

83. Andante in G Major (4 Orgelkompositionen, 1893)

Elfrida Andrée
(1841-1929)
arr. William Melton

Andrée, Elfrida

(Born 19 February 1841 in Visby on the island of Gotland, Sweden; Died 11 January 1929 in Göteborg, Sweden)

Andrée began musical studies with her father, a physician who fully supported his daughters' professional ambitions. In the conservative social climate women were not accepted as students at Stockholm's Royal Academy of Music—Andrée's older sister Fredrika Andrée Stenhammar had left Sweden to attend the Leipzig Conservatory before launching a successful operatic career as a dramatic soprano. Elfrida chose to study privately in Stockholm with teachers that included Franz Berwald (and briefly in Copenhagen with Niels Gade). She then successfully passed the Academy's final examinations, with organ as her specialty.

The next hurdle was already waiting. However qualified, women were barred by the state hierarchy from playing the organ in churches. With her father's help Andrée petitioned parliament to change the status quo. After three years they prevailed, and in 1867 Andrée was engaged as the first female church organist in Swedish history. It would not be her only such distinction, as she would become both the first woman to conduct a symphony orchestra and the first female telegraph operator in her homeland.

From her post at the Göteborg (Gothenburg) Cathedral, Andrée greatly enriched the musical life of the city, teaching, conducting, performing and sponsoring an estimated eight hundred concerts. She toured as an organist as far as London where, aided by her famous countrywoman Jenny Lind, Andrée gave recitals at Albert Hall and the Crystal Palace. When she died shortly before her 88th birthday, she had served faithfully as organist in Göteborg for over sixty years and had become the first woman elected

to the Swedish Academy of Music. Still, it is telling that most of her own compositions only saw print under the name 'Monsieur E. Andrée'. As the organist-scholar Karrin Ford observed, 'the great tragedy surrounding the life and times of Elfrida Andrée was society's inability to see her for the remarkable pioneer she truly was'.

Andrée's compositions included a Swedish Mass, an opera, a symphony, the prize-winning Second Organ Symphony and the *Suffragette Cantata* for soloists, chorus and orchestra (1911) as well as chamber music, piano works and songs. Most of these were never published, and today her manuscripts still slumber in the library of the Stockholm Royal Academy of Music. The contrapuntal *Andante* (originally in G major) was composed for solo organ (*4 Organ Pieces*, 1893), and was most likely meant for church use. Biographer Eva Öhrström cited Gade, Mendelssohn and the French Romantic organ school as the main influences on Andrée's personal style.

Imagine a woman who thinks and feels, who writes music not for the sake of salon flattery but in order to earn the respect of other human beings, if not sooner, then at very least after her death.
(Elfrida Andree, diary entry of autumn 1870)

Text by William Melton