

that I didn't play the pedals at all. Drawing a pedal knob was enough to show the weight and presence of the impressive bass stops. I played for 20 minutes to get the hang of it, figured out a few tricks to navigate around ciphers, and made a ten-minute recording. When I went downstairs, there was a group of former parishioners standing in the street with the priest. They had come when they heard the organ through the open door, the first time it had been played in three years.

The Gothic-inspired case is made of quarter-sawn oak, with lots of beautiful carved and formed details. The draw-knob console is comfortable and well appointed. It's nestled in an alcove of the case. The player sits under the impost and façade, looking down the aisle to the altar. There are heaps of white plaster dust on the pews. There are empty pedestals from which the saints migrated across town. Wrought-iron votive-candle stands are heaped in the narthex. The choir loft has pews to accommodate at least 50 singers. There is still a tray of paper clips, a basket of sharp pencils, a stack of photocopied psalms now one fewer, and a glass canister of Hall's and Ricolas. But there are no people.

You can sense the decades of rites of liturgy and rites of passage, all the celebrations, sounds, smells, and sights of a century of worship in a vibrant community. One can hardly grasp the number of First Communions with pretty little girls in frilly white dresses, weddings, and funerals, to say nothing of tens of thousands of Masses. There are 5,000 weekends in a century. I bet it's an understatement to say that there were at least five Masses a week for many years, 20 in the Glory Days. All that's left is an organ that needs a new home. It's got a lot of miles on it. Good care. No rust. Only driven by a little old lady on Sundays . . . and Saturdays, and Mondays . . . Take a look at <www.organclearinghouse.com>.

And to you all, my colleagues and friends in the world of the pipe organ, we have a special art that needs special care in this particular and transitory moment.

On Teaching

by Gavin Black



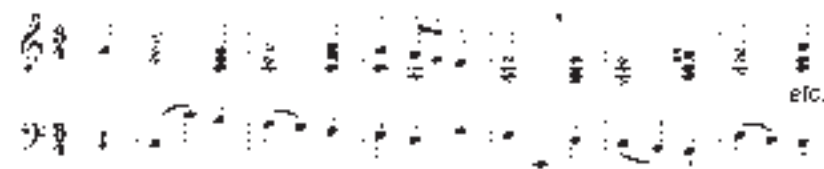
Boëllmann *Suite Gothique*, Part 1: Getting to know the piece

This month's column is the first in the current series to take a look at the Boëllmann *Suite Gothique*, op. 25. We will go through the first steps of getting to know the piece in a manner analogous to what we did with the Buxtehude *Praeludium* in June's column. In large part, this will be presented as a list of features or aspects of the piece, the noticing of which will help with learning the piece, either by suggesting approaches to technical problems or by helping with the task of knowing securely what is coming up next. Next month we will discuss fingering, pedaling, and practicing issues in the opening movement.

Editions

As with the Buxtehude, there are several perfectly good editions. There is (as of this writing) a Durand edition in print that is the direct successor to the original edition of 1895. There are also several free online editions available. The best

Example 1. Boëllmann, *Menuet Gothique* opening



of these seems to me to be the one at the Werner Icking Music Archive, edited by Pierre Gouin: <<http://icking-music-archive.org/ByComposer/Boellmann.php>>. This is essentially an accurate new type-setting of the original, with registrations and other performance suggestion transcribed in an undistorted manner. There are, I believe, other good editions to be found online. (This is, like the Buxtehude, a piece that is in the public domain.) However, there are also some editions out there that are misleading. For example, again as of this writing, both editions available through the Petrucci Music Library—in general a wonderful resource—omit original registrations and other performance suggestions. One of them also adds fingerings and pedalings, which, by the nature of printed technical suggestions, may or may not suit any particular player. They do not come from the composer and thus have no authority.

Whatever edition one is using, it is important to start by writing in measure numbers if, as in the case of the Durand edition, they are absent.

Overall structure

The first thing to notice about this piece is that it is in four movements. The Buxtehude, we noticed, is in one movement but several sections. What is the difference? Would this piece be different—would we want to *play it differently*—if the movements were printed in such a way that the end of one was followed immediately on the same staff by the beginning of the next, and the various instructions—name, tempo, registration—were printed discreetly above the appropriate notes? What is the effect on our concept of the piece of all the thick double bars and new pages? There is a chance (danger?) that whereas it is obvious that *sections* should follow one another in a way that is dictated by musical sense, shape, and drama, it does not always seem obvious that *movements* should do so. Breaks between movements can seem like opportunities to cough, take a drink, reposition on the bench, and so on. Perhaps this is often just fine, but it is worth thinking about. In the case of this piece, the first movement ends with the word *enchaînez*, which is French for what we often call *attacca*—that is: let what follows arise directly out of what is ending. The other movements do not have this notation.

Each movement has a title and a tempo marking. The titles are in a sense “fanciful”—they are probably meant to suggest images and moods, and to link the music of each movement to the idea of the “gothic,” which is found in the title of the work as a whole. How will these images affect choices made in playing the work? Three of the movements have ordinary Italian tempo markings: two *Allegros* and a *Maestoso*. The remaining movement has a tempo marking in French, that is, in the vernacular: *Très lent*. This means “very slow” and this movement—the third, titled *Prière à Notre Dame*—has no metronome marking, whereas all the other three do.

All of these various markings help to differentiate the movements; so does the fact that each is in a different meter, and so do the registrations offered by the composer. Interestingly, all of these things tend to separate out the *Prière* more than any of the other movements. It alone lacks a metronome marking, it has the vernacular—and extreme—tem-

po suggestion, and its registration is significantly more different from any of the others—they differ from one another slightly—and its name is fully extra-musical. It is also in a (very) different key, namely A-flat major. Meanwhile, each movement is remarkably consistent within itself in texture and mood, almost as if each movement had an “affect” in the sense in which people often apply that word to Baroque pieces. What does all of this mean? Not necessarily anything in particular. We will explore some of it along the way, but it is all useful to notice as part of getting to know the piece.

Now to go through the movements one by one.

First movement

The first movement is *Introduction-Choral* (not, by the way, “Introduction & Choral” as some editions have it). It is the shortest movement in the work, certainly in amount of musical material and probably in duration, even at its slow tempo. Perhaps this is in part what justifies calling it an “introduction”. It is a “choral”, essentially, because of the texture. In keyboard music, “choral(e)” texture means that by and large the voices all move in the same rhythm as one another. This is the case here. (Note: “by and large”, not 100%.) So chorale texture is somewhat of a chordal texture, but not necessarily entirely so. The phrase structure here is also reminiscent of a chorale or hymn. The opening phrase is eight measures, and it is repeated. The next phrase is seven measures and it is also repeated. The final phrase is eleven measures, with an internal quasi-repetition after the first four measures, and with only the tail end of the phrase repeated at the end. The repetitions—mm. 9–16, 24–30, and 42–end—are quiet, whereas the initial statements—mm. 1–8, and so on—are loud: therefore the repetitions are echoes. These echoes are manuals-only, while the initial statements all use pedal. Thus the pedal/no pedal shift serves to intensify the *fff/p* contrast. There is pervasive octave doubling in the *fff* passages, and essentially none in the echoes. (In fact there is *one* instance of it in all of the echo passages, in m. 11. This has the look of an inadvertent “parallel octave” rather than a way of building a texture.) This also intensifies the *fff/p* contrast. It also serves to shift the feeling of the texture a little bit: the echoes seem closer to the contrapuntal than the initial statements do.

From the purely technical point of view, the two most noticeable issues presented by this movement are the fingering and execution of some very thick chords, and the double pedal that opens the work.

Second movement

This first movement ends quietly, and on a dominant chord. This, plus the *enchaînez* instruction, leads us directly into the second movement. Entitled *Menuet gothique*, it is appropriately in the minuet meter of 3/4. The lilting minuet rhythm is very clear from the beginning. It is accentuated by the articulation in the bass line in the left hand (Example 1). The opening motive provides about half of the musical material of this movement. It is, somewhat like the first movement, organized in phrases that are repeated. In this case, the initial statements are manuals-only and quiet. The repetitions are with pedal and loud. The louder statements have octave dou-



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Example 2. Boëllmann, *Menuet Gothique* second motive



Example 3. Boëllmann, *Toccata*



blings, the quiet statements by and large do not. The second motive begins with the upbeat to m. 49. It is quite different from the opening, but with a version of the same lilting articulation (Example 2). The movement consists of a back and forth between these two ideas. In one stretch they interrupt each other in short bursts. The movement ends with a complete statement of the opening idea, loud and with pedal.

This minuet movement is marked “non legato” throughout. One of the chief performance issues is how to interpret that instruction, and how to interpret the detailed articulation marks—dots and slurs—in light of the overall non legato. As a matter of note learning, the main issue is—as with the first movement, but in a very different esthetic context—the fingering and executing of long passages in block chords.

Third movement

The third movement—*Prière à Notre Dame*—starts with a *cantabile* melody in the top voice, accompanied by chords and slow accompanying notes in the middle part of the manual compass and in the pedal. This melody begins with the interval C–G, which is of course the defining interval of the overall C (major and minor) tonality of the work. However, in this context the interval consists of the third and seventh scale degrees of the key of A-flat major. The movement retains the feeling of *cantabile* throughout, even as occasionally the inner voices become more melodically active. The treble melody is marked with long slurs throughout, most of which last a (slow) measure or longer.

This movement has more phrasing marks and more shadings of dynamics than the other movements. The absence of a metronome marking may suggest an assumption on the composer’s part that the tempo and rhythm will be freer than might otherwise be normal, even that it will be free enough to render the initial setting of one very precise tempo inappropriate. All of this is in keeping with the purely musical notion of *cantabile*, and perhaps also with something about the composer’s sense of what is implied by the concept of prayer.

From a playing point of view, this movement divides into two parts: those measures, such as the first four, or mm. 33–50, in which the principal melody is alone in the right hand, and those, such as mm. 5–12, in which the right hand also takes some of the slower accompanying notes. (Oddly enough, there is an almost identical amount of each.) When the melody is alone in the right hand, it is physically quite easy to create legato and to shape and time the line in whatever way the ears and mind suggest. This is harder when the hand also has other notes to play. This will suggest specific approaches to practicing and learning the movement.

Fourth movement

The last movement is *Toccata*. It is, until the grand ending, a pure *perpetuum mobile*—that is, a piece in which there is one note value that is always present and is the shortest note value in the piece. (In this case it is the sixteenth note.) These sixteenth notes almost always outline chords, and the notes of those chords are usually also present elsewhere in the texture in slower notes. The opening is a

typical example of this (Example 3).

With the kind of organ sound that the composer would have expected—nineteenth-century French foundation stops and reeds in a well-closed swell box—in the kind of very resonant room that would have been normal at the time, at the indicated tempo (quarter-note = 132) this writing is mostly pure texture, with a dose of rhythmic impetus. The notes are not heard as individual, let alone particularly crisp, notes. Slower-moving themes, such as the pedal line that enters in m. 3 or the various forms of syncopated quarter notes that first enter in m. 20, will seem to cut through this texture rather than interact with it contrapuntally.

The sixteenth-note patterns are, in themselves, fairly easy. That is, they fall under the fingers naturally. The challenge for many students will be to prepare these patterns well enough that the movement can go fast enough for the texture and rhythm effects to work well. In performance it is important that the *perpetuum mobile* sixteenth notes neither seem to interfere with or to be interfered with by the other lines.

About Boëllmann

This is a very well-known piece by a not very well-known composer. Boëllmann worked in the shadow of the other great French composers of his day, and of the organ composers in particular. Or at least he seems to us to have done so. Perhaps this is mainly because he had, unfortunately, a very short life and left less music than he might have. Many of us who know the *Suite Gothique* do not have a lot of context for it. As part of the preparation for working on the piece, I would suggest that a student explore that context a little bit. There are recordings of Boëllmann’s chamber music and other non-organ music, and this music is worth getting to know. Boëllmann lived in the household of Eugène Gigout from the

mid-1880s until his death in 1897. (He had married Gigout’s niece.) Gigout published his famous *Toccata* in 1890. It is obvious on its face that Boëllmann was influenced by this piece in the composition of the *Toccata* that forms part of this suite. A student who doesn’t know the Gigout work should listen to it. Also, organ music and, perhaps especially, other music by such composers as Franck, Widor, Saint-Saëns can form an important part of this context.

Next month we will zero in on specific technical aspects of working on and learning the first movement. ■

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Music for voices and organ

by James McCray

The perseverance of children’s choirs

When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

Children’s choirs, especially in churches, offer a wide range of accomplishments. Gilbert Chesterton, the magnificent 19th-century essayist and critic, said that “hope is the power of being cheerful in circumstances that we know to be desperate.” I suspect that could also be said about many children’s choir directors. Often for those working with the *very* young, it is not really about the music, but rather about building a platform of understanding/discipline in these children so that their future musical experiences will be meaningful. Those “preschoolers” need to develop a personal desire so that they will continue to explore singing. They may be cute, but they usually are not musical. But they have to start somewhere, so I say, “God bless and thanks to those music directors of preschoolers.”

The patience and valiant efforts of music leaders of those at this age is to be respected. Generally they evaluate success on a different standard than for older children’s choirs. It tends to be less about singing and more about having a performance with the least embarrassing events such as yelling or waving at parents, staying with the group and not wandering off, or simply not participating in any phase of the performance. As Mahatma Gandhi pointed out, “To lose

patience is to lose the battle.”

In our local school system, instrumental lessons do not begin until the summer of the fourth grade, yet vocal involvement is expected from kindergarten on. The annual holiday concert usually has large numbers of children of various ages singing familiar carols. Does this mean that learning to sing is easier than learning to play an instrument? Surely not! As Beverly Sills said, “There are no shortcuts to any place worth going,” so maybe the thinking is that since singing is more difficult, an earlier start is necessary. I doubt that as well!

By the age of ten, children singing in true training choirs do have significant success. Our community children’s choirs have two levels, beginning and advanced. The tonal beauty and musicianship achieved by those at both levels are truly professional in every way. The children are fortunate to have this opportunity, because it develops in them an ability and passion that usually remains with them throughout their life.

That ground level of musical training is so important, and it owes a debt of thanks to those earlier “almost singing” experiences where the seed was first planted. At each level of experience from pre-school through high school, there are joys of accomplishment that will continue to resonate throughout adulthood. Many church choirs are filled with “seniors” whose unbridled participation brings them a happiness that carries far beyond daily living. They may retire from their jobs at work, but not from their involvement in music, so those of us who direct adult choirs benefit from those early singing experiences and training.

An ancient Chinese proverb merits recalling: “When eating bamboo sprouts, remember the man who planted them.” To all those choir directors who work with singers at every level, from beginning to advanced, we salute your contributions to the craft of making music. Thanks for all you do on a daily basis to enrich the present and future lives of those you encounter. These reviews of new choral works for children’s choirs are for you!

Children without adult choir

Seasonal Songs for Young Singers, Michael Bedford. Unison, piano, and optional handbells or handchimes (2 octaves), Choristers Guild, CGA 1160, \$3.50 (E).

This collection contains seven original works for seasons such as Advent, Thanksgiving, Easter, etc. Each is two or three pages in length, usually with repeated verses or refrains, and all with optional handbell lines. The bell parts

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