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Fenner Douglass. *Cavallé-Coll and the French Romantic Tradition*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999. xiii, 235 pp. ISBN 0-300-07114-0 (hardcover)

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more. Glenn Gould, by renouncing the stage for the recording studio while still in his thirties, provides an antidote to Debord's idea of the icon as the embodiment of fans' wishes and the incarnation of mass fantasies. Gould, notorious recluse, never lost his individuality. His idiosyncratic recordings of Mozart, Beethoven, and other composers are a sustained critique of the musical culture of virtuosos and exhibitionism. What happens when you separate a virtuoso pianist from his status as an icon? You begin to see the tension between his performance and his iconic status. Gould is a virtuoso *malgré lui*. He is an icon who critiques fans' adherence to star systems. He is a performer who makes music serve an ideal by alienating listeners from their fantasies about repertoire. Whatever image of himself and of music that he wished to project, Gould also emanated an image of neurotic disablement and glory, even posthumous glory, that contradicts the stringent idealism that he set out to perform.

Allan Hepburn

Fenner Douglass. *Cavaillé-Coll and the French Romantic Tradition*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999. xiii, 235 pp. ISBN 0-300-07114-0 (hardcover).

"The Revolution," asserts Fenner Douglass, "left French organs in ruins. Had the Reign of Terror (1792–94) continued to the end of the 18th century, it is likely that the art of organ building would have vanished from France altogether" (p. 1). With those ringing words Douglass begins his story of Aristide Cavaillé-Coll (1811–99), whose career would rise from the ashes of the early nineteenth century, and who would go on to produce organs unlike any heard before. Though their superlative tonal beauty and finish would in themselves qualify Cavaillé-Coll as one of the four or five greatest organ builders of all time, more significant still is the way in which his organs have inspired a still flourishing tradition of composition and performance. Franck, Widor, Vierne, Dupré, Duruflé, and Messiaen responded to the rich sounds of Cavaillé-Coll's instruments by producing a body of literature for organ surpassed only by that of the North German school of Buxtehude and Bach. In the present volume, Douglass examines the first three decades of Cavaillé-Coll's long career in an attempt to show how so influential a figure could have arisen from so unpromising a cultural and historical background.

Much of this, according to Douglass, was sheer luck, though that luck attached itself to a man of genius, perspicacity, and winsome personal qualities. In chapter 2 Douglass points out that Cavaillé-Coll's rise to prominence corresponded fortuitously with the coming to France of rail travel, which permitted him to move quickly around the country, as demanded by his contracts for provincial cathedrals and churches. Increasing mechanization meant that the old craft of organ building, like the manufacture of pianos, had become an industry, and Cavaillé-Coll took full advantage of these opportunities. Even so, fortune smiled upon him with unusually enduring warmth. It was Rossini who, after hearing an instrument built in Toulouse by Cavaillé-Coll, urged the twenty-

one-year-old to further his career in Paris. Within a few days of arriving in the capital, Cavaillé-Coll had secured two major contracts (the organs for the royal abbey of Saint-Denis and Notre-Dame-de-la-Lorette) that together would establish his reputation and lead to a half-century of aesthetic and innovative triumph, if not financial security. There was also the decisive role played in his career by a fellow innovator from across the Channel. Rejected by his English colleagues who, according to Cavaillé-Coll's friend, Charles Marie Philbert, "utterly scorned the work of a bold novice who dared interfere with the arcana of their routines" (p. 32), Charles Barker came to France with a new pneumatic lever designed to lighten the resistance of organ keys and thereby make possible the construction of larger, more elaborate instruments. The Barker lever was a godsend to Cavaillé-Coll, who immediately used it to improve the flexibility and tonal range of his instruments. Such good fortune early in life enabled Cavaillé-Coll to establish himself quickly, and the story of his professional début and early career, on which Douglass focuses, is gratifying to read.

In providing this account, Douglass draws almost exclusively on his massive *Cavaillé-Coll and the Musicians: A Documented Account of His First Thirty Years in Organ Building* (Raleigh, N.C.: Sunbury Press, 1980), a two-volume work comprising a total of 1,534 pages and 29 plates. The relation between the two titles—or more accurately the extraction of the present book from the 1980 study—bears some clarification. In his preface, Douglass mentions the "first edition of *Cavaillé-Coll and the Musicians* (1980)," which might lead readers to suppose that the present volume is a second edition or revision. On the copyright page, the publishers characterize the present volume as "a new and expanded edition of *Cavaillé-Coll and the Musicians*." Given its relative brevity, however—the present volume is less than one-fifth the length of the 1980 work—readers might be forgiven some puzzlement about what kind of expansion has occurred.

Let us, then, try to sort out the relationship between the two works. Chapters 1 to 11 of the present book, together with two appendices, are reproduced photographically from the 1980 study. Chapter 12, "Cavaillé-Coll on Electricity," replaces the corresponding chapter ("Views on Diverse Matters," a fascinating compendium of notes on issues ranging from acoustics and placement of organs to estimations of his fellow builders) from the 1980 study, which in turn becomes appendix A in the present volume. Appendix B, "Selected Letters in English Concerning Cavaillé-Coll's Travels," is a much abbreviated version (shortened from 216 pages to nine) of the 1980 study's appendix A. The present book's appendix C, "Several Contracts in English," is the 1980 study's appendix B, and is reproduced without changes. The original twenty-nine plates have in the present volume been reordered and reduced to seventeen. Several erroneous attributions have been corrected: figure 6, for example, is now correctly attributed to Calla's 1854 *Rapport* rather than de la Fage's earlier study of the Saint-Denis instrument.

Once the bibliographic dust has settled, therefore, *Cavaillé-Coll and the French Romantic Tradition* emerges as a reordered and very lightly revised reprint of the body of Douglass's 1980 study. It includes a "new" chapter 12 that

was first published in a 1980 *Festschrift*,<sup>1</sup> and omits French-language letters and contracts originally occupying more than 1,300 pages of appendices. These curtailments mean that references in the body of the text to omitted material have had to be altered, which in turn has necessitated resetting some lines of type in chapters 1 to 11.<sup>2</sup> Given that the 1980 volumes were set in Linotype, a precise match of typeface has proven elusive: the emendations are noticeable. Though the publishers have wisely decided not to correct small errors in the reproduced material (“Lemmons” for “Lemmens” on p. 52, and “1945” for “1845” on p. 53, for example), they have allowed obvious errors to creep into new and reset material (“ingenius” for “ingenious” and “a slot in the cut chest” for “a slot cut in the chest” on p. 6, “Cane” for “Caen” on p. 149, “alter” for “altar” twice on p. 151, “1998” for “1898” on p. 153, and the startling “Inauguration du Grand Orgue de la Basalique” on p. 225). Some confusion of sources is also evident in the attribution of the 1855 *Nouveau manuel complet de l’organiste* to the non-existent “Manuels-Roret” on p. 223 and to Georges Schmitt on p. 225.

These distractions aside, the clarity and rhythmic vigour of Douglass’s prose remain a source of pleasure, as does his occasional asperity. He calls Charles Burney’s hyperbolic praise of the Venetian swell “patently inane” (p. 38), and he minces no words when he concludes his discussion of the revisions to the Sainte-Clotilde organ made by Franck’s successors Charles Tournemire and Jean Langlais with the bald assertion that “Franck’s instrument has perished” (p. 142). Strongly held views lead him, however, to make at least one assertion that cannot be supported. He accuses Marcel Dupré (1886–1971) of “putting words in [Cavaillé-Coll’s] mouth” (p. 144) regarding the application of electricity to organs, implying that Dupré misleadingly construes remarks Cavaillé-Coll made to the inventor Albert Peschard.<sup>3</sup> Also striking in this regard is a remarkable sentence in which Douglass describes Dupré as “self-proclaimed protector of the old Cavaillé-Coll organ at St-Sulpice” and someone with “no ambivalence toward electric action” (p. 144).

Dupré’s fondness for the sophisticated electric actions by Skinner, Casavant, and others that he encountered during his North American concert tours is a matter of record. He valued them for their rapidity of response and their ability to repeat notes at high speed, both of which showed off his prodigious keyboard and pedal technique. But in an age when one after another of Cavaillé-Coll’s instruments in France fell prey to tonal revision and electrification at the hands of state-appointed “experts,” Dupré indeed protected the Saint-Sulpice *magnum opus*, an organ sometimes called the “spiritual centre” of the French school, from any mechanical or tonal changes. In so doing, he played a crucial role in ensuring that today the instrument remains as Cavaillé-Coll conceived it. Surely this in itself is eloquent testimony to his regard for Cavaillé-Coll’s

<sup>1</sup> Albert Dunning, ed., *Visitatio Organorum: Feestbundel voor Maarten Albert Veute* (Buren, Netherlands: Frits Knuf, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> Occasionally the necessary changes have been overlooked. On p. 172, for example, the reader is referred to letters that appear in the 1980 study, but which have been omitted from the present book.

<sup>3</sup> Marcel Dupré, *Recollections*, trans. Ralph Kneeream (Melville, N.Y.: Belwin-Mills, 1975), 18.

work, and a more restrained approach to electric action than Douglass implies. Moreover, when we consider his preservation of the Saint-Sulpice organ in tandem with his often expressed admiration for the builder, it seems improbable that Dupré, at the end of his own long life and nearly three quarters of a century after Cavaillé-Coll's death, would put words in the latter's mouth.

The evidence Douglass offers to support his accusation is not convincing. We do not know exactly why, late in the 1890s, Cavaillé-Coll discarded electric action in the instrument of Saint-Augustin in Paris; the reasons are unclear and, unless new evidence comes to light, they will remain so. In an 1890 letter that Douglass quotes, moreover, Cavaillé-Coll writes that he has "not had the courage" to embark on a thorough study of the new electrical systems, phrasing that can hardly be read as a blanket condemnation of them. These are shaky premises on which to slur Dupré's veracity. Douglass's attack is unfortunate, and adds nothing to this account of Cavaillé-Coll's career.

One's view of *Cavaillé-Coll and the French Romantic Tradition* thus varies according to circumstance. Libraries possessing Douglass's 1980 study might regard the new title as superfluous, in that nearly all its contents are derived from the earlier work. To those libraries and individuals without the 1980 study, the present volume is a fascinating account of part of the career of a magnificently gifted artist and builder, a man of genius who changed the course of organ building and provided the tonal inspiration for a new school of composition. It is also of great value for its illustrations. Most striking among them are Cavaillé-Coll's shop drawings of the organs of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul (figures 7–9) and Saint-Sulpice (figures 14–17). Though considerably reduced from their 1980 dimensions, the reproductions remain clear. They testify to another of Cavaillé-Coll's virtues, the care with which he laid out these large and complex instruments, and show us how the internal beauty and symmetry of Cavaillé-Coll's organs echo the opulence of their sound.

In an important sense, then, Yale University Press's promise of "a new and expanded edition of *Cavaillé-Coll and the Musicians*" remains unfulfilled. We await a full account of Cavaillé-Coll's life and work. In the interim, this reissue of material that is the better part of a generation old is of value chiefly to those without access to Douglass's earlier study.

Thomas Chase

Nicholas Thistlethwaite and Geoffrey Webber, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to the Organ*. Cambridge Companions to Music. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. xiv, 340 pp. ISBN 0-521-57309-2 (hardcover), 0-521-57584-2 (paperback).

In contrast to other instruments treated in the Cambridge Companions to Music series, the organ is by far the most complex and diverse, and has a repertoire with the longest history, of any present-day instrument. The amount of information surveyed here is prodigious. The twenty chapters are by sixteen specialists (British, American, and Australian) on subjects relating to the instrument