

Introduction (Aurélie Decourt, historian and daughter of Marie-Claire Alain)

The purpose of this text is to inform the reader about the methodological precautions to be taken when consulting the manuscripts, which have been scanned as they are, without any modification or comment. They are raw documents, which may involve difficulties in understanding and interpreting, and must be apprehended according to strict criteria of the historical treatment of sources.

The aim is to allow the reader to understand as well as possible the musical thinking of Jehan Alain, in order to form his/her own judgment in complete independence and freedom.

The editions and catalogues of the musical work of Jehan Alain are briefly presented. In an attached file, the reader will find the complete history of the successive editions, a bibliography and a discography. It is out of question in this place to repeat what has been written so far, but we do recommend to study it, because « *the complete knowledge of Jehan Alain's work must include, whether one likes it or not, the synthesis of all existing sources, and even of all accessible commentaries, and no single person can decide for everybody where to find « the » truth.*¹ »

Musical editions²

- *L'œuvre d'orgue de Jehan Alain*, published by Marie-Claire Alain, Paris, Leduc, new edition, vol. I 2001, vol. II 2002, vol. III 2003, based with modifications on the previous versions of 1971, 1952 and 1943. It must be completed by :

- Alain, Marie-Claire, *Notes critiques*, Paris, Leduc, 2001 and the English translation *Critical Notes on the organ works of Jehan Alain*, Paris, Leduc, 2003 (translated by Norma Stevlingson).

- J. Alain, *L'œuvre d'orgue*, published by Helga Schauerte-Maubouet, Bärenreiter Urtext, Kassel, Basel, London, Praha, 2011, vol. I, II, III ; *Preface* in 3 languages (Fr - Eng – Ger) ; *Critical report* (in English).

Catalogues

1 - Jehan Alain has himself established a catalogue of his works in October 1938. Although incomplete, and not always strictly respecting the chronological order, this document is however the prime reference, since the composer wanted it this way : this is a basic principle of archivistics.

2 - Jacques Gommier and Marie-Claire Alain have continued this catalogue, precisising certain dates and adding sequence numbers for the unrecorded pieces (*Catalogue MCA*).

3 - Helga Schauerte-Maubouet has established and published her own catalogue (numbered in AWW, *Alain-Werk-Verzeichnis*) and completed after the discovery of new manuscripts, in the last edition of MGG (*Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 1999) and in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2001.

4 - In order to propose a complete catalogue, corresponding to the scientific requirements of source treatment, Aurélie Decourt and Denis Alain have revised the initial catalogue by Jehan Alain, completed by Jacques Gommier/Marie-Claire Alain, using a more systematic and open mode of classification, adding the works or variants forgotten by the composer and those composed after the establishment of his catalogue, as well as those being in hands of other persons or institutions, of which some have not been transmitted to them. The catalogue can be completed any time with works not yet discovered.

For the time being (early 2016), the catalogue of Jehan Alain's works contains 156 opus numbers, but actually 156 – 10 = 146. In fact, Jehan has inadvertently jumped from Nr 102 to Nr 113. This numbering includes both large pieces like *Trois Danses* as well as simples ideas of a few measures or transcriptions³. The opus numbers are by the composer himself and must be respected.

The complete title should thus be : ***Catalogue of the works by Jehan Alain, established by the composer, revised and augmented by Marie-Claire Alain, Jacques Gommier, Denis Alain and Aurélie Decourt.***

For a historical treatment of the sources

¹Jean Ferrard, *Le Magazine de l'Orgue*, review of J. Alain, *L'œuvre d'Orgue*, BärenreiterUrtext, published by Helga Schauerte-Maubouet, Kassel, 2011, vol.1, vol.2, vol.3., p. 2

²See in separate file the bibliography and discography.

³See in separate file the history of the catalogues with their respective limitations.

The composer does not always indicate the composition dates, and it is often difficult to establish a precise chronology. Helga Schauerte-Maubouet explains in Vol. II, p. VII of *J. Alain, L'œuvre d'orgue*, Bärenreiter, *op cit.* that « *the editor has listed all works of Jehan Alain in the order of their composition. However, this chronology remains hypothetical for a certain number of undated pieces, to which an approximate date has been assigned.* »

Historically speaking, it seems safer to consider periods of composition. The nine *Carnets de Notes* de J.A. give precious indications, however without respecting an absolute chronological order. These periods are, amongst other indications, characterized by particular preferences for certain instruments (e.g. the piano between 1929 et 1931). An analysis of the handwriting of Jehan Alain and musicological analysis also provide some hints, which can be cross-checked with indications coming from Alain's epistolar correspondence.

A meticulous man, Jehan Alain liked classifications : the notes from *Carnets* 1 to 9 are, for the largest part, recorded and listed, with page numbers and sequence numbers written by his own hand with a thick pencil, and some of them are carefully written or copied in calligraphy. Why would somebody that careful give different versions of his works, with differences in rythm and even in the musical text ? Let us not propose a simple answer to this apparent contradiction, since it is exactly one of the reasons why we propose these scans. However, one has to acknowledge the fact that certain manuscripts are specially and in a homogeneous way bound under Kraft paper, and numbered with red pencil in the left lower corner, with the letter O for organ, I for instruments. For example, the *Intermezzo pour deux pianos et basson*, 66, has been classified **ID**, thus in the category **I**nstruments, piece **D**. We could reconstruct the list of these documents, which confirms the intention of the composer to take special care of some manuscripts and to fix - at least for a while - an « official » text of some works. We designate these documents « source manuscripts ». The reader should also be careful not to be confused by the different handwritings appearing on the scans, particularly on the cover pages (numbering). Jehan's handwriting can easily be identified, but additionnally one finds annotations by his father, Albert, his brother Olivier, his sister sœur Marie-Claire with her husband Jacques Gommier, of Jehan's daughter Lise, whose handwriting is almost the same as her father's, and finally of his wife Madeleine Payan-Alain. The playing indications, *tempi*, dynamics, registrations, are from the composer's hand or by the persons above mentioned, but also by Virginie Schildge-Bianchini, Lola Bluhm, Noëlie Pierront, Aline Pelliott, Pierre Segond, Geneviève Denis-Poirier, Bernard Gavoty and in some cases by unidentified musicians.

Friends and relatives of Jehan have left striking testimonies of the mobility of his musical thinking. Bernard Gavoty and Aline Pelliott report a similar memory : seeing the face of Gavoty upon hearing a clash between a G and a G sharp, Jehan modified the harmony⁴. Another time, he asks Aline Pelliott : « Do you like this G sharp ? If you prefer, I can write a G natural ».

Jehan, always in a hurry, could make minor mistakes. Olivier Alain writes on the manuscript of the *Intermezzo* (the source manuscript) : « *the tempo indicated by Jehan is slower than the one we used under his direction* ». Jehan indicates the quarter at 108 ; Olivier proposes 126. Jehan may also write erroneous dates : on the manuscript of the *Intermezzo*, he mentions 1932, while this piece has been completed in 1934.

Marie-Claire Alain was explaining in 1974 :

« *He was writing as one breathes, very fast, without the help of an instrument, on a table corner or in a local train, notating ideas, large fragments or even complete pieces, on large sheets of white paper on which he drew the staves himself with a five-point pen, whenever needed.(...) His ideas were very clear, one can see it on the sketches, the whole form was there and he just corrected some details, as if the piece were all ready in his brains and he would just copy it down. Even his penciled manuscripts are practically free of corrections and the musical handwriting is extremely secure. One feels, however, that everything has been written extremely fast : the musical orthography is approximative, accidentals are missing, symmetrical passages often show supremely illogical differences.*⁵ »

Historically, it is impossible to designate an unique manuscript which could be the only authencital version. Only the composer could have done that, while destroying all other versions. In the contrary, the more versions a composer elaborates, the higher the interest for the reader or the

⁴Gavoty, Bernard, *Jehan Alain, musicien français*, Paris, 1945, p. 49

⁵ Alain, Marie-Claire, Notice from *Intégrale de l'œuvre d'orgue de Jehan Alain*, Erato-Costallat, 1974

performer. He/she can then measure the distance covered by the creator, try to discover the different stopovers in the creative process, reconstruct the hesitations and the decisions, although sometimes difficult to explain.

As a (provisional) conclusion, we invite the reader to meditate the following quotations, in order to form his own opinion. First these two, coming from the two editors :

Marie-Claire Alain : « *The first sketches of his pieces are often more relevant than the later copies.*⁶ »

Helga Schauerte-Maubouet : « *The most recent version is in general the main source.*⁷ »

Then, from three organists, connoisseurs of Jehan Alain's work :

Jean Ferrard : « *The contradiction is striking between the spirit of a composer, full of fantasy and in a perpetual creation act, and of an editor whose aim is to give « the » text of a work.*⁸ »

Jean-Baptiste Robin : « *The originality [of Jehan Alain's work] obliges to liberate oneself from certain interpretation habits, and to find instrumental solutions able to express the thoughts of Jehan Alain, passing of course through the prisma of each performer's imagination and personality. His work always remains of an incredible youthfulness, everyone being free to appropriate himself of « his » Jehan Alain.*⁹ »

Guy Bovet : « *I do not believe that Jehan Alain would have encouraged anyone to write a text on himself and his music. He navigates above all disciplines and musical traditions : his music is the most simple and natural thing in the world.*¹⁰ »

Jehan Alain's work leaves a very large freedom to the performer ; the freedom which Jehan himself placed above everything. The last word is his : « I prefer a musician who proposes to a musician who imposes.¹¹ »

⁶*Notes Critiques, op. cit.* p. 11

⁷*J. Alain, L'œuvre d'orgue, op. cit.* Vol I, p. VII

⁸*Le Magazine de l'orgue, op. cit.*, p. 4

⁹*Jehan Alain, Livre du centenaire*, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Presses Franciliennes, 2011, p. 91

¹⁰*Jehan Alain, Complete Works for Organ*, L.N.Birkeland, Simax classics, 2011, p.12.

¹¹Quote from a separate sheet containing some remarks about Wagner and Messiaen, quoted *in extenso* in *JehanAlain, Livre du centenaire, op. cit.* p. 160