

## THE ORGAN WORKS OF JACQUES LEMMENS

**John Riley**



For many organists, close acquaintance with the works of the name of Jacques Lemmens is limited to the ubiquitous *Fanfare* and, as much by reputation as acquaintance, *The Storm*.

But what of his other works and his contribution to the organ world in general? The Belgian, Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens (3 January 1823 – 30 January 1881), received his first music lessons at an early age from his father, an organist and primary school teacher. In 1839, he enrolled at the Royal Conservatoire in Brussels and by his late teens had attained his first big post at the church of Saint Sulpice in Diest, one of the few that he held during his lifetime but gave this up after 15 months. After an interruption to his conservatoire studies for family reasons, he went on to win three *Premier Prix* in piano, organ and composition. In 1846, and through much encouragement from his composition teacher and Director of the Brussels Conservatoire, François-Joseph Fetis, he embarked on a course of study with Adolf Hesse in Breslau and majoring on the German organ tradition.

Belgian organ culture in the first part of the 19th century had, as elsewhere, increasingly become decadent and the vehicle of operatic transcriptions and textures more akin to that of the piano. Lemmens did much to bring the works of Bach to audiences in Belgium and France and, as we shall see, helped to revitalise the organ through a greater emphasis on counterpoint and other aspects of traditional organ texture. This however was not a slavish recreation of the Baroque style but rather than a synthesis of traditional and modern elements of composition as well as helping drive the development of the symphonic organ, not least through the work of Cavallé-Coll.

By his 20s, Lemmens was already a celebrated performer, not least for his highly developed pedal technique, and did much to lay the foundations for the organ technique for the emerging repertoire of the romantic era and the organs capable

of performing it, in particular through facilitating legato playing by pedalling technique using both heel and toe and finger substitution. In 1849 at the mere age of 26, Lemmens was appointed Professor of organ at the Brussels Conservatoire. Such composers as Widor and Guilmant came to study with him rather than at the Paris Conservatoire and carried a tradition – the ‘Lemmens School’ – through their pupils including such figures as Marcel Dupré.

In 1857, Lemmens married the English soprano, Helen Sherrington, herself a student at Brussels Conservatoire. Lemmens subsequently spent much time in England where his fame and influence spread, eventually leaving his post in Brussels to set up home in England.

Lemmens’ first published organ work was *Dix Improvisations dans le style sévère et chantant* (‘Ten improvisations in a strict and singing style’) in 1848. Following this was the *École d’Orgue, basée sur le plain-chant romain* in 1862, consisting of two volumes, manuals only and with pedals, and a total of around 100 pieces of varied difficulty and length. These were intended as both teaching and liturgical material and whilst many are serviceable rather than being of great musical significance, evident even among the lesser material is Lemmens’ emphasis on counterpoint and textural interest. This can be seen in *Élévation*, as is the need for considerable amounts of finger-substitution to achieve a legato whilst maintaining a consistent three-part texture.

## 6. Élévation

Jeux doux

(Trio)

The musical score for '6. Élévation' is presented in three systems. The first system begins with a piano (p) dynamic marking. The second system starts at measure 5, and the third system starts at measure 10. The piece is written for two staves (treble and bass clef) and is marked 'Jeux doux' and '(Trio)'. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is common time (C). The score shows a consistent three-part texture throughout, with frequent finger-substitution to maintain a legato line.

In *Canon à l'octave*, we see Lemmens' advocacy of developed pedal lines as well as strict counterpoint.

### 7. *Canon à l'octave*

The musical score for *Canon à l'octave* is presented in three systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature. The top staff (treble clef) begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The middle staff (treble clef) also begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff (bass clef) begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second system continues the piece, with the top staff featuring a melodic line and the middle and bottom staves providing harmonic support. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs.

Whilst much of *École d'Orgue* has not gained a regular place in the organ repertoire, there are a number of pieces of greater distinction that are much better-known. Among these is the *Prière* in E major with its cantabile line in the left hand accompanied by soft, slow-moving chords in the right, a texture that is orchestral yet with elements of the French Classical tradition, in particular, the *Tierce en Taille*.

### 14. *Prière*

Clav. 1: Voix humaine  
Clav. 2: Gambe ou Salicional  
avec des jeux de fond 8'  
Péd.: Jeux doux 16' et 8'

**Moderato cantabile**

The musical score for *Prière* is presented in three systems. The top staff (treble clef) features a cantabile line in the left hand, characterized by soft, slow-moving chords. The middle staff (treble clef) provides harmonic support with soft, slow-moving chords. The bottom staff (bass clef) provides harmonic support with soft, slow-moving chords. The piece is in E major (three sharps) and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked *Moderato cantabile*. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs.

Among Lemmens' finest works is the beautifully eloquent *Prélude à 5 parties* with its flowing counterpoint and finely honed harmonic structure. Somewhat redolent of some works of Mendelssohn, it is a worthy piece to have in any organist's repertoire and without posing undue technical demands.

## 26. *Prélude* (à 5 parties)

Jeux de fond.

Grave

7

There are few greater examples of Lemmens' advocacy of contrapuntal textures and reference to traditional organ genres than the *Hymnus* on the plainchant *Creator alme siderum* (overleaf). However, this is more than a simple recreation of a Baroque style but incorporates a pedal line whose legato is wholly dependent on a systematic use of toe and heel pedalling.

In complete contrast is the *Cantabile* in B minor, (overleaf), an example of Lemmens' 'singing-style' and emphasis on melody-led textures and vertical harmony. It is both orchestral and pianistic in nature – witness the allusion to a plucking double-bass in the pedals combined with pianistic arpeggio writing in the left hand – yet fully able to exploit the organ's inherent ability to differentiate lines of texture and colour.



## 12. Hymnus « Creator alme siderum »

Clav. 1: Hautbois ou Trompette avec Bourdon 8'  
Clav. 2: Jeux de fond 8' et 4'  
Pédale: Jeux de fond 16' et 8'

Pour exécuter ce morceau sur les orgues qui n'ont qu'un seul Clavier, il faut jouer de la main gauche la partie de la pédale et réunir à la main droite les deux autres parties.

4 **Plain-Chant.**

Récit : Flûte 8'  
G. O. : Montre 8', Flûte 8', Bourdon 8'  
Viola 8', Flûte 8' ou 4'  
Péd. : Bourdon 16'; tirasse du G. O.

## 28. Cantabile

**Allegretto**

6

In total contrast is this tuneful and imposing *Marche Triomphale*. There are arguably more than faint echoes of this style of writing in many 19th-century and early 20th-century marches by English composers, even as late as Hollins or Whitlock.

### 25b. *Marche Triomphale*

Grand chœur

*ff*: G. O.

*p*: Récit

The musical score for 'Marche Triomphale' is presented in two systems. The first system consists of three staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a separate bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The first system begins with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic in the grand staff, followed by a piano (*p*) dynamic section. The second system continues the piece, starting with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic, followed by a piano (*p*) section, and ending with a fortissimo (*ff*) section. The score includes various musical notations such as chords, melodic lines, and dynamic markings.

By far the best-known of the works of *École d'Orgue* and indeed Lemmen's output as a whole is the *Fanfare*, (overleaf), albeit more of a toccata-march. The broken-chord pattern in the right-hand was most unusual if not unique for the times and in many ways precludes the numerous French toccatas that were to appear. The toccata-like figuration though is superimposed over a more traditional regular phrase and harmonic pattern, rather than the freer structures and slower harmonic rhythm of many later toccatas. Theodore Dubois' *Toccata* is a close equivalent.

27. *Fanfare*

*Allegro non troppo*

The musical score for '27. Fanfare' is written for piano in D major and 2/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and features a prominent four-note rising scale motif in the right hand, which is repeated and varied throughout the piece. The second system begins at measure 6 and includes the instruction *(staccato sempre)*. The score features a prominent four-note rising scale motif in the right hand, which is repeated and varied throughout the piece.

Another piece from *École d'Orgue*, and one sharing some characteristics of the *Fanfare* is the *Final* in D major. Its decidedly athletic character is skilfully propelled by the opening four-note rising scale motif, which appears in various guises through sequences and modulations, (overleaf).

Yet, just as everything is going so well, Lemmens inserts what (to the current author at least) feels like a somewhat incongruous and frankly rather dull and uninventive 'hymne', ending in a rather forced modulation from B flat major to D major, after which he climbs back on board the initial material. (Did Lemmens feel some need for a period of marked reverence amid such jollity?!)

## 29. Final

Grand Chœur

**Allegro**

G. O. **ff**

5

(simile)

9

61

Hymne

Récit

In 1866 his *Four Organ Pieces in free style* were published in London:

1. *Allegretto*
2. *Christmas Offertorium* (part of which was used in his third Sonata (q.v.))
3. *Fantasia in A Minor* (also redeployed in the third sonata).
4. *Grand Fantasia in E minor (The Storm)*.

The *Grand Fantasia* with its highly programmatic depiction of a storm is sometimes dismissed as empty gimmickry. However, to do so is surely to overlook the considerable daring and ingenuity in the harmony and texture of the central storm section. Indeed, it is difficult to think of a direct parallel in organ literature up to that point. It also represents the expressive possibilities of the emerging symphonic organ and indeed other compositional trends that were already manifested in the large organ works of Liszt and even the operas of Wagner.

In the excerpt below we see the first signs of the impending storm (bars 64-67); note the very low starting note of the rising chromatic scale.

The image shows a musical score excerpt for the organ piece 'The Storm' (Grand Fantasia in E minor). The score is written for three staves: two for the right hand (treble clef) and one for the left hand (bass clef). The key signature is E minor (three sharps: F#, C#, G#). The time signature is 3/4. The excerpt begins at bar 64, marked 'Réc. 3' (Recitativo). The right hand plays a series of chords and single notes, while the left hand plays a rising chromatic scale starting on a very low note (E2). The scale is marked with a '3' (triple). The piece concludes at bar 67, marked 'G. O.' (Glorioso). The right hand plays a series of chords and single notes, while the left hand plays a rising chromatic scale starting on a very low note (E2). The scale is marked with a '3' (triple).

In the second excerpt (from bar 73) we see a passage not unlike found in Liszt's major organ works and orchestral works, for example *Les Preludes*. Despite all the fury and chromaticisms, everything is underpinned by a cogent harmonic structure.

*con fuoco*

73

G.O. *ff Tutti*

*ff*

75

77

The image shows a musical score for organ, consisting of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 73-74) features a treble clef staff with a melodic line of eighth and sixteenth notes, and a bass clef staff with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system (measures 75-76) shows a more complex texture with chromatic movement in the treble and a more active bass line. The third system (measures 77-78) returns to a similar texture to the first system. The score is marked 'con fuoco' at the top, and 'G.O. ff Tutti' and 'ff' are placed within the first system. Bar numbers 73, 75, and 77 are clearly marked at the beginning of their respective systems.

The 'storm' section is only a small part of the whole piece, being preceded by a quieter movement that might be interpreted as the depiction of a summer's day but with little hints of what might be to come. Following the storm is an extended passage of some eloquence conveying a sense of calm and perhaps even of clearing skies and the sounds of nature. It is difficult to imagine that Lemmens was not influenced by Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* when composing this piece, and with which there are a number of parallels.

The **Three organ sonatas** published in 1874 in many ways represent the finest of Lemmens' work, and incorporate a distillation of many styles prevalent at the time as well as elements of the the Baroque organ tradition. In this, Lemmens is pragmatic in his approach so sonata form and fugue are not fully worked out but rather fused into a bigger whole.

*Sonata no.1 'Pontificale'* opens with an *Allegro moderato* reminiscent of the more reflective elements within Saint-Saëns' Fantasias. The third movement, the '*Marche Pontificale*' is an imposing and celebratory piece, and surely a model for similar movements by Lemmens' pupils Widor and Guilmant. As with many individual movements in the sonatas, this can work independently as a voluntary or recital piece, as indeed can the final fugue, which opens as something akin to a bugle fanfare, which Lemmens ingeniously turns into a fugue. (Overleaf)

The *Sonata no. 2 'O Filii et Filiae'* has three movements, the first characterised by constantly shifting thematic material and mood, together with chromatic harmony that is redolent of Franck's chorales. The various elements, including a fugal section, combine to create a very satisfactory whole. The central section of the second movement consists of a series of statements of the Easter plainsong *O Filii et Filiae*, (which gives its name to the whole sonata), each of which are subtly different in harmonisation and texture, and framed by lyrical outer sections. The sonata concludes with a fugue, which demonstrates Lemmens' highly proficient contrapuntal skill, yet arguably is almost too dense and lacks the 'air' to allow the logic of the subject's workings to be followed. Despite some admirable features, it is (for the current author) the least satisfying movement of all the sonatas.

The first movement of *Sonata no. 3 'Pascale'* is the *Fantasia* from *Four Organ Pieces (1866)* comprising of a characterful lyrical theme with flowing counterpoint interspersed with a sections of a slow chorale-like theme. The central *Maestoso* section has some distinct echoes in Guilmant's March on 'Lift up your heads', (albeit in 3/4 metre) and is by no means the only example Lemmens' influence on his pupil, another being the semi-canonical treatment of soprano and bass in the second movement *Adoration*, – again, drawn from Lemmens' *Four Pieces*. The final movement is based on the two Easter plainsong themes, the *Alleluia* and *Victimae paschali laudes*. The former is hardly the most promising of thematic material but Lemmens certainly gives it his best, not least in the fugal treatment. Whether the whole movement holds its various thematic elements in a musically cogent whole though is perhaps a debatable point.

## Sonata no. 1 Mvt. 4 Fugue

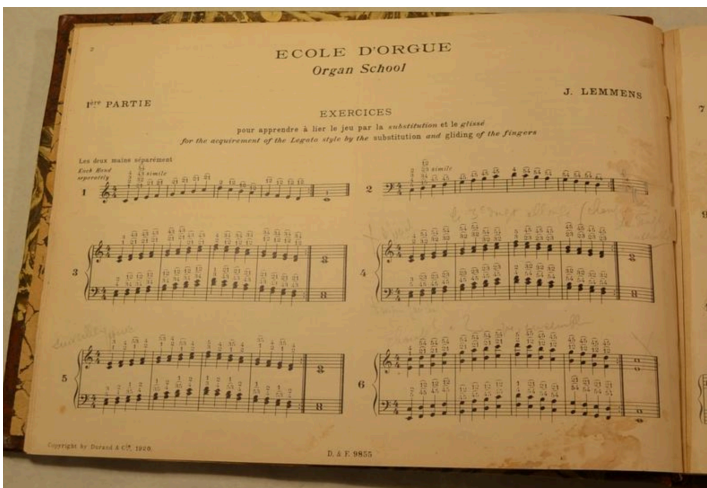
J. Lemmens

The image displays a musical score for the fourth movement, a fugue, of Sonata no. 1 by J. Lemmens. The score is written for piano and is in the key of D major (two sharps) and common time (C). The tempo and dynamics are marked *mf* (mezzo-forte). The score is divided into four systems, each containing two staves (treble and bass clef). The first system (measures 1-4) shows the initial entry of the fugue subject in the treble clef. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the development of the subject. The third system (measures 9-12) features a complex texture with multiple voices. The fourth system (measures 13-16) concludes the section with a final cadence. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings.



Lemmens was therefore a highly influential figure of significance as performer, composer and teacher. Although his legacy of composed works does not equal the integrity and distinction of his slightly younger contemporary, César Franck, there is much of Lemmens' influence in the finest works of his pupils, not least Widor and Guilmant.

So do investigate the works of Lemmens. The scores of all the works discussed are available to view and download on [www.imslp.com](http://www.imslp.com) Recordings are also available on Spotify and other music media. All musical examples, (except on p.59) are courtesy *Les Éditions Outremontaises* via [www.imslp.com](http://www.imslp.com)



*Jacques Lemmens and his wife, Helen Sherrington*