

RECORDINGS

Reviewed

VERNON GOTWALS
Smith College

Robert Anderson, *Program of 20th Century Organ Music*, AS 327 (A two-record set in the King of Instruments series of Aeolian-Skinner).

Hermann Schroeder, *Zweite Sonate*; Anton Heiller, *Ecce Lignum Crucis (A Meditation)*; Luigi Tagliavini, *Passacaglia su Tema di Hindemith*; Jehan Alain, *Trois Danses*; Carel Brons, *Invenzione*; Tom Bruynèl, *Reliëf (Organ & 4 Electronic Sound Tracks)*; Vincent Persichetti, *Shimah B'koli (Psalm 130) Op. 89*; Olivier Messiaen, *Verset pour la Fête de la Dédicace*; Gaston Litaize, *Prélude et Danse Fuguée*.

Aeolian-Skinner Organ Co. Opus 1509 (1970) in Zumbro Lutheran Congregation, Rochester, Minnesota, 3 manuals, 52 ranks (39 stops).

This is a record that cannot be faulted. The program is unhackneyed. Anderson plays with authority and imagination. The organ sounds fine, although the church, despite the wood and tiles that show in a photograph, is not very reverberant. Robert L. Sipe designed the instrument with a "modern detached console and electronically operated stop and combination action"—the word "tracker" is not used. (Who voiced the especially beautiful reeds?)

Extensive notes by Dr. Herbert Turrentine of Southern Methodist University help to guide us through less familiar pieces. The roster includes a German, Austrian, Italian, three French, two Dutch, and one American composer. We find Anton Heiller's meditation, *Behold the Cross of Wood*, beautiful, while Schroeder's *Second Sonata* (1966) and Tagliavini's 1954 *Organ Passacaglia* on a theme from Hindemith's *Quartet in C Major, Op. 16*, are rather academic. Anderson plays the Alain pieces on Side 2 with great verve. These comprise the first disc.

Brons (b. 1931, Amsterdam) and Bruynèl (b. 1934) occupy Side 1 of the second disc. The *Invention* (1963) was inspired by the Schnitger organ at Zwolle, Holland. The *Relief* (1964, published by Donemus) is more stylish than the "old-fashioned"-modern stop-start sounds of the Brons piece. These are respectable compositions and deserve to be studied and heard. Somewhere, however, there is a great masterpiece of late 20th century organ music waiting to be composed. Neither of these offerings is it. Both present materials we have all heard before, but neither makes a compelling structure of them. We are still at the musical tinker-

ing stage here, although these are the most advanced textures in this recital.

On the last side Messiaen's *Verset for a Dedication Ceremony* (1960) stands out like a monadnock from the surrounding plains. It is long but full of enchantment. Persichetti's *Psalm*, commissioned for the 1962 opening of the organ in Philharmonic Hall, Lincoln Center, N.Y.C., is long but not very gratifying to the ear. The *Prelude and Fugal Dance* of Litaize (1964) are short and slick.

So it is the superb organ and the gifted organist who are the stars of this highly recommended set. (The recording is very clear, the surfaces excellent.) One wonders at Robert Anderson's diligence in learning all these notes, only some of which are going to be around for very long, and one is grateful to him. If there are few surprises in this recital, most of the pieces are admittedly too new to be permanently judged.

We must observe, finally, that Bastanier's cover design is awful, that it would have been helpful to know which pieces are published and by whom, and that an occasional identification in the Notes of a solo stop displayed (those beautiful reeds—Swell Regal 8', Rückpositiv Krummhorn 8', Pedal Contra Posaune 32') would have been welcome. Otherwise this record set is at the top of the list in all categories of criticism.