

# Sheet Music Reviews

## Sir John Stainer

*Six Pieces for the Organ, Book One*

Edited by David Patrick

Fitzjohn Music Publications, Barnet, Hertfordshire

£11 (€16.50)

## Reviewed by RJ Stove

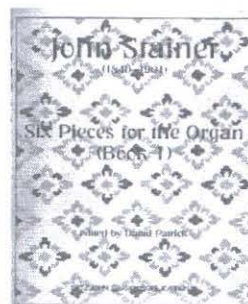
Alas, poor Stainer. A handful of hymn tunes (of which 'Love Divine' might now be the most often sung); *The Crucifixion* at Easter, naturally; very infrequent Anglican revivals of the anthem *I Saw The Lord*; and the rest – except among those students who, quite rightly, find useful the technical exercises in his organ primer – is silence. Perhaps the present publication will succeed in showing us what we have been missing when it comes to Sir John's bigger works for the instrument he loved most.

All six of these pieces originally appeared in 1897, four years before Stainer's sudden death while on an Italian tour. None fails to justify reprinting, but the two which stand out from the others are the two most difficult: a remarkably ingenious C major *Prelude and Fughetta* – some passages in the *Prelude* demand enough from the player to evoke Bach's *Trio Sonatas* – and, better still, a G minor passacaglia called simply *On A Bass*. The fact that Stainer crossed paths with Widor speaks for itself. Both these works, though unfailingly idiomatic – they never convey the impression of mere jumped-up pianism – presuppose virtuoso finesse; and as the occasional recording of them has indicated, they have a disarming tendency to sound much easier in performance than they actually are.

For player and hearer alike, the remaining four items offer greater approachability. We have an *Andante* in A flat major with some Schubertian-Lisztian modulations; a more conventional *Adagio ma non troppo* (E flat major) suggesting Léon Boëllmann, which is no mean artistic company to inhabit; a slightly saccharine *Impromptu* (E minor-major) where Mendelssohn is the dominant influence; and *Rêverie* (A flat major again), which falls a little below the artistic level of the rest, the use of octave doublings for the main melody being excessive.

In everything Stainer gives detailed instructions

– faithfully conveyed by David Patrick, his editor – concerning stop choice, and he assumes that the organist will have a three-manual machine available, which will create problems for those of us not thereby blessed. The presence of an assistant for carrying out registration changes would do the music no harm, particularly when some page-turns are impossible to manage without interruption of phrases. Generally this publication will better suit the cathedral-employed player and the concert recitalist than the average parish-based organist, however adept. That said, for having supplied us with two out-and-out masterpieces and with four other efforts eminently worth hearing, Fitzjohn Music Publications should be congratulated.



Whether congratulations can be extended to the company's sales procedures is another question. Fitzjohn's website ([www.impulse-music.co.uk/fitzjohnmusic.htm](http://www.impulse-music.co.uk/fitzjohnmusic.htm)) allows for neither credit-card nor PayPal transactions in the purchase of this book. So unless you have relatives or friends living in England and able to visit the Hertfordshire store on your behalf – or else, as implied by this review's header, prepared to deposit the equivalent sum in euros from across the Channel – you must go down one of two long, winding, and wickedly expensive roads: buying from some Australian source an international draft in sterling, or else making a direct payment to Fitzjohn's account, which process your friendly neighbourhood bank will make just as time-consuming as a draft and, more to the point, just as costly. Perhaps this situation can be changed soon.

The online Fitzjohn catalogue of organ works (separate listings are given for piano and choral material) contains much attractive-looking stuff from the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. Such eminent names as Handel, Saint-Saëns, Elgar, and Stanford jostle with such mysterious figures as Alan Gray and William Howgill, whoever they might have been. All the more reason to make buying easier for non-British and non-European customers, particularly since there remains enough Stainer organ music left over to warrant a Book Two being released.