In Memoriam

Marie-Claire Alain
August 10, 1926–February 26, 2013

By James David Christie

T he world’s most distinguished concert organist, Marie-Claire Alain, died at the age of 86 on Tuesday, February 26, 2013, in Le Pecq, a small French commune located next to her home city of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. She had been in failing health for several months, and had moved temporarily to the Netherlands at the end of 2012 because of her declining health.

Alain was born in Saint-Germain-en-Laye on August 10, 1926. Her father was the organist-composer Jean Alain (1911–1940) and her mother was Magdeleine Alberty (1890–1971). She had three siblings, all excellent musicians, who preceded her in death: her older sister, Marie-Odile Alain (1914–1997), and two brothers—the renowned organist-composer Jehan Alain (1911–1940) and Oliver Alain (1918–1994). Her father, Albert, was the organiste titulaire of the Church of Saint-Germain-en-Laye from 1924 until his death in 1971. Marie-Claire began assisting her father at the church in 1937 at the age of 11. She was appointed her father’s assistant in 1949, and faithfully served as organiste titulaire for the following 40 years. She resigned in 2011 because of her declining health.

She studied at the Conservatoire national supérieur de Paris, where she was an organ student of Marcel Dupré; there she also studied harmony with Maurice Durufle and figured with Pélée-Caussade. At the Paris Conservatory, she won first prizes in organ, improvization, fugue, harmony, and counterpoint. She studied organ privately with Gaston Litaize and André Marchal; both of these masters were important mentors to her career.

For a complete discography, see www.france-orgue.fr (to access the list, type “Marie-Claire” in the box marked “Recherche rapide organist” on the right side in the middle of the page). Alain has recorded works of J. S. Bach and Jehan Alain for the service, including former Marie-Claire Alain students Vincent Warnier, Daniel Roth, Bruno Morin, Jean-Baptiste Robin, and Jean Ferrand. A small Gregorian chant part sang songs of the Requiem Mass. Her daughter, Aurelie, gave a touching eulogy and spoke lovingly of her mother’s last difficult weeks and how optimistic she was about life. When she would ask her mother how she was feeling, she would respond that she was getting better and better each day. As Madame Alain held the rank of Grand Officier in the Légion d’honneur, an honor guard carried the French flag into the church and gave a military homage when her coffin was taken outside the church at the end of the service. Marie-Claire Alain was buried next to her husband in the Guérini family plot in the “New Cemetery” of Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

The world has lost a great artist—we have lost a great inspiration, an exceptional human being, and a great friend. Thank you, Madame Alain, for making our lives so rich and so full of beauty—we will never forget you. May your soul rest in peace, now and forever—Amen.

James David Christie holds positions as the Distinguished Artist in Residence at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts, Chair and Professor of Organ at the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music, Oberlin, Ohio, and serves as College Organist at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts. He has previously held positions at Boston Conservatory, Harvard University, M.I.T. and Boston University. He has served as organist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra since 1975.

James David Christie has made over fifty tours of Europe and performs regularly in Canada, Asia, Australia, and Iceland. He has recorded for Decca, Philips, Nonesuch, JAV, Northeastern, Arabesque, BCA, Dorian, Navos, Bridge, and GM and has received several awards for his solo recordings, including the Preis der Deutschen Schallplatten-Kritik and the Magazine d’Orgue: Coup de Cœur. In the fall of 2010, he was an unenthusiastic audience member for a performance of Marie-Claire Alain’s organ music in Paris, where he served as visiting Professor of Organ at the Paris Conservatory.

One page from A Second Edition of the Music of of J. S. Bach and Jehan Alain for the service, including former Marie-Claire Alain students Vincent Warnier, Daniel Roth, Bruno Morin, Jean-Baptiste Robin, and Jean Ferrand. A small Gregorian chant part sang songs of the Requiem Mass. Her daughter, Aurelie, gave a touching eulogy and spoke lovingly of her mother’s last difficult weeks and how optimistic she was about life. When she would ask her mother how she was feeling, she would respond that she was getting better and better each day. As Madame Alain held the rank of Grand Officier in the Légion d’honneur, an honor guard carried the French flag into the church and gave a military homage when her coffin was taken outside the church at the end of the service. Marie-Claire Alain was buried next to her husband in the Guérini family plot in the “New Cemetery” of Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

The world has lost a great artist—we have lost a great inspiration, an exceptional human being, and a great friend. Thank you, Madame Alain, for making our lives so rich and so full of beauty—we will never forget you. May your soul rest in peace, now and forever—Amen.

James David Christie holds positions as the Distinguished Artist in Residence at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Mass-achusetts, Chair and Professor of Organ at the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music, Oberlin, Ohio, and serves as College Organist at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts. He has previously held positions at Boston Conservatory, Harvard University, M.I.T. and Boston University. He has served as organist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra since 1975.

James David Christie has made over fifty tours of Europe and performs regularly in Canada, Asia, Australia, and Iceland. He has recorded for Decca, Philips, Nonesuch, JAV, Northeastern, Arabesque, BCA, Dorian, Navos, Bridge, and GM and has received several awards for his solo recordings, including the Preis der Deutschen Schallplatten-Kritik and the Magazine d’Orgue: Coup de Cœur. In the fall of 2010, he was an unenthusiastic audience member for a performance of Marie-Claire Alain’s organ music in Paris, where he served as visiting Professor of Organ at the Paris Conservatory.

WWW.THEDIAPASON.COM THE DIAPASON • APRIL 2013 • 23