

Reviews of Hymn-Based Compositions for Organ

Ruth Anderson

All prices are in U.S. dollars

New Music

Winter Solstice: Carols for Organs by Roberta Rowland-Raybold

Augsburg Fortress, 2015. ISBN 978-1-4514-9910-0. \$20.00

This collection of easy-medium difficulty includes Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany tunes, mostly three to four pages in length. An intriguing setting of EL DESEMBRE CONGELAT opens with a lively arrangement of the tune, then slows with an ornamented, introspective solo melody over a soft accompaniment. Two Asian tunes, OSOSŌ and HUAN-SHA-XI, make use of parallel fourths and fifths to offer a taste of their Eastern cultures. The original composition "Meditation on Winter Solstice" makes a reflective prelude, using minimal pedal. The fantasia on WIE SCHÖN LEUCHTET opens with a sense of shimmering light in the manuals. The tune then moves to the pedals, accompanied by running triplets in the manuals. The piece ends in a whisper. The variations on BESANÇON are fun to play. This is a useful collection for liturgical organists looking for simple service music.

Christmas Carillon: Organ Carols for the Winter Seasons by Harold Stover

Augsburg Fortress, 2015. ISBN 978-1-4514-9905-6. \$17.00

This collection of eight Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany tunes looks for new ways to approach hymns sung early in the liturgical year. The delightful manuals-only theme and variations on NARODIL SE KRISTUS PÁN uses contrasting registrations concluding with a polymetrical dance movement. The arioso on VENI, EMMANUEL has a blues feel. An intriguing nocturne on LOST IN THE NIGHT employs dark registration with rhythmic and harmonic dissonances to paint a 'lost' picture. WIE SCHÖN LEUCHTET appears twice 1) as an homage to Pachelbel, with a little challenge in a trio arrangement, and 2) an ethereal version with long chordal clusters (including a wedge) and brief pedal motifs. Throughout the collection, the composer explores surprising harmonies in an improvisatory fashion.

Star of Promise: Ten Preludes on Advent Hymns by Kenneth L. Dejong

Augsburg Fortress, 2015. ISBN 978-1-4514-9908-7. \$16.00

This contemplative organ collection of medium difficulty suggests mostly quiet registrations for the reflective side of Advent. All are suitable for service or prelude music, two to three pages in length. In each, the tune is clearly heard. CHRIST, BE OUR LIGHT has a blues feel and is not difficult, save some tricky changes in registration. The composer uses a passacaglia-type structure in a delightful setting of TIF IN VEDELE. LOST IN THE NIGHT employs simple pedaling and a plaintive countermelody. LUCENT also uses a simple pedal line in this gentle setting with its moving eighth notes in the manuals. The light, happy setting of ASCENSION is a joy to play. I recommend this collection as a practical addition to any liturgical organist's library.

Angels We Have Heard on High: Five Organ Pieces for Advent and Christmas by Rebecca K. Owens

MorningStar Music Publishers, MSM-10-175, 2015. \$16.00

This collection includes a toccata (on PICARDY/DIVINUM MYSTERIUM), two preludes (on GLORIA and HAGEN), and two medleys (AWAY IN A MANGER/MUELLER/GREENSLEEVES and NUN KOMM DER HEIDEN HEILAND/CAROL OF THE BELLS/O FILII ET FILIAE). The toccata begins quietly, simply, then increases rhythmically into toccata style as it builds to a climax with the DIVINUM MYSTERIUM tune, requiring little pedaling. An unusual GLORIA setting ornaments the tune at a meditative *largo*, making it suitable for a quiet prelude. Both medleys call for chimes, which could be substituted with handbells. The first medley (mentioned above) ends with a quiet surprise quoting “lullaby and goodnight,” while the second medley mentioned concludes by cleverly combining CAROL OF THE BELLS with NUN KOMM DER HEIDEN HEILAND.

Advent Awakenings: Organ Settings for the Season by Franklin D. Ashdown

Augsburg Fortress, 2015. ISBN 978-1-4514-9904-9. \$21.00

Several of the eight hymn-based settings and two original compositions have big registrations, expressing the joyful expectation of the Messiah. In this collection of medium-difficulty, a few tricky passages include fingering markings. “Gabriel’s Trumpet” is a jubilant new piece suitable for a postlude. The accessible setting of BURLEIGH in the keys of F and D is sensitively written. The fanfare recessional on ANTIOCH is an exuberant rendition that moves through several modulations. A partita on WACHET AUF appears in five movements of contrasting styles with hints of the tune, embellished. The final movement has a more active pedal line. The sortie on HAF TRONES LAMPA FÄRDIG is accessible, festive, and fun to play. Most pieces are four to six pages in length. This is a fine collection for those who enjoy numerous key changes within a given work.

One of My “Old” Favorites

Slane: Prelude for Organ “At the close of the day” by Healey Willan

C. F. Peters Corporation 66034, 1967. ISBN M-3007-1621-3. \$12.75

This quiet prelude calls for a soft string background to the cello or horn-like registration of the (mostly) bass-clef tune. It requires careful fingering to maintain smooth legato phrases. The piece makes a lovely 4½ minute prelude to an evening worship service.

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