

THE THREE MASSES OF JEHAN ALAIN (1911-1940)

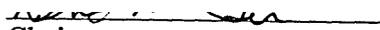
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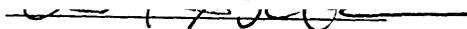
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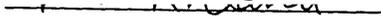
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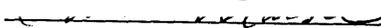
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Introduction

Jehan Alain's career as a composer and organist followed the French tradition established by Louis Vierne, Charles-Marie Widor and Alexandre Guilmant. His own family was and continues to be very musical. His father Albert Alain (1880-1971) studied at the Paris Conservatoire from 1896 to 1907 with Vierne and Guilmant. He was a noted organist, composed music for choir and organ and was a self-taught organ builder. Jehan's sister Marie-Claire Alain (b. 1926) studied harmony with Maurice Duruflé and organ with Marcel Dupré at the Paris Conservatoire. She is recognized as a leading teacher, performer and lecturer on topics ranging from Baroque performance practice to the music of her brother. Jehan Alain (1911-1940) continued the family tradition of studying at the Paris Conservatoire. He was awarded the first prize in many disciplines including harmony, counterpoint, fugue, organ and improvisation. His teachers were the leading Parisian musicians of the early twentieth century including Paul Dukas, Roger Ducasse and Marcel Dupré. Alain composed over 140 works including music for organ, chamber music, orchestra and music for vocalists, both choirs and soloists. Alain's organ music is frequently performed all over the world, including the organ work *Litanies* composed in 1937. When considering Jehan's tragic death at age 29, his compositional output is outstanding. He was killed during World War II during the battle of Saumur on June 20, 1940.

Musical settings of the mass are an established tradition in the Catholic Church. The three mass settings by Jehan Alain were composed in 1938. *Messe de Requiem* is written for mixed choir with organ accompaniment, *Messe modale en*

septuor for two equal voices, solo flute and string quartet, and *Messe grégorienne de mariage* for solo voice and string quartet. In these compositions Alain does not set the complete ordinary; for example, he leaves out the “Credo.” Historically, Jehan Alain’s mass settings are not as well known as his organ music, but some documents about his choral music have been published in France and Marie-Claire Alain was responsible for the publication of the mass settings. One of my goals for this project is to promote Alain’s masses in North America. I am not suggesting that this music is unknown, but it needs to be performed more frequently both as concert repertoire and in the context of liturgy.

Jehan Alain’s mass settings are unique in that they contain distinctly different compositional elements, including a) timbre, b) texture, c) melodic construction and d) harmony. I have two primary goals for this lecture recital. The first is to analyze the influence of chant on the *Messe grégorienne de mariage* and the *Messe de Requiem*. Employing chant is a compositional technique that Alain used in many organ pieces including *Postlude pour l’office de complies* from 1930, *Variations sur Lucis Creator* from 1932 and *Monodie* written in 1938. Chant forms the musical foundation in terms of its use in the Catholic liturgy as well as the basis for many of Alain’s choral and organ compositions. My second goal is to consider the possible influence that the *Messe modale en septuor* may have had on the “Sanctus” from Maurice Duruflé’s *Requiem*. I will explore the use of imitation in Alain’s writing and how the music is enhanced through text painting. I had a unique opportunity on 23 May 2006 to interview Marie-Claire Alain in Dallas, Texas. We spoke primarily

about the mass settings of Jehan Alain and I will be incorporating some of this experience in my lecture.

Messe grégorienne de mariage

The *Messe grégorienne de mariage* employs chant throughout. Chants from “Veni Creator,” as well as “Kyrie,” “Gloria,” “Sanctus” and the “Agnus Dei” are included. Alain has taken the chant from the *Liber usualis* and arranged it as a melody performed by solo tenor. The accompaniment consists of a slow moving harmonic progression in the string quartet.

Table: Form of *Messe grégorienne de mariage*

Veni Creator – Chant with imitative string sections in alternatim
Introit – Chant
Kyrie – Chant with imitative string sections in alternatim
Gloria - Chant
Alleluia – Chant with imitative string sections in alternatim
Sanctus/Benedictus - Chant
Agnus Dei – Chant with imitative string sections in alternatim
Communion – Chant

Jehan Alain employs balance in the arrangement of this mass as he alternates between compositional styles and how the instruments are used. The chant influence is strong both in the solo tenor and the strings. In the preface to the 1999 edition of this work Marie-Claire Alain comments: “From the family chronicle we know that Jehan Alain composed this mass for a friend’s wedding, which was held in a church without an organ. Another friend of the Alain family sang the vocal part, Monsieur André Verroust, who was endowed with a beautiful tenor voice.”¹ By using a slower

¹ Jehan Alain, *Messe grégorienne de mariage* (Austria: Ludwig Doblinger, 1999): 2.

harmonic progression Alain keeps the focus on the chant melody, establishing the importance of the musical line and the text. Throughout this setting Alain intersperses short instrumental canons between sections of the chant. These contrapuntal sections are performed by the string quartet and are based on the same chant melody. Alain's use of the "Veni Creator" hymn for the wedding mass promotes the role of the Holy Spirit in this sacrament.

The opening intonation, performed by the violin and cello, outlines the intervals used for the beginning of the "Veni Creator."

Hymn.
8.

V
Eni Cre-á-tor Spí-ri-tus, Méntes tu-órum ví-si-ta :
Imple su-pérna grá-ti-a Quae tu cre-ásti pécto-ra. 2. Qui

Example 1a. *Liber usualis*, "Veni Creator," verse 1.

Example 1b. *Messe grégorienne de mariage*, “Veni Creator,” measures 1 to 6.

String accompaniment starts at the second phrase and continues to the end of the verse. Musical example 1 shows Alain’s harmony and how the strings are spaced in four parts. The voice leading of the strings promotes a smooth progression and places emphasis on the voice. Alain uses the long held notes to promote the freedom of the chant melody. The mixolydian mode in G is the emphasis for the opening section. Musical example 2 shows a contrapuntal string section, which is inserted between verses one and seven. An obvious canon at the octave between the first violin and cello is displaced by one beat. Alain’s canon continues for the duration of this section ending on unison G.

Quatuor solo

The image shows a musical score for a string quartet and piano accompaniment. The top system features four staves for Violon I, Violon II, Alto, and Violoncelle, all marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The bottom system features four staves for piano accompaniment, marked with a forte (f) dynamic and the instruction 'sans hâte' (without haste). The score is in 2/4 time and consists of two systems of staves.

Example 2. *Messe grégorienne de mariage*, string section between verses one and seven of the “Veni Creator.”

The second violin and viola use intervals of a third, fourth as well as stepwise motion, which imitates the intervals used in the chant. Verse seven that follows is identical to the opening verse with the strings returning to their role as accompaniment. Marie-Claire Alain comments in the preface that: “Jehan Alain took great care to keep the accompaniment of the Gregorian chant as simple as possible, deliberately employing only a few chords in order to allow the melody its requisite freedom.”² The chant line in measure 20 is to be used on the feast of Pentecost. Musical example 3 shows how Alain simplified the chant with the closing “Alleluia” by making it syllabic and having only one change of interval. The original chant from

² Alain, *Messe grégorienne de mariage*, 3.

the *Liber usualis* is virtuosic by comparison, using melismatic lines and being in a constant state of motion.

V. Loquebantur vá-ri-is línguis Apósto-li, alle-lú-ia.

R. Magná-li-a Dé-i, alle-lú-ia.

Example 3a. *Liber usualis*, closing section of “Veni Creator.”

18

Voix

In . sae-cu - lo-rum - sæ-cu-la. A - men. Lo-que-ban-tur va-ri-is lin-guis A-pos-to-li, al-le-lu-ia, A-men. Magna-li-a De-i, al-le-lu-ia.

Violon I

Violon II

Alto

Violoncelle

Example 3b. *Messe grégorienne de mariage*, “Veni creator,” measures 18 to 21.

The origins of the alternatim tradition lie in the early practice of antiphonal and responsorial psalmody. There were many ways of setting music in this style including chant with solo portions set polyphonically and having the chant melody and organ alternate verses. The alternatim plan for the “Kyrie” became standardized in the seventeenth century. The choir and organ would alternate verses with each part of the “Kyrie” being performed three times. The pattern was: “Kyrie” –

Choir/Organ/Choir, “Christe” – Organ/Choir/Organ and “Kyrie” – Choir/Organ/Choir. Alain employs this same model in the “Kyrie” setting of the *Messe grégorienne de mariage*. He adapts the instrumental sections by substituting the string quartet for the organ. The liturgical effect is the same, but with the musical effect slightly altered, when comparing the timbre of strings to the registration of the organ. The other change is that the strings perform throughout, first as the accompaniment to the solo voice and then interpreting the chant melody. The “Kyrie” chant is called “Kyrie fons bonitatis” and it is found with the ordinary set for solemn feasts. All three of the melodies – “Kyrie,” “Christe” and “Kyrie” – are the basis for both the tenor melody and the imitative material for the string sections, which is a strong unifying feature of this mass setting.

II. — For Solemn Feasts. 1.

(Kyrie fons bonitatis)

3. x. c.

K Yri-e * e-lé- i-son. *ijj.* Chri-

ste e-lé- i-son. *ijj.* Ký-ri-

e e-lé- i-son. *ij.* Ký-ri-e *

** e-lé- i-son.

The musical score consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a large 'K' and the lyrics 'Yri-e * e-lé- i-son. ij. Chri-'. The second staff continues with 'ste e-lé- i-son. ij. Ký-ri-'. The third staff has 'e e-lé- i-son. ij. Ký-ri-e *'. The fourth staff has '** e-lé- i-son.'. There are various musical notations including notes, rests, and bar lines. A 'x. c.' is written in the top right corner.

Example 4a. *Liber usualis*, “Kyrie” from “Kyrie fons bonitatis”

1^{er} Kyrie

Voix
Ky-ri - e e - le - i - son.

Violon I

Violon II

Alto

Violoncelle

Example 4b. *Messe grégorienne de mariage*, “Kyrie,” measures 1 and 2.

Musical example 4 presents both the ‘Kyrie’ chant from the *Liber usualis* and Alain’s setting. Notice how similar the two lines are except for the repeated notes from the *Liber usualis*, which Alain has interpreted as quarter notes with a simplified progression. The final “Kyrie” is unique in that the texture of the contrapuntal section includes all four strings with more dynamic contrast. Again in this instance the canon is between the first violin and the cello as demonstrated in example 5.

2^{ème} Kyrie

43 **Quatuor solo**

Violon I
f
détaché

Violon II
f
détaché

Alto
f
détaché

Violoncelle
f
détaché

Example 5. *Messe grégorienne de mariage*, “Kyrie,” measures 43 to 52.

The final section of this mass setting that I will analyze is the “Agnus Dei.” Alain uses another liturgical formula combining the solo voice and string quartet. The opening section is taken from the *Liber usualis* and mode is D Dorian. “Agnus Dei” is performed three times with the “miserere nobis” text changing to “dona nobis pacem” on the second repetition. Example 6 shows the chant from the *Liber usualis* and the opening two verses from Alain’s “Agnus Dei.”

1. X. c.

A -gnus Dé- i, * qui tól- lis peccá-ta

mún-di : mi-se-ré- re nó- bis. Agnus Dé- i, *

qui tól-lis peccá-ta mún- dí : mi-se-ré- re nó- bis.

Example 6a. *Liber usualis*, “Agnus Dei” from “Kyrie fons bonitatis.”

1^{er} Agnus

Voix
A - gnus De - i, qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di:

Violon I

Violon II

Alto

Violoncelle

2^{ème} Agnus
Trio solo

3
mi - se - re - re - no - bis.

Bien soutenu

Bien soutenu

Bien soutenu

3^{ème} Agnus

9
A - gnus De - i,

Example 6b. *Messe grégorienne de mariage*, “Agnus Dei,” measures 1 to 16.

Both the first violin and the cello follow the contour of the melodic line, a canon is at the interval of a seventh. Alain alters the pattern at measure 12 as the cello

outlines a fifth, placing emphasis on the Dorian mode, which provides an effective way to stabilize the canon at the interval of the seventh.

Messe de Requiem

Jehan Alain's *Messe de Requiem* was composed for a service to mark the anniversary of the end of the First World War, which was held on Armistice Day, November 11, 1938. My initial reaction to this historical connection was that the service would primarily be a memorial to those who died in the War. Marie-Claire Alain was emphatic in stating: "This day was a celebration – an event to mark the end of the War."³ Two published editions of this work exist, one from 1978 and the second from 1991. In between these dates, an unknown manuscript in Jehan Alain's hand was found amongst the papers of André Marchal after his death in 1985. Marie-Claire Alain comments in the preface to the second edition: "André Marchal and Jehan Alain were close friends. It is likely that Marchal was given the copy on one of his many visits to Alain in his apartment in the rue duroc in Paris. Jehan Alain certainly had other copies of the work; they and others of his scores were lost when he was killed in the war."⁴ The main differences between the editions are dynamic markings and tempo indications.

Alain's *Messe de Requiem* consists of three movements: the "Kyrie," "Sanctus" and "Agnus Dei." These movements are based on the chant found in the *Liber usualis* under "Masses for the Dead." The text for each section of the "Kyrie" is

³ Marie-Claire Alain, Interview by Geoffrey Ward, Dallas, TX, 23 May 2006.

⁴ Jehan Alain, *Messe de Requiem* (Austria: Ludwig Doblinger, 1991): 2.

performed three times, maintaining the liturgical practice and the opening chant is found in the bass voice as shown in example 7.

6. **K** Y-ri- e * e- lé-i-son. *ijj.* Chri-ste e- lé-i-
 son. *ijj.* Ký-ri- e e- lé-i-son. *ij.* Ký-ri- e
 * e- lé-i-son.

Example 7a. *Liber usualis*, “Kyrie” from “Masses for the Dead.”

En décomposant à la , sans lenteur

Sopran *p* Ky - - - ri - e e - - - le - i - son.

Alt *p* Ky - - - ri - e e - - - le - i - son

Tenor

Baß *p* Ky - - - ri - e e - - - le - i - son.

En décomposant à la , sans lenteur

Orgel *p* sans 16', à la Pédale

Example 7b. *Messe de Requiem*, “Kyrie,” measures 1 and 2.

This mass setting is an example of a contrapuntal exercise, incorporating chant. In the second “Kyrie” the chant melody is moved to the alto part. Alain varies the texture in this movement between three and four voices, with the tenor and bass parts not always performed at the same time. During the third “Kyrie” all four voices are heard for the first time with the dynamic marking increased to *forte*. The harmony is based on F major and its relative minor, D. At measure 7 the chant is heard for the first time in the soprano (see Example 8).

5

S *f* Ky - - ri - e e - - - le - i - son. *P* Chri - - ste

A *f* Ky - - - - ri - e e - le - - i - son. *P* Chri - ste

T *f* Ky - - - ri - e e - - - le - i - son.

B *f* Ky - - - - ri - e e - le - i - son. *P* Chri - - ste,

O

8

poco cresc. e - - - - le - i - son. *mf* Chri - - ste e - - - le - i - -

poco cresc. - e - - - le - i - - son. Chri - ste e - - - - le - i - son.

mf poco cresc. Chri - - - ste e - - - - le - i

poco cresc. Chri - - - ste

cresc. *f*

Ped.

Example 8. *Messe de Requiem*, “Kyrie,” measures 5 to 10.

In Example 8 Alain uses the opening eighth note motive, found in the bass voice, in imitation with the other voices. At measure 7 the alto and bass lines both

enter on subsequent beats with eighth note figures, which maintain the piece's rhythmic drive. Alain intended to publish the work with no bar lines, which would have placed even more emphasis on the chant in terms of a point of reference for the other choral parts. The bar lines were added to facilitate performance of the work; however, it required changing meters throughout the "Kyrie" movement, including 12/8, 9/8 and 15/8. The triplet rhythm established in the opening is maintained through these changes. The sixteenth note motive found in the alto line in measure 7 is used as a unifying device in the "Kyrie." The faster rhythm provides variety with the long phrases found in the soprano and tenor lines at the beginning. Also, it continues the momentum to the next strong beat. The final "Kyrie" has been set in unison. All four voices perform this chant, as shown in Example 9.

The image shows a musical score for measures 17 to 19 of the "Kyrie" from a Requiem. It features five staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Bass (B), and Organ (O). The vocal parts (S, A, T, B) are in a single melodic line, with lyrics "Ky-ri-e e - - - le - - - i - son." written below the notes. The organ part (O) provides accompaniment with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *f* (forte), and performance instructions like *sostenuto* and *molto rit.* (molto ritardando). Measure numbers 17, 18, and 19 are indicated at the beginning of the vocal lines. The organ part has a 2-measure rest at the start of measure 17.

Example 9. *Messe de Requiem*, "Kyrie," measures 17 to 19.

The musical line of this passage is uplifting. The imagery of everyone singing same melody for the final “Lord have mercy” is profound. At the close of the “Kyrie” Alain moves the chant to the alto section with the final pitch of F transferred to the tenor section.

Alain’s setting of the “Sanctus” is primarily syllabic, which requires emphasis with the declamation of the text. Only three short imitative sections are melismatic, which develop out of the syllabic sections. Example 10b shows how Alain combines these ideas.

S Anctus, * Sánctus, Sánctus Dóminus Dé-us Sá-
 ba-oth. Pléni sunt caéli et térra gló-ri-a tú-a. Ho-sánna
 in excélsis. Benedíctus qui vénit in nómine Dómi-ni.
 Hosánna in excélsis.

Example 10a. *Liber usualis*, “Sanctus” from “Masses for the Dead.”

(A la blanche, un peu porté, fort)

f, *f molto sostenuto* *dim. e rit. (souple)*

S. Sanctus, San - - - - - ctus, — Sanctus Do-mi - nus

A. *f molto sostenuto* *p*, *f*
 San - - - - - ctus, — Sanctus Do-mi - nus

T. *f molto sostenuto* *f*, *p*, *f*
 San-ctus, — Sanctus, — ctus, — Sanctus Do-mi - nus

B. *f molto sostenuto* *p*, *f*
 San-ctus, — Sanctus, — Sanctus Do-mi - nus

(A la blanche, un peu porté, fort)

Org. *ff* *f*

Example 10b. *Messe de Requiem*, “Sanctus,” measures 1 to 5.

The opening interval in measure 1 stresses the dissonance of a minor second, which is resolved on the following beat. Alain places the chant melody in the bass part with long sustained chords. In measure 5, the soprano line continues the chant through to measure 7. Alain moves the chant to the alto voice in measure 11 and then back to the soprano section in measure 12. At this point the dynamic is *fortissimo* depicting the text “Glory be to Thee, O Lord most high.” The “Benedictus” that follows is unique in that Alain changes where the chant line sounds every time he indicates a breath. In Example 11 the chant begins in the tenor (Benedictus), moves to the soprano (qui venit) and concludes in the alto (in nomine domini). This makes it more difficult to follow the chant line, but Alain retains the melody as the basis for the composition.

18

S Be - ne - dic - tus qui ve - nit in no - mi - ne Do - mi - ni.

A Be - ne - dic - tus qui ve - nit in no - mi - ne Do - mi - ni.

T Be - ne - dic - tus qui ve - nit in no - mi - ne Do - mi - ni.

B Be - ne - dic - tus qui ve - nit in no - mi - ne Do - mi - ni.

O *pp* *mf* *f*

sans 16' avec 16'

Example 11. *Messe de Requiem*, “Sanctus,” measures 18 to 21.

The “Agnus Dei” setting of the *Messe de Requiem* has the chant melody in canon between the soprano and bass lines. Each time the canon is performed the second entry is displaced by a half note pulse, creating tension that Alain resolves.

A -gnus Dé-i, * qui tóllis peccá-ta múndi : dóna é-is
 réqui-em. Agnus Dé-i, * qui tóllis peccá-ta múndi : dóna
 é-is réqui-em. Agnus Dé-i, * qui tóllis peccá-ta múndi :
 dóna é-is réqui-em ** sempi-térnam.

Example 12a. *Liber usualis*, “Agnus Dei” from “Masses for the Dead.”

Assez lent et uniforme, mais d'une expression contenue

mf

S. A - gnus De - - - i qui

pp

A. A - gnus De - - - i qui

pp

T. A - gnus De - - - i

mf

B. A - gnus De - - - i

Assez lent et uniforme, mais d'une expression contenue

Org. *p*

sans 16'

Example 12b. *Messe de Requiem*, “Agnus Dei,” measures 1 to 4.

Initially the canon is performed at the octave with the soprano section starting. The second presentation is at the interval of a twelfth with the final section returning to the octave. Each time the canon starts the dynamic indication for the soprano and bass lines is louder than the alto and tenor, which indicates the prominence of the line. Alain uses quarter notes in the alto and tenor voices and this drives the half note pulse in a subtle way. In performance the outer voices become hypnotic in performing the canon, while the inner voices loosely imitate the chant with shorter rhythmic values. The mode employed in the “Agnus Dei” is primarily Mixolydian. Throughout the *Messe de Requiem* Alain does not use any accidentals. The writing is based on the key signature of the opening the “Kyrie” and the modes for the “Sanctus” and “Agnus Dei.” By restricting himself to the chant melody as the foundation for this work, Alain creates a setting that has variety in compositional style. This strict exercise in contrapuntal writing depicts the text in an ethereal way, creating a mood that is both spiritual and heavenly.

Messe modale en septuor

Jehan Alain composed the *Messe modale en septuor* in August 1938.

Le 6 août, Jehan écrit sur son agenda: “Je commence à écrit la Messe modale” et, le 15 août, elle est jouée à Maissons-Laffitte.⁵

Alain uses many elements to distinguish this mass setting compared to his other masses including: a) the use of seven independent parts, b) employing the string quartet harmonically and melodically and c) Alain’s use of the flute as a third voice with the soprano and contralto soloists. The flute part was inspired by a friend of

⁵ Aurélie Decourt, *Jehan Alain* (Chambéry: Éditions ‘Comp’Act, 2005): 222.

Jehan Alain, who was an excellent flautist. This setting consists of four movements including “Kyrie,” “Gloria,” “Sanctus” and “Agnus Dei.” Alain employs an instrumental introduction for the “Kyrie.” Initially the strings outline the D Aeolian mode. The tempo marking and the *alla breve* signature both indicate a half note pulse. Important thematic material is performed by the first violin in the measure 4, foreshadowing the entry of the flute in measure 6, the contralto in measure 8 and the soprano in measure 11. Example 13 shows the consistency of the dotted half note pattern followed by the eighth notes.

Allegro

Flûte

Soprano

Contralto

Allegro

Violon I

Violon II

Alto

Cello

5

Ky - ri - e

Example 13. *Messe modale en septuor*, “Kyrie,” measures 1 to 9.

Alain introduces chordal writing in the closing section, employing the flute as a third voice with the soprano and contralto (see example 14). Alain alternates modes by using both the Aeolian mode initially established and the Dorian mode, which uses a B-natural. For example in measure 45 the soprano voice performs a B-flat changing to a B-natural two measures later in the contralto voice.

low range for the flute, as Marie-Claire Alain stated, but ideal for a third voice. The final 11 measures of the “Gloria” have a thickened texture with all seven parts performing together as shown in Example 16.

95 *poco a poco cresc.*

Fl. *mf*

S *mf* tis-oi-mus. Cum San-cto Spi-ri-tu in glo-ri-a

C *p sub.* Je-su Chris-te, cum San-cto Spi-ri-tu in glo-ri-a *mf*

V I *p sub.* *mf*

V II

A

C

103 *Largo (à 4 tempo)* *Molto Largo*

ff De-i Pa-tris. A-men.

De-i Pa-tris. A-men.

Largo (à 4 tempo) *Molto Largo*

ff

Example 16. *Messe modale en septuor*, “Gloria,” measures 95 to 109.

This excerpt demonstrates a strong connection between and music and the text “Cum sancto spiritu in Gloria patris. Amen.” Alain has the intensity of the text

matched by employing all seven parts and having a gradual crescendo from *mezzo-forte* to *fortissimo*. Also, there are moments where the second violin, viola and cello are performing two notes at the same time, creating a nine-part texture. Measure 104 is an example of this. Alain's writing allows both the performer and the audience to contemplate the meaning and importance of the text. Also, notice how the main melodic motive from the "Kyrie," which includes a dotted half note and eighth notes, returns at the *Largo* section in the soprano voice and in the violin parts.

During my interview with Marie-Claire Alain she commented: "I especially like the *Messe modale*. The "Sanctus" is one of the most beautiful pieces."⁷ The "Sanctus" movement does not contain a "Benedictus" section. The setting from the 1965 publication contains a "Benedictus" realized by Marie-Claire Alain and her brother Olivier Alain. It employs many of the thematic ideas introduced in the "Sanctus." I asked Marie-Claire Alain why the "Sanctus" would have been left incomplete? She stated: "In that time, the 1930's, they didn't sing the "Benedictus" at Jehan's church because it took too long. Usually the "Benedictus" was replaced by a motet, which would be performed after the Elevation."⁸ *Ave verum* by Albert Alain and *Tantum ergo* by Jehan Alain were examples that Marie-Claire Alain gave in terms of motets that would have been used. The pitch center for the "Sanctus" is C and Alain has modified the scale to include F-sharp and B-flat. The string quartet is more active in this movement. Alain has the strings performing melodic lines that complement the homophonic writing of the voices and the flute.

⁷ Alain Interview, 23 May 2006.

⁸ Alain Interview, 23 May 2006.

Andantino

The musical score consists of seven staves. The top staff is for Flute (Fl.), followed by Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Violin I (VI. I), Violin II (VI. II), Alto (A.), and Cello (C.). The tempo is marked 'Andantino'. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is common time (C). The score shows the first four measures of the 'Sanctus' movement. The vocal lines (S., A.) enter in measure 3 with the lyrics 'San - ctus, —'. The string quartet (VI. I, VI. II, A., C.) provides a harmonic accompaniment throughout. Dynamics include *mf* and *mf espress.*

Example 17. *Messe modale en septuor*, “Sanctus,” measures 1 to 4.

Example 17 shows the string introduction, which establishes the melodic line in the first violin and the harmonic progression used throughout the “Sanctus.” As the movement develops the texture thickens to six parts. The eighth notes from the initial melody gain more importance as they are doubled at the octave in measure 13. Homophonic writing has been a consistent compositional technique through the first two movements of this mass. When employed in the “Sanctus” the chordal writing is more syllabic, which Alain combines this with rests to produce a syncopated rhythm. This idea continues with the “Hosanna” text where the initial syllable acts as an anacrusis to measure 23. The dynamic peak of the movement occurs at the same time with a *fortissimo* marking.

Jehan Alain’s setting of the “Sanctus” is very similar to the “Sanctus” composed by Maurice Duruflé in his *Requiem* from 1947. Example 18 shows excerpts from both of these pieces.

22

Fl. *ff*

S. *ff* Ho - san - - na in ex - cel - - -

C. *ff* Ho - san - - na in ex - cel - - -

V I

V II

A.

C.

Example 18a. Jehan Alain, *Messe modale en septuor*, “Sanctus,” measures 22 to 26.

44

S. *f* Sanc - tus, Sanc - tus,

A. *f* Sanc - tus, Sanc - tus,

44

G. + Flûte 8 *f*

S. Sanc - tus Do - mi - nus De - us Sa - ba - oth.

A. Sanc - tus Do - mi - nus De - us Sa - ba - oth.

Example 18b. Maurice Duruflé, *Requiem*, “Sanctus,” rehearsal number 44.

First I compared the use of the solo flute with the two solo voices in Alain's setting to Duruflé's use of three voices. Both excerpts are chordal and they are in a similar range. Also, both composers use rests and breath marks to create syncopation in the choral parts. The accompaniments also share similar characteristics. Duruflé has a virtuosic sixteenth note rhythm stabilized by chords that are similar to the choral parts. Likewise the Alain setting has an active running eighth note pattern in the cello stabilized by chordal writing in the upper strings. As a final comparison both of these movements have a short instrumental introduction as well as a short closing section. In both cases the material introduces important melodic material as well as chordal progressions used through the movements.

I asked Marie-Claire about this connection and she felt that Duruflé would not have known the *Messe modale en septuor*.⁹ However, consider that both of these musicians were acquaintances at the Paris Conservatoire in the 1930's, and as demonstrated by the *Messe de Requiem*, Alain is known to have freely shared copies of his music. Finally, Duruflé composed one of his great organ works *Prélude et fugue sur le nom d'Alain* in 1942, which was dedicated to the memory of Jehan Alain. Based on the musical evidence and research done for this project I think it is likely that Duruflé had some connection with the *Messe modale en septuor*.

Alain's setting of the "Agnus Dei" is simplified when compared to the other movements of this mass. The texture is reduced to only 3 parts at the beginning, the viola performs the initial melody in unison with the contralto and the solo flute

⁹ Alain Interview, 23 May 2006.

imitates the same thematic material one measure later as a canon. Alain introduces the second melody, which is performed by the first violin, in the tenth measure. The tied note and the falling interval of a fifth are characteristics of this material.

Musical score for measures 1-8. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Violin I (I.), Violin II (II.), Alto (A.), and Cello (C.). The lyrics are: "A - gnus De - i, qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di, mi - se -". The music is in 3/4 time and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

Musical score for measures 9-17. The score includes parts for Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Violin I (I.), Violin II (II.), Alto (A.), and Cello (C.). The lyrics are: "re - re no - bis. A - gnus De - i,". The music is in 3/4 time and includes dynamics such as *p*, *mf*, and *ppressivo*.

Example 19. *Messe modale en septuor*, “Agnus Dei,” measures 1 to 17.

The harmonic writing is unstable as he uses more accidentals and a tritone relationship between the E-flat major triad and the closing A minor triad in measures

14-15. The second “Agnus Dei” features the soprano voice with the violins and viola performing both in unison and in canon with the voice. The solo flute performs the second motive. Alain’s progression leads to another cadence with a tritone relationship – A-flat to D. The soprano and contralto perform a canon at the fifth for the final “Agnus Dei.” These parts are doubled by both of the violins through to the closing *Dona nobis pacem*. When I first heard a recording of this movement the end of the “Agnus Dei” reminded me of Alain’s organ piece *Le jardin suspendu*, written in 1934 and first performed by the composer in 1938. I asked Marie-Claire about the possible relationship between the closing five measures of the “Agnus Dei” and the closing four measures of Alain’s organ composition. She explained that borrowing is a compositional practice employed by many composers in the history of music, including Handel. She could see a relationship between these two excerpts shown in example 20.¹⁰

36 *f* *lentement* *rall.*

Fl. *f* *lentement* *rall.*

S *p* *pp*
tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di: Do - na no - bis pa - - - - cem.

C *p* *pp*
pec - ca - ta mun - - - di: Do - na no - bis pa - - - - cem.

V I *pp*

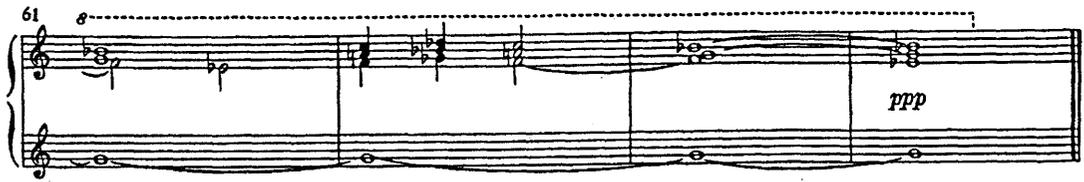
V II *pp*

A *pp*

C *pp*

Example 20a. *Messe modale en septuor*, “Agnus Dei,” measures 36 to 44.

¹⁰ Alain Interview, 23 May 2006.



Example 20b. *Le jardin suspendu*, measures 61 to 64.

First, the range of where the violins and viola perform is similar to the right hand of the organ. Both pieces are outlining triads with similar harmonic content. There are relationships in the actual structure of the triads, including F major, the use of the suspended ninth and E-flat major. Also, both pieces have material written an octave below. *Le jardin suspendu* has a static G sounding, while the “Agnus Dei” has all three solo voices imitating the harmonic structure performed by the strings. Their roles are different, but the range of the octave between the parts is the same. This is a small excerpt, but one that is significant, especially since the *Messe modale en septuor* was written during the same year that *Le jardin suspendu* was first performed. The closing chord of the *Messe modale en septuor* rests on A Aeolian. By employing this mode the mood is somber and reflective. Alain’s setting of “dona nobis pacem” can be interpreted as not yet reaching our spiritual destination.

Conclusions

Through the process of working on this project I have discovered that research on this topic has only just begun. Jehan Alain created three beautiful mass settings in 1938 that are strongly tied to the liturgical tradition of the Catholic Church. The use of chant as the basis for the *Messe grégorienne de mariage* and the *Messe de Requiem* re-affirms this point. Also, the powerful use of text painting in the *Messe modale en septuor* reminds the performer of this important tradition.

I need to emphasize that it is my goal to help promote this music with the result being that more people have the opportunity to deepen their faith through Alain's mass settings. I am deeply indebted to Marie-Claire Alain and her daughter Aurélie Decourt, who gave a lecture on the chamber music of Alain in November 2005. This experience was the inspiration for my project. The musical setting of these works is profound and achieves the primary goal of writing music to enhance the liturgical experience for both the performer and listener.

It is fitting to conclude with words from Jehan Alain. This quote is written at the top of the score for his famous organ piece *Litanies* from 1937: "Commentary for a program: When the Christian soul no longer finds new words in its distress to implore God's mercy, it repeats ceaselessly and with a vehement faith the same invocation. Reason has reached its limit. Alone, faith continues its ascent."¹¹

¹¹ Jehan Alain, *L'Oeuvre d'orgue de Jehan Alain* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 2002): 31.

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