

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation for the study

The writer has been fortunate to have had attended masterclasses under both Marie-Claire Alain and Jacques van Oortmerssen. Their exceptional professionalism, performance techniques and knowledge made a permanent impression on the writer and thus motivated him to pursue a study of such a nature.

The writer also had the privilege to have played on several historical organs and copies of such instruments in the Netherlands, viz. the organs of Grote Sint Laurenskerk, Alkmaar, Eglise Wallonne, Amsterdam, the Grote Kerk, Edam, the Nieuwe Kerk, Haarlem, and in Sweden, viz. the Arvidsson/Van Eeken/Yokota North German Baroque organ (a copy of a Schnitger organ) in the Orgryte Nya Kyrka, Göteborg. The authenticity of these instruments therefore also contributed to the undertaking of this study.

1.2 Aim of the research

It is the writer's intention to make a contribution in this interesting field of comparative studies and to explore this hitherto little known area of organ performance. A critical comparative study of these performances will provide a comprehensive foundation for the organ scholar's research into Bach interpretation as a whole. The writer also needs a stimulus by means of comparison for his own performance of Bach works and that would also provide the student with an additional option of stimulating an interest in Bach's organ music.

1.3 Research method

There are numerous recordings of Bach's organ works that were made by competent and distinguished organists, but for the purpose of this thesis the writer has selected the latest recordings of Marie-Claire Alain and Jacques van Oortmerssen. The study is primarily one of an empirical nature, with the recordings of Alain and Van Oortmerssen as the research basis. A wide spectrum of literature is also used as secondary sources to highlight certain aspects pertaining to this study such as registration and historical organs. During this process, the writings of composers, organ builders, theoreticians and musicologists will be compared to the interpretation and "authenticity" of the recording artists. In the process of selecting the organ works for this thesis, the writer aimed to include works that would represent the main genres of Bach's organ music under two main categories, i.e. free works and chorale-based works. The writer also specifically chose works that have a distinct difference in terms of registration between the two performers, thereby omitting works with more or less the same registration structure in the two different approaches and interpretation thereof.

It is also the intention of the writer to include all the latest available volumes of organ recordings of Bach by both Marie-Claire Alain and Jacques van Oortmerssen. Therefore a selection of corresponding works found on the fourteen volumes of Alain and the current five volumes of Van Oortmerssen are made.

The names of registers in the specifications are spelt as supplied in the cover booklet notes of the CD's.

1.4 Problem statement

There are many studies of a musicological nature, yet there is a dearth in comparative studies on performance practice in style and approach between various performing organists. It is an irrefutable fact that subtle yet perceivable differences exist amongst

interpretational approaches of various performers, especially in terms of registration. The writer therefore felt that this aspect deserves closer scientific study, especially in the case of highly skilled performers of the calibre of Alain and Van Oortmerssen.

BIOGRAPHY OF PERFORMERS

1.5 Presentation of the script

This script is divided into the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: A biography of each performer
- Chapter 3: The historical organs that are used in recordings with specific detail such as year built and/or restoration, names of builders and specification of the organs.
- Chapter 4: A background to contemporary registration practices in Bach's time that are used in recordings.
- Chapter 5: An analysis and comparison between the two organists' different registrations that are used in the recordings.
- Chapter 6: Conclusion
- Appedix A contains a list of the most important recordings by Marie-Claire Alain.
- Appendix B contains a list of all the recordings by Jacques van Oortmerssen.