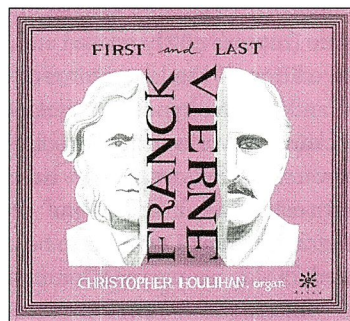


RECORDINGS



FRANCK AND VIERNE: FIRST AND LAST. Christopher Houlihan, organist. Manton Memorial Organ of the Church of the Ascension, New York City (Pascal Quoirin, 2019). Azica Records ACD-71356, 2023. I attended Christopher Houlihan's landmark "Vierne 2012" program at the Church of the Ascension and reviewed it at length. It's a pleasure to return to the same artist and venue eleven years later and hear the same talent with so much more experience enriching it. The Quoirin organ is a wonderful addition to the musical life of New York City; it is always a joy to hear it. As for Houlihan himself, he just keeps getting better.

The title of the recording is explained by Houlihan's opening remarks in the liner notes (there is no booklet; all is printed on the folding wrappers). He points out that "the era of French Romantic symphonic organ music is book-ended by the work of two composers, César Franck (1822–1890) and Louis Vierne (1870–1937)." He goes on to identify the *Grand Pièce symphonique* of Franck and the Sixth Symphony of Vierne as the actual "bookends," or pillars if you prefer, of this time period. It's an interesting thesis, but the music speaks for itself, as always.

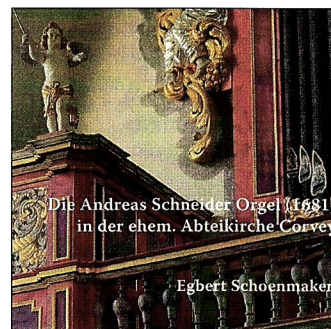
We begin with Franck's masterful "GPS." At this point, I would have to call this my favorite, indeed my go-to, recording of this work. The psychological drama is handled wonderfully; the pacing is faultless; the organ responds seamlessly in a blaze of crescendo and

decrescendo. The great masses of Romantic harmony never obscure the clean structure of the piece, and vice versa. Franck's sense of architecture is spacious, leisurely; he needs time to unfold all the potential of his ideas. I especially enjoy the final *beaucoup plus largement*, in part because of its magisterial pacing, and in part because of the thrilling effect of the long-built-up-to finale. Here, Houlihan just keeps finding stops to add! Yet the effects are natural, inevitable, convincing.

The recording moves on to *une fleur entre deux abîmes* (as Liszt described the middle movement of the "Moonlight" Sonata). This is the "Berceuse" of the 24 *Pièces en style libre*. A quintessential prelude choice from this collection, it is lyrical, atmospheric, and technically undemanding. Its placement here is apt; it serves as an entr'acte. The tremulant adds a gorgeous effect at several spots. Like anything else, the tremulant can be over-used, but there is no need for aversion to it either. After five centuries, I think it has won its spurs.

The second "monster" piece on the recording is the Sixth Symphony of Louis Vierne, composed between July and September 1930. When published in 1931, it was dedicated to the memory of Lynnwood Farnam, the Canadian-born organist who had died in New York City the previous November at the age of 45. (The Petrucci Music Library says that Duruflé was the dedicatee, but this appears to be a mistranslation of a note attached to the manuscript.) Again, my impression of immense musical maturation was strong here. There is no need to go movement by movement; as in the GPS, every movement is in the right spirit and then some. This performance is spacious yet rhythmically driven; thorough musical professionalism meets a poetic spirit.

My overall impression is that you might prefer a *different* recording, for any number of personal reasons, but that you will not find a better one. Here's to Christopher Houlihan's continued success.



DIE ANDREAS SCHNEIDER ORGEL (1681) IN DER EHEM. ABTEIKIRCHE CORVEY. Egbert Schoenmaker, organist. Andreas Schneider organ of the Abbey Church of Corvey, Höxter, Germany. Katholische Kirchengemeinde Corvey and Rex Music, 2021. Available at Flen trop.nl. An American organist can be forgiven for struggling with the title of this recording. Translated, it reads, "The Andreas Schneider Organ (1681) in the Former Abbey Church of Corvey." The liner notes, in English as well as German, identify Corvey as the site of an early Benedictine monastery, established around A.D. 815 under Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious. The notes proudly call the site a "lighthouse of Christianization." Corvey is in Höxter, in the German state of North Rhine–Westphalia, and sits by "the river Weser, deep and wide," which we know from "The Pied Piper of Hamelin." (It lies about an hour south of the rat-beleaguered city of legend.) Little of the abbey's original structure (the so-called westwork) remains, but it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The organ on this recording was built by Andreas Schneider in 1681, at the time of the building of the present church. Schneider was born in 1647 in Dortmund, in northwestern Germany, and died in Höxter in 1685. His aesthetic may be fairly described as Northwest German. Repairs and alterations to the instrument occurred at various times between 1718 and 1994. Starting in 2016, Flentrop Orgelbouw initiated a return of the organ to its original design. The instrument has two manuals, a Hauptwerk and a Brust Positiv, as well as a nice Pedal division with a full principal

chorus. (The Pedal also has a new stop, a “Rohr Flöthen Baß 1 fueß,” or 1’ Rohrflute, heard on track 20, enchantingly, at the three-minute mark.) It is in meantone temperament in *Chorton*, or A465. The spring chest of the Hauptwerk, reintroduced in a 1963 Paul Ott project, was rebuilt, and a slider chest was made for the Brust Positiv. Many other details are available in the liner notes.

The present CD demonstrates and celebrates the restoration. To my ears, it has been highly successful. The tone is full, broad, and a bit edgy in a pleasing way. The organ has a big presence, aided by a long, full reverberation.

One of the best features of the fine performance by Egbert Schoenmaker is the careful and thorough exploration of the sounds of the instrument. We get to hear just about everything. The intensely colorful *volles Werk* of the first track gives way to a brilliant plenum on the second. (These are a Goudimel psalm setting and a wonderfully retrospective piece by Dick Koomans, a living composer, who also wrote the notes.) This is followed by a set of dances of Tielman Susato, where we hear the various effects of principal, flute, and string, as well as the bold reeds. I loved the warm and lyrical buzz of the Krumhorn and was impressed with the chorus of Great reeds.

The implications of meantone are not shunned, but rather embraced, with the *Capriccio chromatico* of Tarquinio Merula. The opening theme is a rising chromatic scale of all twelve tones. To the uninitiated, it will simply sound “out of tune.” To the cognoscenti it will sound out of tune, but for a reason. The organ is in perfect tune, and the piece is composed perfectly. It’s just two different perfections! Listen, and consider.

I wouldn’t change the temperament under any circumstances. Although it is undoubtedly limiting, it is also liberating, opening up the tone of the organ to a fullness and extroversion that, I think, would be missing otherwise. It is part and parcel of this instrument.

Another highlight is the repertoire. This CD is a wonderful starting point for the discovery of 16th- and 17th-century organ music. The composers represented include

Scheidemann, Hassler, Krieger, Kerll, Buxtehude, Muffat, Froberger, and others. Schoenmaker handles this music with clarity and poise, allowing it to speak for itself and for the instrument.

While I thoroughly enjoyed all the pieces, I was especially pleased to hear a selection from the *Görlitzer Tabulaturbuch* of Samuel Scheidt. This vastly underappreciated collection of chorales is better for students (says this theory teacher) than Bach’s “371,” in part because ingenuity is laid aside and the subtle pleasures of diatonic harmony and muscular late-Renaissance rhythm are to the fore. You can’t *slay* a congregation till you can *pray* with one.

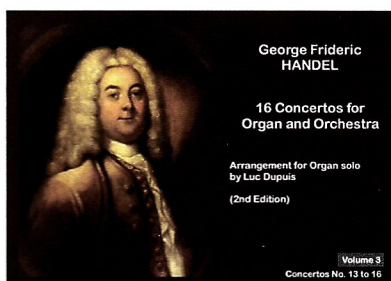
The final track, a stunning Fantasia in D Minor by Matthias Weckmann, puts all the passion of the North German tradition on full display. It is a brilliant and inspiring performance.

The result of all this hard work is a masterful production, a marriage of keyboard skill with astute repertoire and registration choice, as well as, of course, first-class organbuilding.

There is, in the end, no teleology of musical style, no evolutionary goal (indeed, evolution itself precludes any idea of a goal—it just goes on). Music has periods in which we discern progress or regress; but none of these periods, and no progress or regress, can exhaust the meaning of music itself—an expression of the human heart and a lighthouse of faith. This recording proves that the music and the instruments of this place and period are complete, finished, gorgeous musical texts that deserve preservation on their own terms. Bravo to Egbert Schoenmaker and Flentrop Orgelbouw.

JONATHAN B. HALL, FAGO, ChM

SCORES



16 CONCERTOS FOR ORGAN AND ORCHESTRA, George Frideric Handel. Arrangement for organ solo by Luc Dupuis, 2022. Available at LucDupuis.org. Luc Dupuis’s newly revised and corrected edition of the latter concertos by G.F. Handel is an elegant arrangement of these chamber works for organ solo. Previous versions for organ solo have involved extensive manual and pedal playing throughout. Dupuis is to be commended for this arrangement for manuals only, which allows performance on smaller chamber organs more in keeping with the style of Handel. The orchestral writing has been judiciously reduced for performance at the keyboard, and the score clearly marks passages for orchestra and solo so that the performer can delineate these as they wish. Where necessary, Dupuis has included *ossia* to better facilitate performance on a single-manual instrument, where a change in registration may be necessary for such delineation. The engraving is comfortable to read, and the spiral-bound landscape score allows for infrequent and easy page-turns. This edition will breathe new life into this repertoire by greatly expanding its versatility. The first two volumes of the concertos (Op. 4 and Op. 7) are equally laudable; all three are available in a complete set or as individual collections.

JORDAN PRESCOTT, AAGO

BOOKS



KLINGENDE DREIFALTIGKEIT: DIE NEUE MAINZER DOMORGEL, Daniel Beckmann and Birger Petersen.