

LEMARE *Konzertstück no. 1, op. 80. Andantino in D-flat. Caprice Orientale, op. 46. Organ Symphony no. 1, op. 35* ! Lars Rosenlund Nørremark (org) ! CDKLASSIK CDK209 (46:26)

Now utterly obscure, Edwin H. Lemare (1865 or 1866-1934) was the Virgil Fox of his day – at least in virtuosity and fame, if not in personal flamboyance. Had he been born a generation or two later, the phonograph surely would have kept his memory far more green. Born and raised on the Isle of Wight as the son of an Anglican parish organist, he entered the Royal Academy of Music in London in 1878; by the time he graduated in 1882 he was already employed as a full-time parish organist. Over the next 20 years he passed through a succession of increasingly prestigious church posts while building a reputation as an unparalleled virtuoso. At the London International Inventions Exhibition in 1885, he was hired by the organ building firm Brindley and Foster to play two concerts a day, for a total of 110 performances over the fair's duration, with daily notices in the *London Times*.

On New Year's Day, 1901, Lemare played his first American recital in St. Bartholomew's Church, New York to ecstatic reviews. A subsequent American tour led to his employment as civic organist for the city of Pittsburgh from 1902-05, in an era when many major municipalities funded such a position for weekly performances during the fall-to-spring concert season. During these three years he also undertook the daunting travel rigors required for a concert tour to Australia and New Zealand. For twelve years afterward he performed internationally as a freelance concert artist; during a sojourn in Germany in 1913 he recorded 96 player organ rolls for the Welte Philharmonic Autograph Organ, which along with another 24 rolls made for Aeolian, and a handful of 78s recorded in 1927, constitute his surviving auditory legacy.

In 1915 Lemare was paid the then princely sum of \$10,000 to perform 100 concerts for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. This led to his employment there from 1917-21 as the first city organist; his opening concert for the dedication of the organ in the newly built Civic Auditorium attracted a capacity audience of 10,392, with thousands more turned away at the door. He moved to successive positions in Portland, Maine, in 1921 and then to Chattanooga in 1925. The post-San Francisco years marked an increasing decline in his reputation, as he was deemed old-fashioned and "sentimental" in comparison to the new performing style represented by Marcel Dupré. He moved back west to Hollywood in 1929, where he lost his entire fortune in the stock market crash of the Great Depression and died penniless in 1934. By then his fame had been fully eclipsed; when in 1932 the *American Organist* published a list of the 58 best organists in the USA, he was not even mentioned. An autobiography, *Organs I Have Met*, with supplemental material from his wife and friends, was published posthumously in 1956.

In addition to being a celebrated virtuoso, Lemare was an avid transcriber of orchestral music (those of Wagner excerpts are still very much in use) and composer of original works. While these both were geared primarily to display his pyrotechnic prestidigitations, he also

believed they performed a valuable pedagogic function in bringing to many people orchestral repertoire that they might otherwise never hear in their lifetimes – a point all too easily forgotten after a century of recorded sound available for individual purchase and home consumption.

Despite his British roots, Lemare's own compositions are firmly stamped with the French influence that dominated late nineteenth-century organ music. This CD presents four works, three apéritifs followed by a substantial main course of the four-movement symphony. The *Concertstück* is subtitled “written in the form of a Polonaise” and is a vivacious, energetic, colorful foray into that folk dance style – though, a bit unusually, the rhythmic and harmonic twists also bring the zarzuela to mind. The Andantino (Op. 83, no. 2), popularly known as “Moonlight and Roses” after being set to words without the composer's consent in 1921, was perhaps his most popular work. (Ironically, the composer had sold the original for only three guineas and realized further income from its subsequent popularity only upon winning a lawsuit over the unauthorized vocal setting.) It is a minor trifle, very much in the mode of popular entertainment music of the time (think of stereotypical silent film accompaniment music for an idyllic outing by a young couple in love). The *Caprice Orientale*, another brief divertissement, has nothing about it that sounds particularly oriental, though a couple of exotically stopped chords in the middle may have conveyed such to the audiences of its era.

Lemare's two organ symphonies, in form following French models of Guilmant and Widor, are considered to be his finest works, and this one at least is worthy to stand with them. The first movement has an impish, skipping triplet theme that could easily have been penned by Dukas for *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. A succeeding Adagio cantabile fulfills the promise of its name with a lovely, flowing, singing melody. The Scherzo features cascading, trumpeting runs of sixteenth notes and a contrasting, more subdued trio section. The finale is dominated by a strikingly dramatic and memorable theme very much in Widor's mold.

It is difficult to track down previous recordings of pieces by Lemare; while Christopher Herrick recorded several works in his “Organ Fireworks” series, I cannot find a previous recital disc devoted specifically to the composer. Based on the *Concertstück* and Symphony presented here, I would be very glad to hear more, though the two filler works are greatly inferior, being obviously churned out for easy appeal and immediate effect rather than musical substance. Organist Lars Nørremark has the complete measure of these pieces, both technically and stylistically, and is blessed with a superbly clear recorded acoustic that avoids the muddy reverberation of too many organ CDs without sounding the slightest bit dry. The digipack offers a thick booklet with photos and an extensive essay in Danish and English translation. My one complaint is that 46:26 is shamefully short timing for a modern CD recording – especially since the CD is subtitled “Organ Works, Vol. 1,” with the promise of more to come from a legacy of over eighty opus numbers. Despite that (and at the risk of encouraging such exploitation of collectors' wallets), this disc is strongly recommended to all lovers of Romantic organ music.

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