

Reviews of Hymn-Based Compositions

Karin Gargone

All prices are in U.S. dollars.

Piano Weavings

Sherri Hansen. Augsburg Fortress, 2014. ISBN 978-1-4514-9412-9. \$21.00.

Here is a collection of thirteen practical hymn settings for general worship, but also for occasions with specific themes (communion, baptism, confirmation, marriage, thanksgiving, resurrection, the natural world/God's creation). These settings are mostly based on newer hymn tunes such as GOOD SOIL, HARVEST GIFTS, LAC QUI PARLE, LUX IN TENEBRIS, SPIRIT LIFE, and ZACHARY WOODS ROCK – lovely for peaceful and joyful meditation, and an excellent way to introduce these tunes if they are unfamiliar. Three traditional hymn tune settings are also included: EIN FESTE BURG, KINGSFOLD, and PUER NOBIS. Most are three to four minutes in length.

The style is “current” and easily accessible to the listener, utilizing functional harmony, prevailing repeated rhythmic patterns, syncopation, and interesting shifts in meter and tonality. In all settings the melody is clearly heard. The skill level suggested by the publisher is medium, which I would refine as slightly more advanced, especially in order to play the faster-paced settings with fluency.

Six Hymn Reflections for Piano

Jason Krug. GIA Publications, Inc. G-8484, 2014. ISBN 85147-84846. \$19.00.

Contents: ROYAL OAK, SLANE, PAT-A-PAN / UNE JEUNE PUCELLE, PEACE LIKE A RIVER, SANS DAY CAROL, and TERRA BEATA.

Krug has provided a practical and effective resource for use in Christian worship. Text-driven, the settings of these familiar hymn tunes are at times peaceful, joyful, playful, and folk-like. PAT-A-PAN emulates the sound of the drum (adding a hand drum at the beginning and end could be delightful). The simple left hand accompaniment in PEACE LIKE A RIVER sounds like the picking of a guitar, lending a buoyant feel to the piece. The ending will take the listener a bit by surprise! TERRA BEATA celebrates God's world through gentle jazz chord changes which build into greatness and then humbly yield again to quiet reflection. All are three to four minutes in length.

At “easy-medium” skill level, with ever-present melodies and friendly harmony, Krug's piano hymn settings are well done, and warrant further exploration.

Anguished American Easter, 1968, for Organ

Thomas H. Kerr, Jr., ed. Herndon Spillman. GIA Publications, Inc. G-7947, 2010. ISBN 85147-79476. \$15.00.

Anguished American Easter is a significant work for organ, based on the African American spiritual “He arose,” dedicated to the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.. Thomas Kerr (1915-1989) composed it as a musical reaction to the assassination of Dr.

King, during the week preceding Easter in 1968. Kerr improvised most of the work on the organ at a Good Friday service. It was expanded by him in 1969, and again in 1976 (also edited at that time by Herndon Spillman, who included several changes Kerr had made to registration and tempo).

This tonal work begins with the innocent presentation of the spiritual's refrain on light flutes, shifting abruptly into a strong reed fanfare, followed by variations including scherzo, allegro deciso e ritmicissimo, pedal point variation, "antiphonal," andante risoluto, allegro brillante, moderato, and full organ maestoso conclusion.

The theme of the spiritual is maintained in each variation – through melody, harmony, rhythm, form – though not all at the same time. Amid captivating rhythms, changing meters, ebb and flow of dissonance, and chromatic harmonies, the theme programmatically evolves into something very different from its innocent start.

The composition is twenty-two pages in length, registered for three manuals with pedal, and can be considered difficult. This is mainly determined by activity in the manuals. Pedaling is not complex, consisting mostly of sustained tones, interjected double pedal fifths, and ostinato.

Anguished American Easter is a dramatic addition to any concert, regardless of season, and my hope is that the music and its many messages will long be kept alive.

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