain and Marie-Claire Alain, program notes on record jacket, Jehan Alain: Organ Works, performed by Marie-Claire Alain (New York: The Musical Heritage Society, Inc.), MHS No. 868, 1963. This recording is a reissue of Erato LDE 3239, recorded in France, 1962.
CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY

For Jehan Alain, the first-born son of Albert Alain, "music and life could not be separated, and he had little use for musicians who were not closely connected with life."¹ For instance, he wrote that the Paris Conservatory with its students seemed to him like a

... hothouse where the plants grow very quickly thanks to the temperature and the right humidity which is maintained around them but of which certain ones may wilt when they are transplanted to open ground.²

Jehan, born February 3, 1911, was the eldest of four children; Odile (b. January 14, 1914),³ who was killed in a mountain accident on September 3, 1937,⁴ was next; Olivier (b. August 3, 1918),⁵ now a music critic for Le Figaro and director of the École César Franck, was third; and Marie-Claire (b. August 10, 1926) is the youngest.


²Bernard Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), Avec un choix de lettres et de dessins inédits. (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 22 rue Huyghens, 22, 1945, p. 25.)

³Richard Travis Bouchett, private unpublished interview with Marie-Claire Alain, New York City, December 1969. (Hereinafter referred to as the New York Interview.)

⁴Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), p. 65.

⁵Bouchett, New York Interview.
He was an eminently changeable person, capable of being deliri-ously happy one minute and equally sad the following minute.\(^6\) Completely free from convention, he mocked routines and made fun of the "bourgeois," at the same time being a good father to his family and a conscientious church organist. All who knew him remember the incomparable humor of his jokes, bordering on the ridiculous, while the dominant thought which comes from his music is that of a "profound sadness."\(^7\)

"The 'Alain paradox' appears in the dedication of the piano piece *Ecce Ancilla Domini:*\(^8\)

I want the earth made square. I want to read the blue of the sky. I want to see behind ... I want my temples to burst under irrational monstrosities ... Lord, give me eternal peace.\(^9\)

Bernard Gavoty describes him as "busy and mobile"\(^10\) in manner, yet he often retreated to the quietness of the Abbey at Volloires, or the Alain summer home.\(^11\)

He could enjoy the naughty fantasies of Erik Satie and in the next moment kneel in deep reverence and silence in front of the mystery of the sacrament.\(^12\)


\(^7\)Ibid., p. 21.

\(^8\)Ibid.

\(^9\)Ibid.


\(^11\)Ibid., p. 62.

\(^12\)Ibid., p. 72.
Alain was not limited to just music in his talents and interests. He drew cartoons, wrote poetic letters, was mechanically inclined, and loved adventure. His sketches and cartoons, several of which are reproduced in the biography by Gavoty, illustrate Alain's love of the fantastic. In addition, he enjoyed interminable talks, and his laughter was uncontrollable.

Alain developed a keyboard technique of great velocity and dexterity. It is this dexterity and his mechanical interest which enabled him to assist his father in the building of the Alain house organ. This organ is on the ground floor and is a fragile and odd artisan's masterpiece with four manuals. The instrument had the following specifications during the life of Jehan Alain:

**GRAND ORGUE**
- Bourdon 16 ft.
- Montre 8 ft.
- Flute Harmon 8 ft.
- Prestant 4 ft.

**POSITIF**
- Cor de nuit 8 ft.
- Salicional 8 ft.
- Gros Nazard 5 1/3 ft.
- Flute douce 4 ft.
- Nazard 2 2/3 ft.
- Quarte de Nazard 2 ft.
- Tierce 1 3/5 ft.
- Larigot 1 1/3 ft.


\[14\] Ibid.
In fact, the fourth manual was not finished until after his death. It is evident that this is an unusual specification. It is necessary to note that the proportional relationships of sound qualities are not the same on this organ as on a church organ. In addition, this organ had the peculiarity of possessing a divided pedal, the lower octave always giving the 16' and 8' stops, while the upper part could play a 4' solo—flute or cornet. 15 This explains certain confusing registrations. It is therefore obligatory to change registrations in order to establish the balance probably desired by Alain. Alain helped his father voice the Positif manual, and "adored this instrument with its delicate sonorities." 16 He hated the Bombardes and the big 16' pedals. Lacking mixtures on most of the instruments he was given to play, he tried to make up for this deficiency by some unorthodox combinations. 17

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
The action of this organ was mechanical.\textsuperscript{18}

Jehan grew up with the knowledge that music is "life's joy and the most natural means of expression."\textsuperscript{19} In the Alain household one often heard "two or three pianos and the organ simultaneously,"\textsuperscript{20} for all four Alain children were musicians.

Jehan began the study of piano as soon as his hands were big enough to press the keys.\textsuperscript{21} At the age of eleven, his father judged him ready to play the organ at the church, and he soon became his father's substitute.\textsuperscript{22}

By the age of sixteen Jehan had begun writing down his imaginative improvisations, and it was often his maternal grandmother, Mme. Briard, a fine musician who had studied with a student of Chopin, who first heard many of his early compositions.\textsuperscript{23} In 1927 Jehan interrupted his studies at the college of Saint-Jean-de-Béthune in Versailles\textsuperscript{24} to enter the harmony class of André Bloch at the Paris Conservatory, winning first prize in harmony in 1933.\textsuperscript{25} He studied counterpoint and fugue with Georges Caussade in 1933 and won first prize in this subject

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{20}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21}Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien français (1911-1940), p. 31.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 32.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., pp. 32-33.

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., p. 33.

\textsuperscript{25}Alain and Alain (program notes on record jacket), Jehan Alain: Organ Works.
His piano study was with M. Augustin Pierson, organist of the Cathedral at Versailles, and his organ study with his father until he entered Marcel Dupré's organ class at the Conservatory in the fall of 1934, winning the first prize five years later in 1939. His study of composition was with Paul Dukas, from 1934 to 1935, and Jean Roger-Ducasse. Alain's brother and sister write that the fact that he did not win the first prize in composition is undoubtedly the price of a duel between precocity and maturity in the sense that, very quick to become familiar with the language of his time, Jehan sought his own just as quickly, and that such a quest before his thirtieth year was hardly a way to persuade the juries.

In November of 1933, Alain was inducted into the 26th regiment of the infantry in Nancy, France, and during that winter became ill with pleurisy and bronchitis. While in the regiment, he was assigned to the music section and played the saxophone. He wrote the following about the experience:

I have a horrible saxophone on which I make sparkling chromatic scales; I also play swaying tangos, with the requisite vibrato. In the hall where I am, about fifteen

26 Ibid.
27 Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), p. 31.
28 Bouchett, New York Interview.
29 Alain and Alain (program notes on record jacket), Jehan Alain: Organ Works.
30 Bouchett, New York Interview.
31 Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), p. 72.
32 Alain and Alain (program notes on record jacket), Jehan Alain: Organ Works.
33 Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), p. 54.
saxophones of all dimensions blow, coo, and otherwise carry on, in a sort of thick rumble that fills your ears like a cotton swab. It is deadly boring in the long run. . . . I will try to wash off my ears with some pages of Montaigne. 34

Even though this segment of his life was not the most interesting, he did have occasion to meet Poulenc and become acquainted with him. He was enthused about Poulenc's works, regarded him as a very congenial man, and considered him a friend. 35

Jehan was discharged from military service in time to reenter the conservatory in the fall of 1934, and on April 22, 1935, he married his childhood friend Madeleine Payan. 36 Alain commuted by train each day from their small home in Saint-Germain-en-Laye to the Conservatory. He taught piano students at home, and was organist at the Church of St. Nicolas in Maisons-Laffitte. 37

On April 17, 1936, shortly before the birth of his first daughter Lise, he composed "Berceuse pour le petit qui va venir" ("Cradle song for the little one who is going to come," unpublished). On August 7, 1938, Agnes was born; 38 and on November 3, 1939, Denis-Jean-Sébastien was born. 39 Gavoty credits Alain with the ability to perceive and to live on his children's level as well as "adjusting

34Ibid., p. 53.
35Ibid., p. 54.
36Ibid., p. 44.
38Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), p. 58.
39Bouchett, New York Interview.
his palette to the fresh colors of their paradise."40 Perhaps this perception can also be traced through his music.

In August 1939, mobilization papers reached him assigning him to the Eighth Motorized Armored Division. Since his participation in the band during his military training had prevented him from acquiring any stripes, his assignment was as a soldier seconde classe.41

The regiment spent the winter at Aisne near Sart-en-Thiër-ache, and it was here that Alain gained a reputation of being a gymnast because he could drive "his motorcycle on a ring of ice, his back turned to the handle bars, straddling the gas tank."42 During this winter he found time to orchestrate the Trois Danses and to compose several new compositions—all of which were lost at the time of his death.43

In May of 1940, Alain's Eighth Armored Division raced into Belgium in the wake of the German attack on Holland and Belgium. Alain remained "glued to his machine for twenty hours straight"44 during this time, accomplishing dangerous missions and carrying urgent messages. For his bravery he was awarded La Croix de Guerre with two citations.45

After May 27, 1940, orders kept the regiment moving; the retreat toward Dunkirk, arrival in England on June 1st, return to France—Brest,

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40 Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien français (1911-1940), p. 59.
41 Ibid., p. 101.
42 Ibid., p. 103.
43 Ibid., p. 105.
44 Ibid., p. 107.
45 Ibid.
Alencon, Chevreuse, Blois, Saumur, Brézé, and back to Saumur on June 18. Then on June 20, Jehan volunteered for a mission to spy upon an enemy outpost. On his way, in Petit-Puy, a suburb of Saumur, he saw enemy troops approaching from the bottom of a hill. Never one to give up, he took cover in a hollow and picked off sixteen men before he ran out of ammunition.

Running toward his motorcycle empty-handed, he was shot down and died—just two days before the fall of France. The foregoing account was reported by the German officer who commanded this detachment and who had military honors given to Jehan.

47 Ibid.
48 Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien français (1911-1940), p. 110.
CHAPTER III

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Bernard Gavoty, in a catalogue of Alain's works,¹ lists only 93 "principal works,"² only 50 of which are published from the 127 pieces which Jehan Alain listed in his inventory.

Gavoty stated that a "stern examination would leave only some 30 works worthy of his [Alain's] name."³ In continuing, Gavoty stated that if one looked at only the 30 best works one would see Alain only as a philosopher, as in the Trois Danses, and would fail to see the fantasist.⁴

Of the 93 pieces Gavoty listed, there are 47 piano pieces, 24 organ pieces, 5 pieces for solo voice, 14 pieces for chorus or more than one voice, and 4 instrumental pieces.

Table 1 shows a list of the 24 pieces for organ taken from the catalogue in the biography by Gavoty.⁵

The 24 published organ pieces vary greatly in length and in aim, and they range from the simple Berceuse sur deux notes qui cornent (Cradle song on two ciphering notes) to the philosophic Trois Danses.

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¹Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), pp. 198-204.
²Ibid., p. 70.
³Ibid., p. 71.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Ibid., pp. 198-204.
TABLE 1
ORGAN WORKS OF JEHAN ALAIN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opus No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Berceuse sur deux notes qui cornent</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ballade en mode phrygien</td>
<td>1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Lamento&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Postlude pour l'office des complies</td>
<td>1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Variations sur &lt;em&gt;Lucis Creator&lt;/em&gt;</td>
<td>1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Grave</td>
<td>1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Deux préludes:&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Wieder an.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Und jetzt.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Choral Dorien et Choral Phrygien</td>
<td>1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Introduction, variations, scherzo et choral&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Le Jardin suspendu</td>
<td>1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Première fantaisie</td>
<td>1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Deux danses à Agnie Vavisht&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Climat</td>
<td>1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Petite pièce</td>
<td>1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Prélude et fugue</td>
<td>1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63a</td>
<td>Intermezzo</td>
<td>1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Deuxième fantaisie</td>
<td>1936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Variations sur un thème de Clément Jannequin</td>
<td>1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>Litanies</td>
<td>1937</td>
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<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Trois Danses</td>
<td>1937-38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>Monodie</td>
<td>1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Aria</td>
<td>1939</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Gavoty lists this as a piece for piano.

<sup>b</sup>These preludes are published as 1<sup>er</sup> Prélude Profane and 2<sup>e</sup> Prélude Profane.

<sup>c</sup>These three movements (Introduction et variations, Scherzo, and Choral) comprise Suite.

<sup>d</sup>Gavoty used this spelling in the "Catalogue of Works of Jehan Allain" and in the body of the biography.

To this writer as listener, Alain's organ pieces possess a distinct quality of individuality. None of his pieces sounds like the organ music of any other composer. Perhaps we can attribute this to
the fact that it does not have the same flavor as does the music of his immediate predecessors or contemporaries. For example, it does not have the rigidity of rhythm that Dupré, Widor and Vierne possess; "nor does it give the impression of being based on a complex and individual theoretical system such as does the organ music of Olivier Messiaen."6

This writer believes that Alain's music, on the whole, has been created with rather common musical ingredients such as major, minor, modal and whole tone scales; but it has been put together in such a way that Alain's unique personality comes forth. In effect, he reveals his soul.

Moreover, Alain's music is, for the most part, not liturgically oriented. F. E. Kirby comments that certain of Alain's organ pieces point to "a secular inspiration, something not characteristic of French organ music since the Baroque Period."7

The forms and titles of some of his pieces—Deux Préludes Profanes and Trois Danses—show this secular inspiration. It can also be seen in some of Alain's comments; e.g., he once described his Choral (Suite, 1934), usually considered a sacred form, as "great masses, heavy slopes embroidered with noises, . . . heavy shadows, sunlight . . . and wind and wind."9

9 Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), p. 80.
Bouchett points out that even when a piece such as *Postlude pour l'office de Complies*, the purpose of the piece is different from that of liturgical music. In this piece, for instance, inspired by a visit to the Abbey of Volloires, one hears the chants of the service as in a dream. The piece is the composer's reaction to the service, not a piece to be used liturgically in the service. The same is true of *Litanies*. This piece, written immediately after the death of Alain's sister Odile in a mountain accident, is not a litany to be used in a service or to be played in place of a litany. It is a piece like a litany in that the main statement is repeated over and over again.

Another element important to Alain's organ music is improvisation. Alain was an apt improvisor. That he had improvised since he was quite young is shown through Gavoty's remark that before the age of 16 he began writing down his improvisations.

When Alain entered Marcel Dupré's organ class at the Conservatory in 1934, improvisation became part of his weekly studies. Alain excelled at this and Gavoty recounts the following:

> When Jehan took his turn at the organ, the prospect of a choice dish shut up the clandestine conversations. In the same way one is amazed at hearing a tiresome text come alive in the mouth of a great actor, it was difficult for me to understand how Alain could manifest such ease where others had just floundered miserably. His skill in avoiding the traps evoked that of a cat in the virgin forest. This dusty theme suddenly bloomed again.

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10 Bouchett, "The Organ Music of Jehan Alain 1911-1940," p. 27.
11 Ibid.
12 Gavoty, *Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940)*, p. 32.
13 Ibid., p. 37.
It would seem appropriate, therefore, to assume that when performing his music, one must convey the impression of an improvisation; thus the performer must have the state of mind that one has when improvising—a state where the performance is not fixed but is happening—and a performance in which the performer reacts strongly to the music rather than merely presents a reading of the music."14

Gavoty confirms this in the preface to Alain's organ works when he says that "great liberty is not only tolerable but necessary in the melodic pieces in which the author's ambition was 'to have whomever played them find the supreme ease of improvisation.'"15

In addition to Alain's secular inspiration, which is an important element, he further distinguished his music from that of the older masters, Widor, Vierne, and Dupré. These composers, the major carriers of the French organ tradition, were renowned church organists and teachers; and they often tended to "write music geared to the large churches and large organs on which they played."16 They tended to write music which "sounded" in the large buildings for which it was conceived, and which exploited the particular sounds and registrations of the large symphonic organs.

Alain, on the other hand, did not conceive his music for the symphonic organ; rather, he conceived it "for the salon organ in the Alain house."17

16Bouchett, "The Organ Music of Jehan Alain 1911-1940," p. 35.
17Ibid.
Marie-Claire Alain tells us that Jehan expressed a dislike for the type of pieces, so dear to Vierne and Widor, which end with "all sails set." As she points out, many of Alain's pieces end softly.

Alain further disliked music written in "hollow-sounding" forms. He declared that the composer's musical ideas should reinvent the form. Thus, many of his pieces are in free forms, several in dance forms, and only a very few in academic forms.

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20 Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), p. 79.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED ORGAN WORKS

Variations sur un thème de Clément Jannequin

This piece, written in 1937, is a theme and variations and appears to be especially influenced by the French Classicists. Alain wrote this piece after a visit to the famous organ of the Petit-Andelys (17th century French organ, at that time untouched). He fell in love with this old theme at the same time, reveling in the cadence with its alternation of modal sub-tonic and tonal leading tone. (F-natural to G; F-sharp to G.) Marie-Claire Alain stated that the work presented "is like a 'return to the source' in the purest French classic spirit: Récit de Hautbois, Récit de Cromorne, Récit de Cornet, and Tierce en taille." In addition, Alain used no 16-foot stop on the pedal, another similarity with the classic French school. Alain dedicated this piece to Pierre Segond, organist of the Cathedral of Geneva, and confided his ambition and hope in composing this piece: "It should be possible for a musician of the twentieth century to preserve the spirit of ancient

1 Alain, "L'oeuvre d'orgue de Jehan Alain: conseils pour l'exécution," p. 204.

2 Ibid.
music. Little matters the language. If my work is successful, it has
to have the unity of a work uniquely mine."³

The following is an analysis of this work: The initial tempo
marking is affetuoso $\text{\dot{\j}}=72$. The theme (Figure 1) is presented in a
straightforward manner with no ornamentation making the texture fragile
and transparent.

![Affetuoso](image)

Fig. 1. "A. Leduc, Editeurs Propriétaires"
Variations, measures 1-7.

Alain placed the melody in the uppermost voice with the middle voice
and pedal line serving as an accompaniment to the melody. These lines
are contrapuntal in nature, and it is important that the middle voice
and pedal remain very much an accompaniment as the mood must be serene
and decidedly unhurried.

The first variation begins in measure 52, and continues through
the next eleven measures. He indicated a relaxation of the tempo, and
a change from a minor to a major mode (Maggiore) for this rather trans-
parent section. The pedal and the left hand line, which again form the
accompaniment to the theme in the right hand, have become more chordal
than contrapuntal, primarily due to the change in registration which
requires that the registration of the lower voice be coupled to the
pedal with the resulting homogenous timbre for both lines. The

³Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien français (1911-1940), p. 81.
accompaniment moves independently, yet in a sense, parallel to the melody. The theme itself remains straightforward and untouched, but the color has changed to that of a lighter reed.

The fugato-piu vivo marking found in measure 64 is the beginning of the second variation. This variation is marked as a fugal section, but it must be considered as fugue-like rather than as a strict fugue because the thematic entrances are not complete statements and are further fragmented by the interjection of a short interlude between the statements. The theme (Figure 2) has now taken on a distinctive new rhythmic and melodic ornamentation.

![Fugato Piu Vivo](image)

**Fig. 2. "A. LEDUC, Editeurs Proprietaires" Variations, measures 64-66.**

Tracing this theme, we find it begins in the uppermost voice and is then transferred four measures later to the alto voice in the last two beats of the measure. Here it remains until it disappears entirely, with the introduction of an impressionistic interlude in measure 72. The theme again appears in the uppermost of the voices in measure 78; four measures later in the last two beats of the measure the theme is transferred for the first time to the tenor voice. Hereafter we find the impressionistic interlude and fragmented motives scattered throughout the voices, until in measure 94, the motive (Figure 3) is repeated five times in succession, leading to the interlude once again. This time, however, the interlude contains thematic fragments and ends with one
final use of the melodic and rhythmic ornament which has characterized this section.

![Fig. 3. "A. LEDUC, Editeurs Propriétaires" Variations, measures 94-95.](image)

The third variation begins with a dramatic tempo shift to grave. Remnants of the ornamented theme and portions of the interlude from the second variation are to be found in the remainder of this third variation.

Finally, fourteen measures later, Alain returns to the simplicity of the original presentation of the theme. In the end it has returned to the fragile texture and unhurried *lento* of the beginning.

The tempi of this piece are important when considering the relationship of the variations to the theme. There must be a differentiation between them, but the difference should not be extreme. An extreme change in the tempi would destroy the lyricism of the line. The tempo markings indicate a relaxation or intensification of the pace rather than a decided change which would require differences in articulation. In addition to the tempi, the rhythmic ornamentation, or lack of it, further distinguishes the variations from each other and the theme.

A more important difference, perhaps, must be in the color contrasts (registrations) and their relationship to the texture. The texture in this piece ranges from the relatively uncluttered first theme, to the quite thickly textured (ornamented) second and third variations.
The hautbois and krummhorn colors create the sensation of a thickened texture and also provide a striking contrast to the more mellow gedeckt and string sounds. This contrast too ensures variety and at the same time creates some very subtle sound and color variances. In the second variation, for example, the pedal takes only an 8-foot stop which makes it indistinguishable from the left hand, thus making a cohesive and interesting accompaniment for the theme.

Much of the harmonic structure in Variations sur un thème de Clémence Jannequin is unencumbered and simplistic. The key signature indicates G minor, but it clearly cadences on G Major at the conclusion of each of the first and last variations from Jannequin's choice of a picardy third. The exception is the second variation which cadences on D Major.

Le jardin suspendu

Le jardin suspendu (1934) is perhaps the best example of Alain's organ works that demonstrates the influence of impressionism upon his compositional style. His picturesque title and evocative inscription also give weight to this viewpoint. The inscription reads "The hanging garden is the artist's ideal, perpetually followed and fleeting; it is the inaccessible and inviolable refuge."4

Structurally, Le jardin suspendu is a chaconne. Alain has constructed his chaconne in such a manner that the first and last sections

are nearly identical and are separated by three distinct variations on the chaconne theme.

Compositionally, Alain employed a constant succession of parallel fifths, which produce an organum-like effect, and also creates a distinct atmosphere in which the sense of progression and tonality is suspended. In measures 38-50 the arabesques (characteristic of the third variation) are reminiscent of other impressionistic music, and his exploitation of tone color through registration in this piece is also an important characteristic.

In the first section of this piece, Alain calls for the contrast of a string stop and a flute stop; later when the arabesques are heard against the chaconne theme, Alain calls for a 4-foot flute stop and a Gros Nazard 5 1/3' stop for the arabesques in the right hand, against an 8-foot string stop for the theme in the left hand. The unusual stop called for above (Gros Nazard 5 1/3') Marie-Claire Alain describes as a "very soft wood stop."5

In Le jardin suspendu, he combined this stop with a 4-foot bourdon for the arabesques in the second variation of the chaconne (measures 38-50). This color combination produces an indistinct and faraway sound perhaps translating the composer's thought--"the fleeting ideal, perpetually followed by the artist."6

There is some conjecture that Alain was additionally inspired by the famous hanging gardens of Semiramis in Babylon when he composed this piece. The performance of it in the writer's opinion, should give

5Ibid., p. 196.
6Alain, L'oeuvre d'orgue de Jehan Alain, p. 82.
the impression of a dream. The initial tempo marking is grave $\text{j}=60$.
The thematic material (Figure 4) is presented in the opening measures.

![Fig. 4. "A. LEDUC, Editeurs Propriétaires"
Le jardin suspendu, measures 1-4.]

The motive moves continuously throughout this opening section. It is first found in the uppermost voice and is sporadically doubled at the octave in the upper voice of the left hand (measures 8 and 9). In measure 10 the melody is found concurrently in the soprano and tenor lines a fifth apart. At measure 14, the texture is dramatically thinned so that the melody comes to the foreground in the uppermost voice.

Beginning in measure 26, the first variation of the chaconne appears. The melody is in the left hand, with a descant-like line (Figure 5) appearing in the right hand.

![Fig. 5. "A. LEDUC, Editeurs Propriétaires"
Le jardin suspendu, measures 26-29.]

Of particular note is the ascending pattern of 16th notes which comprise this descant-like line. This line vacillates between the sonority of major and minor to accentuate the movement of the chaconne
theme in the left hand. The line is also found with an added E-flat in augmentation two measures later and leads to the pedal tone G four measures from the end of the variation. Interestingly, this is the first use of this note value in the composition.

The second variation of the chaconne begins in measure 38. Here (Figure 6) the melody remains in the left hand, but now Alain introduces a triplet figure in the right hand.

![Fig. 6. "A. LEDUC, Editeurs Proprietaires" Le jardin suspendu, measure 38.](image)

This is the variation which requires the use of the Gros Nazard with the Bourdon 4-foot, and the first to use the pedal.

The third variation is characterized by Alain's use of the arabesques, and begins in measure 51. These arabesques (Figure 7) bring additional rhythmic activity and an important color change. They occur three times, in measures 51, 54, and 55.

![Fig. 7. "A. LEDUC, Editeurs Proprietaires" Le jardin suspendu, measure 54.](image)

The theme is presented for the final time in measures 59–65 with the tempo marking of lento e lontano. The treatment is identical.
to that of the beginning, with the exception of a softer dynamic marking and a relaxation of the tempo.

This composition is in $\frac{4}{4}$ meter and is marked grave $\frac{\sqrt{\text{J}}}{\text{J}} = 60$. The tempi remain essentially the same throughout except for the slight relaxation of the tempo at measure 50, and the final lento e lontano marking nine measures later. The main metrical groupings are $\frac{\sqrt{\text{J}}}{\text{J}}$, $\frac{\sqrt{\text{J}}}{\text{J}}$, and $\frac{\sqrt{\text{J}}}{\text{J}}$; however, the triplet figure which characterizes the second variation, the $\frac{\sqrt{\text{J}}}{\text{J}}$ Arabesques, and the $\frac{\sqrt{\text{J}}}{\text{J}}$ ascending pattern of the first variation are important elements which characterize the variations of the chaconne theme. Clearly, the rhythm of the first motive (Figure 8) is constant throughout and remains unaltered. As indicated in the

\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw[thick] (0,0) -- (1,0) -- (1,1) -- (0,1) -- (0,0) -- cycle;
\draw[thick] (1,0) -- (2,0) -- (2,1) -- (1,1) -- (1,0) -- cycle;
\draw[thick] (2,0) -- (3,0) -- (3,1) -- (2,1) -- (2,0) -- cycle;
\end{tikzpicture}

Fig. 8. "A. LEDUC, Editeurs Propriétaires"
Le jardin suspendu, measures 2-5.

title, this piece must have some "hanging" on, as it were. This is most apparent in the pedal tones which start the piece, namely, G, B-flat, G, and the pedal tone used to end the piece, G.

The melody in this piece is very eerie and haunting. One almost has the feeling that it is going to catch you unawares. The main motive does not encompass an extreme range, yet the counterparts do exhibit a considerable amount of extention and contraction in contrast.

It is most interesting that this piece cadences on E-flat Major and that the third of the chord has been used (G) throughout as the unifying element which prepares and solidifies the cadence. The scales
are modal in nature and are for the most part nondiatonic. The harmony is non-traditional, yet tonal, and much of its construction is triadic.

The texture has many variances. Primarily, these variances occur in color and rhythmic interest. It is very lush in places, yet brash in others, and gives the listener the feeling that it is being squeezed from a tube of color pigment. The parallel fifths further intensify this sensation and help create a distinct atmosphere as in a dream. Alain's use of unconventional registrations further magnifies the impact of textural variety for the listener.

**Litanies**

"No piece is more famous and more often played, and none is also so often misunderstood and poorly interpreted."\(^7\) With its rhythmic drive and exploitation of the instrument, the piece can be considered as similar to the French organ toccatas of the modern school;\(^8\) but the nature of the material and its subsequent development differ from most toccatas, the majority of which possess fast-moving chords or arpeggios that accompany a slower-moving, long-breathed theme. Also, unlike most toccatas, Litanies is programmatic in nature;\(^9\) for it bears the following inscription:

When the Christian soul in distress no longer finds new words to implore God's mercy, it repeats ceaselessly the same

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\(^7\)Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), p. 82.

\(^8\)For example: Eugene Gigout's "Toccata (si meneur)" and Louis Vierne's "Carillon de Westminster" (Pièces de Fantaisie).

invocation with a vehement faith. Reason has reached its limit; Faith alone pursues its ascension.¹⁰

In 1937 Jehan Alain's sister Odile had met her sudden and awful death in a mountain accident. Alain went through a very difficult period after her death. He was still a student in Marcel Dupré's organ class at the Paris Conservatory but was already married and the father of a family. He led a harried life trying to complete his class work, teach lessons, be a church organist, and remain a father to his young family. He was further tortured by the sadness of those dark pre-war years, and by a sure foreknowledge of the tragic destiny which awaited him three years later.¹¹ Litanies is a cry of anguish and distress. After the ethereal dream of Le jardin suspendu and the classicism developed in the Variations, Alain revealed his tortured soul, maskless and unreserved. It is doubtless this absolute sincerity, this direct character, which makes the work a success for all audiences, even on first hearing. It was not until the fall of 1937, that Alain, on a commuter train between Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Paris, where he attended Marcel Dupré's organ class, jotted down Litanies on paper.¹²

About this work, Alain stated himself that:

> It will be necessary when you play this to give the impression of an ardent conjuration. This prayer is not a lament, but an irresistible storm which overthrows everything in its way. It is also an obsession: it must fill the ears of men . . . and of the good Lord! If you are not dead tired at the end, you will not have understood it or played it the way I want. Keep yourself at the limit of speed and clarity. And yet, it is too

---

¹⁰Alain, L'oeuvre d'orgue de Jehan Alain, 2:31.

¹¹Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), p. 203.

¹²Ibid., p. 82.
bad about the left hand sixths at the end. At the real tempo, they are unplayable. But the rubato is not made for dogs, and it is frankly better to "bungle" it a little than to take a tranquil speed which would disfigure my Litanies.13

Here follows an analysis of this work, including a discussion of the treatment given the thematic material.

In Litanies the composer used the best fragments of an earlier piece, Fantasmagorie, Opus 62,14 which is unpublished. It was written during Easter vacation, 1935, at Argentières, where the Alain family spent their vacations.15 This piece is humorous in character and in it Alain makes some rough experimentations with bitonality.16

In order to facilitate the understanding of the compositional structure of Litanies, I have elected to present at the outset a structural analysis which has been derived from a textural analysis. The structure of the piece is basically two textures which alternated from beginning to end as in a litany.

What follows (Table 2) is a schematic outline of the texture in Litanies.

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., p. 203.
15 Ibid., p. 65.
16 Marie-Claire Alain played this piece from memory for Richard Travis Bouchett in September 1969, and she explained that her brother had taken material from the piece and had transformed it into material used in Litanies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tempi</th>
<th>Texture</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>vivo</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>4 measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b)</td>
<td>2 measures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(a)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>2 measures</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b)</td>
<td>4 measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subito più lento e intimo</td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>1 measure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>1 measure</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(a)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>vivacissimo</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>tempi</td>
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<tr>
<td>vivacissimo</td>
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<tr>
<td>declamato</td>
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<tr>
<td>un poco più largo</td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>9 measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poco accelerando</td>
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<td>1 measure</td>
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<tr>
<td>CODA</td>
<td></td>
<td>16 measures</td>
</tr>
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</table>
First, textures a and b are interrelated because both are rhythmically and melodically derived from the recitative-like statement (Figure 9) which begins the piece.

Fig. 9. "A. LEDUC, Editeurs Propriétaires"
Litanies, measure 1.

Textures a, a₁, and a₂ are characterized by musical material which is thematic. All three are intrinsically the same and are derived from the same elements of the opening recitative, but it is the treatment of the musical material (hereinafter referred to as Motive I) which distinguishes them as separate entities.

In texture a (Figure 10), Motive I is in the upper voice and is accompanied by a series of major and minor chords.

Fig. 10. "A. LEDUC, Editeurs Propriétaires"
Litanies, measures 2-3.

In texture a₁ (Figure 11), Motive I is in the lower voice and is accompanied by a series of chords which move more chromatically in contrast to the chordal accompaniment of texture a.
In texture a^ii (Figure 12), Motive I is presented in identical fashion to that of the opening recitative, but it is doubled at the octave.

The *declamato-vivacissimo* material (Figure 13) is an expanded variant of the opening recitative.

Textures b, b^i, and b^ii are characterized by musical material which is a fragmentation of thematic material. Again, all three are derived from the opening recitative, but the elements have been
separated into components, and it is the grouping of these isolated fragments which distinguishes them from each other.

In texture b (Figure 14), the rhythmical grouping of $3 + 5$ ($\frac{\text{3}}{} \frac{\text{5}}{}$) becomes the most characteristic aspect, but melodically the intervals are the same as the first eight notes of the opening recitativo. The effect is one of a chordal series of moving eighth notes with each grouping of $3 + 5$ being accented by an added pedal note on the first eighth-note of the grouping. Both hands in this antiphonal motive are played on the Positif manual.

![Fig. 14. "A. LEDUC, Editeurs Propriétaires"
Litanies, measure 6.](image1)

Texture b$^4$ (Figure 15) is characterized by triads which are played with the right hand on the Swell manual and the left hand on the louder Positif manual. The rhythmical grouping is still $3 + 5$ ($\frac{\text{3}}{} \frac{\text{5}}{}$) but the disposition between the hands is such that beats 3, 7, 8, 11, and 15 of the $\frac{16}{8}$ measures are accented because of their being played on the louder of the two manuals. According to Marie Claire Alain, Jehan picked up the unusual rhythm of the accented notes from the rhythm of the wheels of the commuter train and wrote it down for use in this piece.$^{17}$

$^{17}$Alain, "The Organ Works of Jehan Alain: Advice on Execution," p. 20.
In texture b\textsuperscript{11} (Figure 16), the rhythmic grouping has been altered and it becomes a combination of $3 + 3$ ($\begin{array}{c} 3 \\ 3 \end{array}$). This $3 + 3$ rhythmic grouping combined with a $\textit{pp}$ dynamic marking produces a more gentle antiphonal motive than either $b$ or $b\textsuperscript{1}$. Melodically, this contains the largest intervallic skips and harmonically is the most dissonant because of the C-natural to C-flat (Major 7th) interval which is repeated three times in succession.

In the coda, the upper voice and the pedal are in contrary motion, with the upper line being an inversion of Motive I. The rhythmic motive now takes over in a dramatically agitated and overlapping rhythm. With the accelerando indication Alain has created a marvelous climax of rhythmic pulses which crash one on top of the other.

Alain began the cadential preparation with a second inversion D Major chord and then moved down a half step to set up an A-flat Major chord which leads to the final tonic of E-flat minor.
In measure 73 Alain has created a dissonant chord which is comprised of a minor triad with an added 4th, and a moving line of major and minor chords moving in an agitated and unsettled manner under the chord which is held in the right hand. After an accelerando Alain doubles both the chord and the pedal to accentuate the finality of the chord.

Looking at the shape of Litanies as a whole, we see that beginning with Motive I in the second measure, the piece builds in intensity through measure 17. From this point to the tempo marking subito più lento e intimo (measure 28), the intensity gradually drops off. Then from measure 30 the intensity builds to the end of the composition.

Organ registration plays a great part in the resulting shape. Alain asks for no unusual stops as he has in other pieces and uses the instrument in a more traditional French manner. He calls for foundation stops and mixtures on all manuals, with manuals coupled and the accompanying manuals (Swell and Positif in this case) coupled to the pedal. Variety is achieved by changing from manual to manual and by the use of the Swell box. Further intensification is achieved by adding, in succession, the reeds of the Swell, Positif, and Great manuals, and finally the Pedal reeds.

From Alain's inscription we anticipate the constant repetition of the recitative-like theme. He achieves the necessary variety within the framework of repetition by using the theme in many keys, by presenting Motive I in different parts of the texture, by varying the texture, by the use of tempo changes, by utilizing the possibilities of organ
registration, and by incorporating fragments of the main theme as antiphonal material throughout the piece.

Finally, a word which describes this piece is "unified." It uses no other material except that which is presented at the outset in measure one. At the same time it is used ingeniously to create a number of musical effects. Agitation, assertion, pleading and the beautiful antiphonal effects are all present. In this piece the composer proves his ability to produce an agreeable and haunting theme, and "to take this material and sculpt an appropriate form, clothing it with appropriate language." ¹⁸ Through all of this a supreme sense of drama is created and the result is a composition of great power and appeal.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Alain's musical journal listed 127 compositions, some not more than three measures in length. The title of each of his notebooks was simply: NOTES. It was in this condition that his works reached publication after his death—simply noted day after day, for he complained that he could not find an adequate system for writing his music.¹

Marie-Claire Alain stated that her brother wrote:

... very quickly from day to day, wither [sic] at a corner of a table, on a train, or in a classroom, keeping a sort of "musical journal" in a little notebook of white paper which he made himself, tracing with a five-pointed pen the staves needed for the inspiration of the moment.²

It would seem, therefore, that for Alain composing was natural and easy. With his busy life he started more than he finished, and it is interesting that he seldom made corrections. In several of his compositions he attempted to capture a fleeting moment or mood.³

He left many details to the interpreter, which he makes clear in a preface to his piano works:

²Ibid.
³Ibid., p. 31.
You shall find here a series of impressions. One must not look, except for a few exceptions, for a course or an argument, but for a dream.
I have not always marked the interpretations that I desire, which, however, is the biggest thing in these small pieces whose simplicity may appear to be poverty-stricken and bizarre, useless or dischordant. Moreover, this interpretation is absolutely variable.
But my goal would be attained and it would be for me a very great joy, if one of you, readers, all of a sudden, found himself in one of these lines: that he stop, touched, and then that he go away having received a little bit of that sweetness which bathes us when we have met a friend's look.4

"Jehan required an 'active rubato' for his interpretations [the phrase is from Olivier Alain]; that is, a stretching of the tempo following the inspiration of the moment."5 It was this liberty of division in French music of the 17th century that Alain found instinctively.

Marie-Claire Alain further stated that Jehan himself modified, sometimes in spectacular fashion, his manner of playing or of registration.6 For example, of the three existing manuscripts of Litanies, each contains its own tempo indication and different registration.7

The music that appealed to Alain the most was Gregorian chant, medieval music, the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, and the music of the French Classicists. Without a doubt, each of these musical thoughts played a role in the synthesis of Jehan's musical ideas.

Alain's music is generally tonal, though not traditionally so. The melodic material is based on fragments from modes and from major,

4Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), p. 75.
6Ibid.
7Gavoty, Jehan Alain, musicien francais (1911-1940), p. 74.
minor and whole tone scales. The harmonic structure is triadic, but traditional progression is avoided and unexpected major-minor and diminished chords appear frequently. Polyharmony is a characteristic as a result of the diatonic progressions, yet there are no extended polytonal passages. Long pedal points are common, which create both dissonant and consonant musical material.

The texture changes constantly and the movement of chordal masses against other lines is characteristic. This textural variety is usually in the form of free chromatic counterpoint.

The registrations are inspired by the Classic French tradition rather than the Romantic organ, representing a break with the tradition established by César Franck.

Most of Alain's music is written in measured rhythm of irregular accents very freely barred. Short rhythmic motives are often reiterated.

Above all, Alain's style was highly individualized and not modeled on any composer, school or system.

Because of this different background and approach, Alain's music represents a break with tradition, and provides new musical thought within the history of French organ music. The discovery and assessment of these musical characteristics inherent in his music make his compositions, and therefore his style, unique to organ literature.
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