

ULTIMATE ORGAN WORKS VOLUME 6

'Choral-Improvisations' opus 65: New Year; Easter; Ascension; Pentecost.

Elke Völker plays the 1902 Walcker organ in Christuskirche, Lüdenscheid, Germany.

AEOLUS 10721. Price: €18.99.

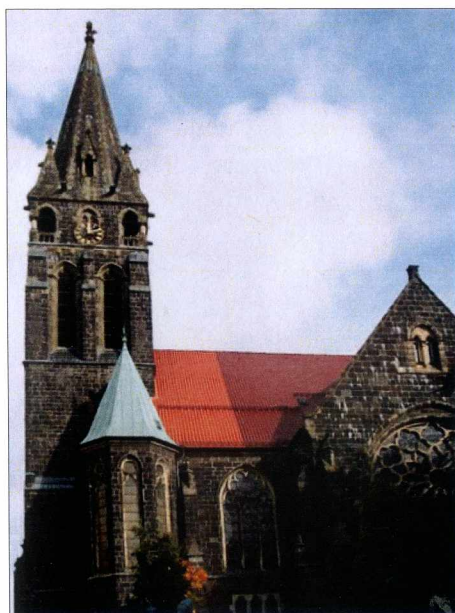
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Archive member Elke Völker continues her groundbreaking recordings of the whole of opus 65 with Volume 6 of Aeolus' excellent production, this time on the EF Walcker instrument of 1902, restored by Stockmann in 2008. The organ of 36 stops is well suited to the interpretation of Karg-Elert's monumental collection of 'choral-improvisations' dating from around 1910; this is the first time that a complete recording of all 66 numbers has been undertaken, for which devotees of Karg-Elert will be extremely grateful. Volume 6 in the series covers Books 3 and 4 in the Breitkopf edition, comprising a total playing time of 70.30 minutes. The presentation of the disc itself is sumptuous; it appears in a card sleeve, profusely illustrating many Art Nouveau features of the Lüdenscheid Christuskirche, which also dates from 1902. Despite serious war damage, the building, which seats nearly 1200 people, and eventually the organ, were fully restored, the tonalities of the original instrument replacing the voguish neo-baroque 'improvements' of 1957.

Elke Völker has provided detailed notes on the music and its composer, and also on the circumstances of its composition; as always in the series, they appear in German, French and English – something English record companies could well emulate. A valuable aspect of these notes is the provision of the German text which frequently underlays Karg-Elert's settings – essential to the understanding and interpretation of these pieces, especially as the first (and title) line does not always appear in the score. The quoted words of our Honorary Member Wolfgang Stockmeier sum up the composer's achievement in opus 65: 'His marvels of liturgical music'. It might, therefore, be helpful to provide here a short summary of the pieces played on this disc – all performed with much sensitivity and interpretative skill.

Book 3 opens with a contrapuntal tour de force – Karg-Elert's inspired use of the paraphrase to 'Gloria in Excelsis Deo' with words and melody by Nikolaus Decius. Here the fugal treatment of the chorale is eventually joined by the melody itself declaimed in the pedals. It is extraordinary that this fine piece, very much reflecting the spirit of Bach, is so seldom played. No 24, *Dir, dir Jehova, will ich singen*, treats the chorale in more straightforward fashion, apart from short imitative interludes, with the first line repeated *fff* in a highly chromatic conclusion. A short declamatory setting of the Easter hymn *Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag* is followed by two reflective pieces *Jesu, hilf siegen* and the darkly elaborate *Jesu, meine Zuversicht*, where the tune moves from the upper of the two pedal parts to a solo manual part, where it is ingeniously concealed. No 28, *Lobe den Herren, o meine Seele* (not to be confused with no 58, *Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König*), is a familiar, extrovert setting of this rousing tune, extending its final 'Hallelujas' into a huge climax.

Machs mit mir, Gott, nach deiner Gut (no 29) is one of three settings made by Karg-Elert, the others being opus 78/13 and W14/3, the latter now available in the Dr J Butz edition BU 2312. Here, as in W14, the tune is treated canonically between the tenor and treble registers. No 30, *Nach einer Prüfung kurzer Tage* is also set in opus 78, and is notable for its chromatic pedal part below the flowing manual lines; only in the last three bars does the tune appear undecorated *mit Inbrust* (with fervour). There follows a setting of a tune familiar in English services, usually set to the Easter hymn 'A brighter dawn in breaking'. The German text is one of thanksgiving – *Nun lasst uns Gott dem Herren*, appearing first above a busy texture of demisemiquavers and a percussive pedal part, to be played 'with Handelian gravity' (!). The busy texture then transfers to the pedal part before a much simpler and calmer conclusion. No 32, a setting of a somewhat obscure text (without words underlying the music) takes the form of a charming, lightweight trio, with the tune partly concealed in the treble part, only appearing fully in its penultimate line (and clearly delineated by this soloist). The concluding cadence illustrates Karg-Elert's careful craftsmanship by enriching the tonality with an 8-part chord. The final number in Book 3, like the first, is an extended setting, this time of the familiar *Wachet auf!* also set in opus 78/18. Lively quaver and semiquaver movement in manuals and pedal herald the entry of the chorale, the introductory material eventually punctuating the chorale in the minor key, now given to the line 'Mitternacht heist diese Stunde!' the tune then rising to the treble register. Bare, declamatory fifths now introduce a darker scene, reflected in the words 'Wohlauf,



The evangelical Christuskirche, Lüdenscheid, in South Westphalia, Germany. Image by PeLei, Wikipedia.

der Bräutigam kommt', sixths replacing single notes for the tune. 'Halleluja!' is declaimed before the last two lines of the chorale, introducing earlier material, now safely back in the major key, while the last line is presented triumphantly before the unexpectedly hushed ending.

Book 4 (tracks 12-22) is every bit as varied as the previous volume, in degrees of difficulty as well as style. It mainly comprises the seasons of Ascensiontide and Pentecost, beginning with the version of a tune found in English hymnals set to 'Strengthen for service'. Here, the lilting, tranquil setting of no 34 illustrates the 4th verse of the hymn *Zeuch uns nach dir*, the tune given to the pedal part – which could, in this recording, have been more prominent. There follows a setting of a Pentecost hymn *Komm, o komm, du Geist des Lebens*, to a tune set in English hymnals to 'May the grace of Christ our Saviour'; in pastoral style, it is for manuals only. No 36 has an Ascensiontide title, but in fact sets words from a hymn more restrained in sentiments: *Herr, wie du willst, so schicks mit mir im Leben und im Sterben*. The tune, by Wolfgang Dachstein, is also sometimes sung to 'Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir' instead of the usual setting by Luther. Karg-Elert here demonstrates the importance of the text by choosing to set only the first line of verse 1 and then alternate lines from that verse and verse 3. Flowing semiquavers throughout over an almost continuous pedal point eventually subside into arpeggios above a quiet 32' pedal. No 37, the Pentecost hymn *O komm, du Geist der Wahrheit*, utilizes antiphonal devices in this rousing, familiar setting of a tune which is subtly disguised throughout, except for a brief fugato passage. Soon after the composition of opus 65 came Karg-Elert's Three Symphonic Chorales op 87, the second based on *Jesu, meine Freude* and dedicated to Karl Straube – one of the composer's most striking (and difficult!) works. Clearly inspired by the words of this famous chorale and Bach's own setting of it, Karg-Elert's version in opus 65 no 38 is in the form of a passacaglia. Its two sections correspond to the first line of the chorale reiterated eleven times, before the huge climax declaiming the subsequent line in octaves. Everything then dies down to a 32' solo, after which the chorale continues on the manuals. This is followed by a further nine variations on the original theme before the previous climax returns, but in the major key, as is the last line of the chorale, again presented in octaves, first in the pedal part and then on the manuals. (A similar major version occurs in op 87/2). The overwhelming cadence *molto largo* anticipates a similar conclusion to Part I of the composer's later version.

No 39, *Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott*, sets the words of the original antiphon *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, with two verses added by Martin Luther. This lively setting introduces the tune in the upper part, with energetic quavers beneath on the manuals, while the pedals reiterate a rising motif derived from the last line of the tune (before the *Hallelujas*), eventually supplying a detached tonic pedal before gently rising and falling quavers in manuals and pedals bring about a subdued conclusion. Even more subdued is no 40, reflecting the words of verse 1: *Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende*. The tune is given to a 4' pedal reed stop, accompanied by elaborate, slow moving counterpoint; as the last line of verse 1 looks towards the end of life, the 'Dresden Amen' completes this darkly meditative piece. No 41, *O Durchbrecher aller Bande*, admirably demonstrates

Karg-Elert's contrapuntal skill, ingeniously utilizing the material of this noble tune in the three part texture above and below it. It's a pity, however, that, in this recording, the solo reed stop displays some unevenness in its upper notes. Total contrast is achieved in no 42, where massive sonorities echo the first line of the chorale *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort*; they are contrasted with short passages which also conceal the tune, the final line of which is presented almost unadorned. Subtitled *Im alten Suitenstil*, the whole piece is intended as a pastiche of the *rigadoun* dance, a concept which also occurs in *Partita* opus 100/4. Karg-Elert sets the chorale *O Gott, du frommer Gott* three times: in no 43, again in no 50 and also in opus 78/16. Here, the tune is treated canonically between a solo stop and the accompaniment, again employing great ingenuity, enhanced by the use of chromatic colouring. Book 4 concludes with a Pentecost hymn, the previous four in this set having no connection with this season. No 48 employs a quiet solo stop declaiming a tune more usually associated with 'Wie schön leuchtet' *uns der Morgenstern*, accompanied by limpid thirds and sixths and a nimble two-note pedal motif all of which mirror the words – a prayer for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The poster designed by Marko Heese of Göppingen for the Titanic commemorative recital at the Christuskirche, Eisingen, in Germany.

Christuskirche Eisingen
Sonntag, 15. April 2012

STAR
In Memoriam
Nahe my God to Thee

Sigfrid Karg-Elert
und der
Titanic-Song

Ein
musikalisches
Portrait des
Jugendstilkomponisten

Spätromantische Orgelhaus von

Sigfrid Karg-Elert (1877-1933)
Louis Vierne (1870-1937)
Max Keger (1873-1916)

Orgel:
Marko Heese
Eintritt frei

Einführungsvortrag: 16.45 Uhr (Gemeindehaus)
Konzertbeginn: 18.00 Uhr