

PETIT LIED

Henri Mulet

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Petit Lied
Op. 10, No. 1
Piano

Harpichord News

by Larry Palmer

The Harpsichord Repertoire in the 20th Century: *Petit Lied* by Henri Mulet

As detailed in *THE DIAPASON* for August 2010, a most observant reader, Thomas Annand of Ottawa, brought the existence of a short piece for harpsichord by French composer Henri Mulet to my attention. I had not been aware, previously, of these two pages published in 1910 “for harpsichord (or piano),” but a check of listings in Grove Music Online, a query to Rollin Smith, a referral

to Stephen Best (whose organ arrangement of *Petit Lied* graced the last page of *The American Organist* for August 2010), and Best’s subsequent scan of the original harpsichord score have made it possible for us to share this addition to the early 20th-century harpsichord repertoire with our readers.

Thanks to all who asked the questions and provided the answers. Now all of us in the harpsichord community may enjoy Mulet’s “Little Song” as this lovely “noel” attains its 100th birthday!

On Teaching

by Gavin Black

Boëllmann *Suite Gothique*, Part 4: *Prière à Notre-Dame*

Last month I wrote of the *Menuet Gothique* as an especially tuneful piece, one that I often find myself whistling or humming as I walk along. The next movement of the *Suite Gothique*—*Prière à Notre-Dame*—is also one in which the treble melody is a large part of the artistic effect of the piece. However, the mood of the piece is as different as can be, and the implications of the shape and nature of the treble melody for the act of learning the piece are also largely different.

Texture

In the *Menuet*, the treble melody should be practiced all by itself, as a single line, and then accompanied just by the bass line. This is both because of the essential tuneful nature of that melody, and because all of the other notes—the inner voices, so to speak, though they are not by and large organized as voices—serve primarily to reinforce the harmonies and rhythms of the melody. This approach to practicing the *Menuet* strikes me as being the equivalent for this piece of practicing the separate voices and pairs of voices of a fugue or other contrapuntal piece.

Looking at the texture of the *Prière*, it strikes me that the essential element is *the whole texture itself*. That is, the treble melody seems to float on the bed of the pedal and inner-voice chords in a way that is essential to the nature and effect of that melody. This is of course a subjective analysis. Perhaps it is supported by the somewhat odd fact that the composer has emphatically not “solo’d out” the melody. For almost all of the piece, both hands are meant to be on the same keyboard, sometimes the *Récit*, sometimes the *Grand Orgue*. And this is in spite of the fact that as early as the first measure the treble line encroaches upon a note being held by the inner voices, forcing at least a brief departure from the legato with which that inner

voice would otherwise be played. (Only near the end of the movement, when Boëllmann has the treble melody briefly swoop down low and then continue to cross the [fairly high] left-hand chords, does he ask that the two hands play on separate keyboards.) If I am right about this, or more meaningfully, if any other player, teacher, or student also wants to see it this way, that would suggest that practicing separate components—right hand, left hand, pedal—while almost certainly still a good idea and indeed still quite important, would serve primarily a *technical* rather than a *musical* function.

(A practical consequence of this idea: when practicing separate voices or one melody for the purpose of learning it musically, it is normal to use a fingering that is specifically *not* the fingering that will be used in learning the notes. When practicing separate components for technical reasons it is crucial to use the fingering that *will* be used in learning the notes.)

In the *Menuet*, the rather jaunty melody is presented as the upper line of a series of chords in the right hand, marked *non legato*. The notion of practicing the top line of notes, the melody, all by itself comes from the desire to allow the ear to engage with that melody as easily as possible. The nature of the melody and the *non legato* instruction from the composer then allow the fingering and execution of the melody and its chords to be performed in a technically very natural way. Each chord can be given whatever fingering feels most comfortable to the player, based primarily on hand position, and the transition from one such comfortable position to the next can be practiced. The situation with the *Prière* is almost exactly the opposite of all of this. The treble melody is a single line, not the upper note of a series of chords. In 45 out of the 55 measures of the piece, the upper line can be played all by itself in the right hand while the left hand takes care of the other manual notes. This is not always necessarily the

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