

Review

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Back in issue 45:5 I gave a mixed welcome to what was then only the third complete recording of the organ works of Anthoni Van Noordt (c. 1619–1675), in a Brilliant Classics set featuring Manuel Tomadin. Briefly, I praised Tomadin's playing, and the recording as superseding the Naxos series and equaling a hard-to-find issue from the pricier Dutch Baroque Records label, but I remained lukewarm (as I had before) about the quality of the music itself, terming it "of limited range and interest." I also provided a synopsis of what little is known about Van Noordt, and of the significance of his surviving oeuvre. This new recording is a radical game-changer. Léon Berben, playing on the 1643 van Hagerbeer organ of the Pieterskerk in Leiden, applies an amazing palette of sound colors and ornaments from his choices of registrations and stops to bring these heretofore seemingly pedestrian pieces to life in a way I never imagined to be possible. In his booklet notes, Berben comments at some length on sources regarding proper ornamentation of organ music from the era, and adds that "I think we would do van Noordt an injustice if we were to regard his psalm variations merely as intonations for the right and proper singing of the psalms in church. On the contrary, the book's aim is to promote and further develop the art of organ playing." His skilled application of ornamentation turns these pieces into ones of genuinely intrinsic interest, and although they still are not first-rank masterpieces he thereby finally makes clear why the collection was deemed the first set of organ works worthy of publication in the Netherlands in half a century, following the death of Sweelinck in 1621. The anonymous pieces from the Camphuysen Manuscript (later 17th c.) and the Lübbenau Tablature (c. 1628) make for perfect complements here. The recorded sound is beautifully focused and proportioned; the trilingual English/German/French booklet has detailed notes on the music (by Berben) and the organ (by Koos van der Linde), plus detailed specifications for and photos of the instrument. For collectors of Baroque organ music, this is for historic documentation a must-have item that completely sweeps aside all previous versions; strongly recommended.