Aspects of French Symphonic Organ Music:

L'Organiste Liturgique, L'Organiste Moderne, L'Organiste Pratique?

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Introduction

We can no longer refer to the 19th century as the "last century"; it belongs now, definitively, to history. As a result, 19th century music has become "early music." Whether this is a positive or negative development I cannot say, but as a consequence of this music becoming ever more distant from our own time, the importance of collecting and preserving as much knowledge as possible increases. Such insights are essential for an accurate assessment of the surviving scores, texts and other sources.

This article will deal with several aspects of 19th-century French symphonic organ music, each of which can influence our appreciation and performance of this literature. Our perceptions of the repertoire in question are colored by such typically 20th-century ideals that it is now high time for the 21st century to contribute its own. As well as the currently typical philological ("musicological") approach to the score, one should now evaluate the bigger picture. The context of French symphonic organ music as a part of 19th century music in general is an important concept for those who approach it creatively.

"Mon orgue c'est mon orchestre"

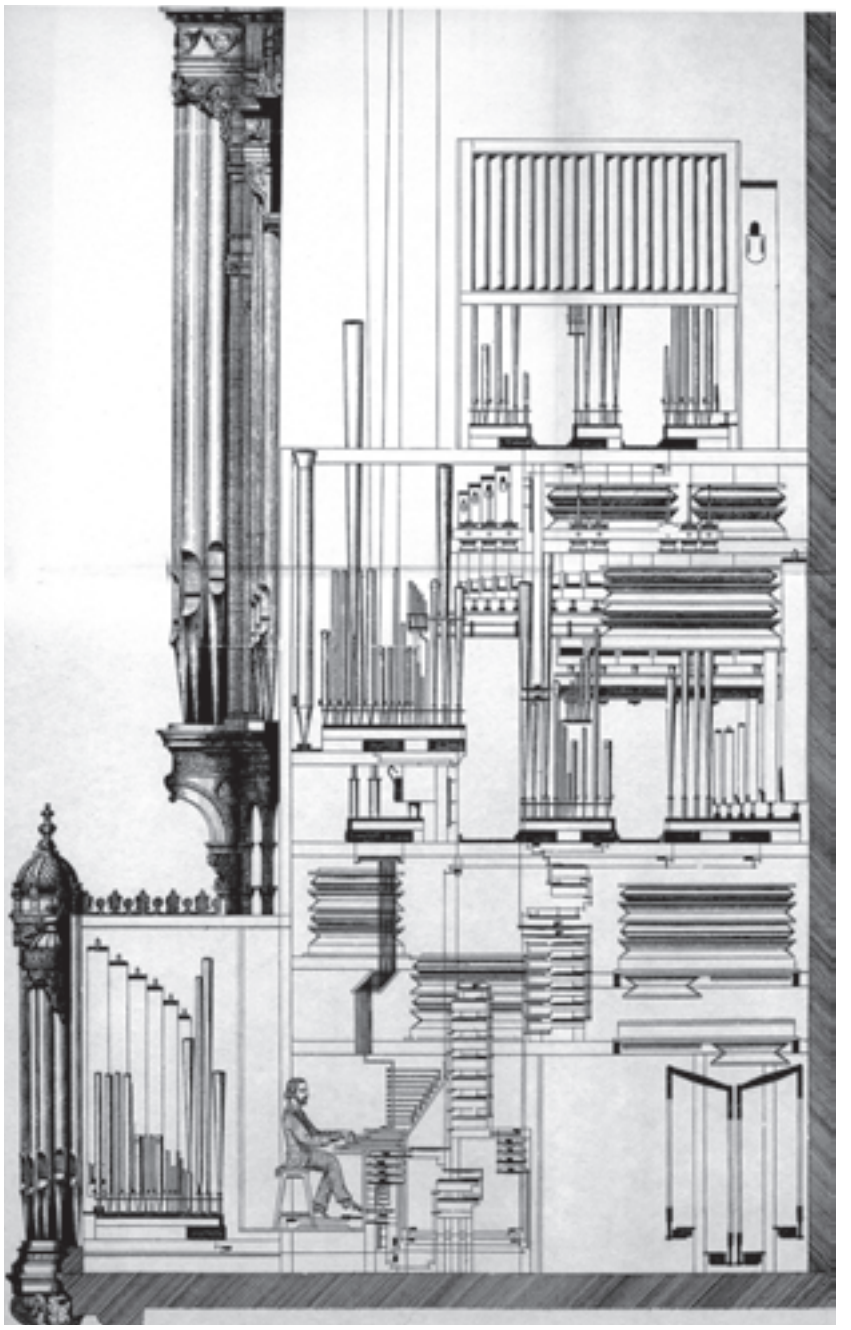
"French" is not difficult to define. It indicates, in general, the areas where the French language defined the culture in the 19th century: France, Belgium, parts of Switzerland and Spain, but with influences felt throughout Europe.

"Symphonic" has more or less the same clear meaning for everyone: we speak about symphonic music, a symphony orchestra, a symphonic suite, etc. Symphonic organ music, then, refers to symphonic music played on the organ, or music played on a symphonic organ. The first definition, in the sense of musical structure, requires no further comment. It is self-explanatory that the typical forms of symphonic music could also be applied to organ music. The second explanation describes the ensemble playing of different groups of instruments resulting in a cumulative sound-concept: that of the orchestra. This is nothing new, but still this idea has an essential importance for the sound of the organ.

The term "romantic" is often used in this context within the organ world. But what IS romantic? Is it a synonym for *tempo rubato*? For *legato*? *Ad libitum*? *Senza rigore*? In any case it has little to do with symphonic music, but refers rather to the evoking or expressing of extra-musical feelings. In this regard 19th-century music is no different than the music of any other period. An *O Mensch bewein dein Sünde gross* is at least as "romantic" as a *Scherzo Symphonique*. A *Toccata per l'elevazione* conjures at least as many images above the altar as a *Prière à notre Dame*. In fact, what we have here is one of those 20th-century ideals that color our view of 19th-century music: the term "romantic" was used in the 20th century to distance itself from the previous century, but today we are hardly aware of this. We would rather, therefore, speak about symphonic music and symphonic organs.

Of course some organs, mainly from the early 19th century, were "romantic." However, the stops that were introduced at the time to imitate colorful instruments were intended as "decoration," without influence on the sound of the ensemble, and therefore not symphonic. The "real" symphonic organ came about when the ensemble-ideal began to determine the direction of organ-building development. Solo stops remained important, but only on the condition that their function within the ensemble was of primary importance.

What would we think of a colorful Cor Anglais without the necessary Hautbois, just as in an orchestra? This is why one finds a minimum of solo stops on small organs. Not for nothing did Lefébure-Wely describe the harmonium as a "symphonic instrument": an instrument with a compact and flexible ensemble made up of strongly differentiated colors. One of the consequences is as follows: In the context of the orchestra it is normal practice to hold sectional rehearsals. Why not then for the organ? Because an organist only has one head? But the conductor also has only one head and he allows the different groups to play beautifully together.



St. Eustache, taken from Ply's 1878 book, showing the organist playing the bass with his left foot, and using the swell box with his right one

Symphonic organ music does something similar. The "symphonic organist" is comparable with the conductor; it is up to him to decide whether the oboe solo works with the accompaniment of the strings, for example. It is not the oboist's problem in the first instance. The two hands of the symphonic organist behave in exactly the same way as the orchestra. The soloist determines his own expression while the accompaniment gives the framework wherein the soloist's freedom comes to life. In other instances, where the orchestra sounds as one instrument to illustrate power and rhythm, for example in the scherzo or finale of a symphony, then it is the responsibility of the conductor to ensure that everything sounds together. In short, the organist must be able to adapt his way of playing to every musical situation. Insight, when referring to a symphonic score, is not limited to the study of the notes—insight dictates which voices may have freedom, and which may not.

The connotations of the term "symphonic" with regards to the organ changed substantially around the beginning of the 20th century. Initially it referred to the sound-concept it shared in common with the orchestra. However, with the reform movement in church music, and especially in organ philosophy, the term gradually began to become separated from its direct reference to orchestral instruments. The symphonic organ became "elevated," even "spiritualized."

Widor explains it as follows:

> The possibility to enclose a complete organ in an opened or closed prison (at the will of the player), the freedom to mix sound-colors, the means by which to louden or soften, independence of rhythm, certainty of attack, equality of contrasts, and, finally, a complete expansion of colors; palette full of the most varied sounds, harmonic flutes, strings with beards, English horns, trumpets, Voix Célestes, foundations and reeds of an until then [until the organs of Cavaillé-Coll] unknown quality and variety. This is the modern organ, essentially symphonic.[1]

This has consequences for performance practice:

> This is the way in which the organ symphony is different from the orchestral symphony. Confusion of the styles is not possible. One shall never again write in the same manner for organ as for orchestra . . .[2]

In other words, we see here a clear line of separation between the secular symphony and organ repertoire. Only the structural element remains important within the context of the symphony; the performance elements become different. They become adapted to the demands of the "modern" organ—distant and monumental.

> It is not necessary to require the same precision and co-ordination of the hands and feet with the release as with the attack.[3]

. . . whereby Widor indicates that such an approach was considered sound.

L'Orgue Moderne

The French classical organ of around 1700 also had orchestral associations, referring to the orchestra of the time. Trompettes, cromornes and flutes were typical colors, but without the concept of ensemble being of importance. The irreplaceable Plein Jeu can be considered the most characteristic organ sound in this context. But the Plein Jeu is of course decidedly non-orchestral, far less symphonic. It remains a Blockwerk, a massive pyramid of sound. The Plein Jeu is also the first element that disappears in the 19th century. (The Plein Jeu as registration remains in use only in the liturgy, to accompany plainchant.) Of course the Jeu de Tierce also disappears; the sound is too nasal, and reminded the listener too much of old instruments with more overtones than fundamental. As a result it was less useful for the ensemble registrational ideal.

Now, an important difference between the classical and the symphonic organ can be found in the pitch basis of the basses, specifically in the pedal. The classical organ is based completely on the 8′. In the case of the Plein Jeu, a 16′ stop can be used, but the tonal basis remains the 8′. The pedal specification is based on the 8′ flute or trompette, not the 16′. The classical French organ shares this feature with the French baroque orchestra where no (or at least very few) double basses were used.

The great change happened around 1750 with the so-called "Concerts Spirituels,"[4] where double basses were indeed introduced. From this time onward, French organs began to feature 16′ stops in the pedal. This didn't make the organ symphonic, but it can at least be considered a condition for an organ to be deemed symphonic. The pedal department of the symphonic organ is then just an expansion of the flutes and reeds at 8′ and 4′ with the corresponding 16′ stops. The essential implication is that the "symphonic" pedal completely takes over the bass function.

One can see this in the music of Lefébure-Wely and his colleagues, for example Franck or Batiste. If one then considers that the pedal represents the basses of the orchestra, this leads of course to implications for the way in which the pedal must be played. The double-basses are of course played with bows, while the bass trombones, and tubas (or ophicleides in this musical context), represented in the organ by the reeds, are dependent on the human breath, with all the implied consequences for the initial sound. Total legato is, then, unthinkable, just as in the symphony orchestra.

This original symphonic manner of playing, that is to say not absolutely legato, is mirrored by the construction of the organs. Basses, by definition, sound low—in the lower regions of the pedal, easily accessible by the left foot. This leaves the right foot free to manipulate the *cuillère* swell box, which is found on the right hand side of the pedalboard. Legato playing in the pedal finds its origins when the organ began to become considered "sacred" or least disassociat-

The Madeleine at Lefébure's time, showing the people attending the service, separated from the others coming in and out for the pleasure of their ears and eyes (the author's collection)

ed from its human elements. It receives, then, an endless, eternal breath, more of which anon. From that moment the swell box and its position also changed: it became balanced and centrally located in the console.

La Peste de l'orgue

The swell box brings us to the following essential element of the symphonic style: dynamics.[5] In the context of the importance of control and flexibility of volume in the symphonic "language," it must be recognized that the increase of intensity, in the strings as well as in the brass, is reflected in the specifications of the organs. As a direct consequence comes the desire to be able to completely control the sound using a flexible mechanical system.

In order to be able to understand this better, we turn our attention briefly to the principles of expression in this period. The main factor when considering expression is dynamics. The normal shape of the dynamics is determined by the content of the musical phrase. A normal curve describes a rise-and-fall movement: an "opening out" from the point of departure, a climax, and a return to the initial point. To work against the gravity requires a certain energy—in other words, a general crescendo-diminuendo pattern is the basis for a normal musical phrase. The beginning and end of the phrase are determined by rests, or by slurs. If this was indeed the normal dynamic pattern, then its notation by composers was not necessary. It was only when the composer wished to indicate another expression that the change in intensity was expressed in symbols or words.

Over this basic curve are added the accents of a phrase. These accents were classified into three types, each of which has a consequence for the dynamic.[6] The first is the *metrical* accent: this places the emphasis on the strong part of the bar. The metrical accent determines how the listener experiences the bar, and also determines the basic character of the piece. (In the current performance practice of early music, the metrical accent is omnipresent.) The second accent is *rhythmic*: it determines the rhythms or figures, further illustrated by upbeats, syncopation, subdivision of the beat, etc. The rhythm of the phrase requires a dynamic indication whereby the meter no longer follows a straight line, but instead follows an interesting and varied course. The third accent is *pathetic*: the feeling of the performer, or the transmission of this feeling to the listener giving rise to additional strong accents, independent of those already discussed. These accents can be notated in the score, but this is not necessarily the case. The essence of this accent is the experience of the performing artist who transmits the expression of his emotions through dynamics.

This phenomenon was already recognized, by Rousseau for instance, but it becomes a parameter of primary importance in the middle of the 19th century. A hierarchy of accents begins to develop. The pathetic accent becomes more important than the rhythmic, which in turn is more important than the metrical. The "virtuosity" of the swell box must be seen within this context. If one, as a consummate artist, wishes to able to express the whole gamut of feelings, then one must have complete control over the dynamics. Therefore the right foot spends ever more time on the swell pedal. (It goes without saying that this clarifies the great success of the harmonium.) In this way the organ gains the power of expression of any other instrument. This was essential to bring the organ out of the historical low-point it had found itself in.

The old joke that French organists could only play with the left foot was simply the truth! They were "left-foot virtuosi" and "right-foot virtuosi," but the right foot remained on the swell pedal (certain Hammond virtuosi still have this technique). This is evidenced by an astonishing comment from Lefébure-Wely writing in *L'Organiste moderne* (*2ème Livraison, Offertoire*): "It is better to abandon the swell pedal and to play the pedal with both feet." Dynamics therefore are incompatible with legato in the bass: with the "left-foot virtuosi," expression always took priority over legato.

December 31, 1869 (the day Lefébure-Wely died) can be seen as the symbolic end of the left-foot virtuosi. The swell box became abandoned and both feet were now available for the performance of legato passages. The arrival of Widor as *titulaire* of St. Sulpice pushed the organ in a totally new direction. Widor's succession of Franck at the Conservatoire further strengthened his grip on the organ culture.

Musica Sacra

The turmoil of the revolution and everything that followed severely affected not only the church, but of course everything associated with it. To recover from such a low point the church had to "pull out all the stops." One of its best weapons was music. The up and coming bourgeoisie had set the tone as far as music was concerned. Musical culture was not only blossoming in the concert hall, but also at home. Those who wished to attract these people to the church were duty-bound to offer music that reflected that of the secular world. For those from the lower echelons of society, the church offered the only possibility to come into contact with the musical fashion of the time. This is the reason that Boëly was so unsuccessful—his music was simply too reminiscent of the *Ancien Regime*—and why Lefébure-Wely was seen by the parish authorities as a hero. This fashionable music brought the extremes of dynamic flexibility into the church. This was one of the most important aspects objected to by the opponents of the new church music. The problem, of course, was nothing new. Berlioz describes it well in his *Traité d'Instrumentation* (1844):

> Without wishing to again stir the debate about the endless issue of expression in spiritual music, which above all should be simple (without a hidden agenda), we do allow the advocates of "plain" music, plain chant, and the non-expressive organ, to express their admiration when the performing choir, singing a spiritual work, delights with its sophisticated nuances of crescendo-diminuendo, light-dark, swelling, exalted sounds. They clearly contradict themselves; at least by their asserting (which they do very well) that the, in essence, moral, liturgical and Catholic expressive possibilities of the human voice, when applied to the organ suddenly become immoral, not fit for liturgical use, Godless.[7]

Berlioz was not the only figure to discuss the problem. One of the leading figures in church music, Joseph d'Ortigue, was very much against this increase of expression. He cited the swell box as the defacing of the godly instrument:

> . . . all the attempts today to corrupt the organ from its origins and to rid it of its Christian roots, are no less reprehensible.
>
> The ensemble of the organ—even, continuous, plain—determines, precisely because of these properties, the character of the plain-chant. The orchestral instruments, which, in a certain context speak to our feelings, have, in the church only a contrived and caricatured expression, but the organ, whose keyboard is cold and insensitive, has, in the same house of God, a grandiose expression full of majesty . . . It is barely more than 160 years ago that people tried to rid the organ of the majestic character it had, due to the equality and "planitude" of its accents, in order to introduce the nuances and convolutions of secular music which imposed themselves on the expressing . . . of the sentiments of man in his most earthly worries . . . some were not able to resist this fatal impulse, and, as a result the power of secular music has tried to impinge on spiritual music for nearly two centuries . . .
>
> The organ is "monotone," it is distanced from all earthly basis. But church music is just as "monotone," that is to say plain, distanced from earthly expression, full of a calm and heavenly expression, and of the human breath; I say again, the organ and church music have the same character, just as they share the same goal, and one can say that the circumstances of the origins of both are just as sacred as each other . . .[8]
>
> . . . this expression, which we view as destructive for the character of the instrument.[9]

The successors of d'Ortigue such as Joseph Regnier attack the "persistent allowing of the mouth of the public to fall open" through the "persistent swelling of the sound." To quote him, "Your box is the plague of the organ."[10] Adrien de La Fage, the other authority on the subject of church music, stuck resolutely to a position against the opinions of d'Ortigue:

> The expression gained through such a simple method as a box with louvers is a very useful improvement made available to organists and one which has long been desired.[11]

Over the question of whether all the manuals of an organ should be enclosed, Ply offers the following pragmatic answer:

> Recently Cavaillé-Coll and Merklin have applied swell boxes to all the manuals of an organ, at the request of organists . . . is this a positive development? Or a negative one? The critics have not yet clarified the official position. As far as we are concerned we can not reject it in an organ intended for concert use. On the other hand we would not see it as useful should all stops of a church organ be under expression.[12]

The tendency against dynamic expression becomes more important from the middle of the 19th century. One of the most notable results can be seen in organ building: the *cuillère* became gradually superseded by the centrally placed balanced pedal. A protagonist of this static conception of dynamics was Charles-Marie Widor, of whom more anon. Lefébure also followed this trend to a degree: *L'Organiste moderne* (1867) contains few dynamic indications, certainly much fewer than earlier in his works, like the *Meditaciones religiosas* (1858); there are a considerable number of pieces without indications and his notated crescendi are discreet. What a difference from his earlier publications!

Incidentally, it is worthwhile to compare the sacred music of Lefébure-Wely with his secular works. One sees from the outset a differentiation with regards to dynamics: the church music is, in general, less flexible. A good example of this is to be found in the *Suites pour harmonicorde*. The second piece from the first suite "Roma," contains a footnote that reads: "This Prayer can be performed, if desired, without expression (NB: Lefébure means the dynamic changes), as long as one takes care to pump softly where 'p' is indicated"—and at the end of the piece: "played by the composer on the organ of the Madeleine Sunday 17 May 1857 during the High Mass." This teaches us two important things: First, that good composers made the distinction between church and concert; second, that Lefébure-Wely within this context created for himself a clear line of separation. His music is also clear evidence of the ongoing evolution of church music. A comparison of the dynamics of *L'Office catholique*, op. 148, with *Vademecum de l'organiste,* op. 187, shows a sobering of the crescendi and diminuendi.

This trend becomes more and more common in church music; and in organ building: less flexible swell boxes; in organ-playing: the increasingly common use of absolute legato; and the new organ schools that were founded under the influence of Palestrina and Cecilia: École de Musique Classique et Religieuse (École Niedermeyer, Paris), Kirchen-

musikschule (Regensburg), École de Musique Religieuse ("Lemmensinstitute," Mechelen), Schola Cantorum (Paris). The development is noted in the French edition of Riemann's *Dictionnaire de Musique*:

> About the real crescendo, comparable to that of the orchestra, that is today certainly not applicable to the organ. Maybe this is a good thing, as it led to the loss of the organ's majestic "impersonality" and also, without doubt to the era of sentimental and pathetic organ playing.[13]

It is reported, incidentally, that Tinel, director of Lemmens Institute, solved the problem on behalf of that institution, by rephrasing the French term for "swell pedal" thus: "La pédale faussement appelée expressive" (The falsely named expressive-pedal).[14]

L'Ecole du Choral

The banning of expression of feeling in the form of dynamics is not the only way to improve church music. Another element is rhythm. During the first decades of the 19th century cheerful and driving pieces made a substantial impact: the polka, mazurka, boléro, march, fanfare are interspersed with light and restful cavatinas, serenades, nocturnes and romances. The musical elements of these pieces were used in order to bring a picture of the prosperity of the outside world into the church. In some parishes these pieces entirely dictated the mood, in others their application was limited to certain moments in the service. The believers arrived and departed to a march, during the collection the public were treated to a brilliant *offertoire*, in order, of course, to encourage their generosity! The versets and communions reminded the listener of the cozy *Soirée musicale* of the day before.

However, a reaction against such music also manifested itself, particularly from those who considered the churches only to be full of believers attracted by the mundane music. These figures went back to the sources of church music, such as Gregorian chant and early polyphony, preferably before Monteverdi and the "seconda prattica"—in other words, Palestrina. This aesthetic can be recognized by its simple rhythm, preferably made up of long note values: half notes or quarters.

Via this "side door," the Protestant chorale made its entry. It answered musically the requirements of "real" church music; the associated text can be left out or replaced. The vertical harmony with its, ideally, affiliated melodic movement brings forth a new genre, the *choral*. A typical example is Gounod's edition of a selection of Bach's chorales. Their titles have disappeared, but each is commented upon from a harmonic viewpoint, such as *le Ré bémol, c'est de la démence* (the d-flat is insane) in no. 130 (*Vater unser im Himmelreich*).

The rhythmic characteristics of the chorale and of counterpoint became an element of good Catholic church music. Rhythmic sobriety, simple meter, and absence of whimsical interjections are typical. The real church music is differentiated from the mundane not only by the rejection of lively accents, but also through the rejection of clearly profiled rhythmic figures (such as in a boléro). This is clearly evident if one compares Guilmant's *L'Organiste Liturgique* with his sonatas, or Lefébure's *L'Office catholique* with his *Soirées Napolitaines*, or even Lemmens's organ school and the songs written for Helen Sherrington. An amusing example can be found in the *Messe Solennelle* of Rossini: the *Prélude religieux* consists of a 120-bar-long string of eighth notes. Truly religious!

But we can also see this phenomenon in *L'Organiste Moderne*: the "strophes" on a Gregorian melody exhibit a uniform picture of equal note values with the comment "dans le mouvement du plain chant." This trend is officially recognized in Catholic church music in the encyclical *Motu Proprio*, 1903. Among organists, it was Widor who, above all, explored and forwarded it. His early symphonies are firmly rooted in the brilliant style, but the Romane and Gothique are classic examples of the new religious style; inspiration from Gregorian chant, rhythmically calm, classical registrations without extreme effects, sober dynamic indications.

The Antwerp exhibition of 1880, where the organ is in the Gallery of Modern Arts
(the author's collection)

Another nice example of this differentiation comes from Edgar Tinel, not only an important representative figure through his position. He was the successor of Lemmens, after the latter's untimely death just after the foundation of the École de Musique Religieuse in Mechelen. As its director he was in the midst of Catholic church music in a country which, at the time, provided a model in a number of fields for its southern neighbors. Because of this, Tinel had an important influence on the following generation of organists. His legendary speech to the Societé Saint-Grégoire in 1883 was published in *Musica Sacra*, the magazine of the episcopacy.

> How does one create a good organist? . . . it comes down to determining what is good taste and to educate . . . what is appropriate to perform in this context . . . Some works written in a somewhat concertante style . . . are easily recognizable because of their joyful worldly style, of their lively spiky rhythms, their military tempi, dancing or overly fast. Sometimes it suffices just to survey which stops the composer indicates . . . Piccolo 1′ and Bourdon 16′ on the Grand Orgue, Hautbois with tremulant and dynamics on the Positif or Récit . . . these works—sometimes composed by famous people—are certainly not appropriate for use in the church, whether performed before, during, or after the service. The good taste of the pupil is formed by his study of the great masters of the 16th and 17th centuries: Frescobaldi, Asola, Pitoni, Fasolo, Hassler . . . also Palestrina . . . works where calm majesty and serene beauty are ideal encouragement for silent reflection. But these masters alone are not sufficient. J. S. Bach and his school are also necessary . . . not the complete Bach of course, but the "Catholic" Bach . . . in one word, the Bach of the chorale. This "Bach of the chorale" has already been, several years ago, brought to the attention of Catholic organists, to their benefit. Mr. Ferdinand Kufferath . . . has published a book entitled "The school of the chorale," a volume containing the purest teaching of the organ-playing style of the church.[15]

Their tempi

The separation of church and concert music manifests itself in another area, also noted by Tinel. Tempo plays an important role in the character of 19th-century music in general, and of organ music in particular. Here, we must differentiate between two levels, the basic tempo of a piece and the flexibility of the basic tempo during the course of the piece, the agogics. As a general rule, the tempo of concert music is fundamentally quicker than that of church music: "their tempo" speaks volumes. This of course should hardly surprise us, but it is interesting to bear in mind that this is reflected in the tempo markings notated by Lefébure-Wely, Guilmant and Lemmens. A typical example from Guilmant is a *Marche* for harmonium and piano: 69 for the half note; *Marche Religieuse*: 60 for the quarter—in both pieces the smallest note value is a 16th note. A comparison of the metronome indications of Lefébure-Wely in his *Meditaciones religiosas* with his opera indicates even more pronounced differences.

The question of tempo was then a vexed one in the 19th century. The review of the organ exams of the Lemmens Institute in 1882, written by Kanunnik Van Damme, one of the founders of the school, tells us that the public criticized the tempi of the performed works. Van Damme agreed that "certains artistes" had made the listeners accustomed to quicker tempi, but states firmly that such dizzy speeds often obscured clarity, and, moreover, were not appropriate for the church. In other words, in the church music school, a moderate tempo was taught as an essential quality in a performance:

> through them [the pupils], the listeners admired the incomparable qualities of the Master, perfection in fingering, excellent use of the pedal . . . and, above all, the extremely steady rhythm that lends greatness to organ playing, is indeed for the organ, what the claw is for the lion.[16]

Here, the agogic aspect is highlighted. Worthy church music is as firm and immovable as the rock on which one can build. This tallies exactly with a review of Lemmens's piano playing, cited by Duclos.[17]

> Just like all great musicians he has, at the highest level, the feeling for rhythm, and his expression is not reliant, as with many talented famous artists, on freedom of tempo. That feeling for rhythm is so strong that he never, even in the quickest passages, hurries, and in slower passages never drags, a rare skill, which is at no time a hindrance to the warmth of feeling, or the unexpectedness of the poetry.[18]

Later we will see how Widor used these ideas of Duclos in his manifesto for the new organ culture. Widor liked to see himself in the famous line which, via Lemmens eventually leads back to Bach himself, but forgot to mention that, as far as is known, Lemmens himself never cited this link.

This brings us, inevitably, to the tempo problems of Franck. One statement we can make immediately: Franck's "great" organ works are concert music; not a single title refers to the church. After his death, his works were saved from certain obscurity by their "declaration," as it were, as church music. Pious tempi and discreet nuances elevated Franck to the "worthwhile" composers of the 19th century, and neatly to tally with Lenoir's statue of Franck in the garden by St. Clotilde.[19]

Le Génie du Christianisme

The sacred character of the organ can only convincingly be accounted for by laying its origins in religion.

> Just as with Christian architecture, the Christian instrument is an anonymous and collective discovery, just as a learned figure once said (M. Boyer, *Notice sur l'orgue et l'organiste*), the person prompted by the Holy Spirit to worship the supreme Lord.[20]

The literary source for this idea can be found in the manifesto of the revival of the Catholic Church in France: *Le Génie du Christiansime* (1802). In his short chapter about music, De Chateaubriand sets the basis for the purification of church music. He refers to Plato in order to determine the true basis of music:

> Music is, in fact, an imitation of nature—art is cited in the same way. Her perfection is then the most beautiful possible manner in which to depict nature.[21]

The "real" music, produced by religion, contains the essentials of harmony: beauty and mystery. It goes without saying that these are lost through all human disturbances—"le trouble et les dissonances." The closing sentence of the last paragraph would later be endlessly quoted: "Christianity discovered the organ and gave it breath."[22]

D'Ortigue would also use this sentence at the beginning of his extended chapter about the organ. He goes on to add to it:

> Indeed, the religious genius alone was able to make of the organ the wondrous instrument that we know, and with it the most complete and perfect expression of the Christian life, in art envisaged in the form of liturgy . . . antiquity, continuation, universality, unity, authority. As a monumental instrument, it represents the unchangeable elements in the structures of liturgical singing, in this art which develops independently.[23]

> The Christian architect . . . with help from the organ and the suspended bronze, has attached as much to the Gothic temple himself, as the sound of wind and thunder, which rolls in the depth of the forest. The centuries summoned by these religious sounds, let their ancient voices sound again from the heart of the stones, their breath in the enormous basilica.[24]

Chateaubriand of course wasn't alone. Victor Hugo (*Chants du Crepuscule*, about the "suspended bronze") and Lamartine added their voices:

> One cannot hear his deep and lonely voice/ mixes itself, outside the temple with the idle sounds of the earth (. . .)/ (. . .) But he directs himself to God in the shadow of the church/ his great voice which swells and hurries like a breeze/ And with voices raised unto God/ The song of nature and humanity.[25]

Finally, Ply published the text of the inaugural speech of the pastor of Clermont-Ferrard Cathedral, at the consecration of the new organ. Here, the ideas of "Le Génie du Christianisme" go rather in the direction of Widor's "calme des choses définitives." The text quotes "un auteur très-compétent" (and should you, the reader, know who this author is, I should be grateful to know).

> There is in the thousand voices of the organ, in that smooth, supporting, enduring static mass of sound, something of the restiveness of the Cathedral, vast and calm like the ecstasy and adoration; something that flies as a "Hosanna" in an enormous heaven, something as unchangeable as God, a knowledge, a meditation of the unknown being, indestructible, from an eternal Word, the unending story of him who is.[26]

Widor had, just as did all his contemporaries, read all these books. The "organ-vision" of Widor fits precisely within the ideal of "Le Génie du Christianisme." Therefore, the organ, and the way of playing it, had to become independent from human attributes (read "inadequacies"). There is in this context no place for the expression of personal feelings which have anything to do with sensuality, in the most literal sense of the word. As a result, no strong accents, no passionate crescendi, no excited agogics. In their place came a musical architecture with clear, straight lines, just as in the structure of cathedrals:

Medallion of the Belgian builder Loret, very much competing with Merklin and Cavaillé-Coll

> The great voice of the organ must have the calm of definite things: she was made for stone arches, and is reliant on natural proportions. Where orchestral instruments search for more or less neurotic virtuoso affects, the organ gains its maximum strength through the simple chord of C major, and with it the sound which seems to have neither beginning or end.[27]

Orgue is continuously written with a capital O, the supremely worthy instrument. Hereby the organ departs the mortal world and the organist depicts a new mysticism. In the early 1930s when Widor himself was rather closer to his own passing, he wrote in his preface to Felix Raugel's *Les Maitres français de l'Orgue aux XVIe, XVIIe, et XVIIIe Siècles, Recueil de 50 Pièces d'orgue ou harmonium*:

> When . . . the sound of this pipe shall become lost under the high arches of our Cathedral, taking with it our soul to the eternal, only then shall the organ truly be "The mystic instrument."

The organist, due to the nature of his instrument, is elevated to the universe of the almighty.

> When one can receive a note of unlimited duration under one's finger, in all freedom, without the need to spare the performer's lungs, when one feels, so to say, the master of time and power, then one has realized the true character of the instrument; of the language which it must speak, and of the style to which it belongs.[28]

How far away the 1850s seem now! The predecessors of Widor, whether Berlioz, Lefébure-Wely, or Franck, lived in another world. The ideal organ of their time is flexible, and is suited, just as an orchestral instrument, to the translation of the most refined nuances of the artistic sentiment. The organ and its music in that time really represented an attempt to break free of monumentality and stardom. In order to entice people into church, the organ had not to remind them of God, but had rather to reflect the human, the artistic, the refinement of the circles in which good was to be found, the earthly paradise. Dizzy luxury, blinding colors, sumptuous decors, all within easy reach of the man in the street. He who wishes to play Lefébure or Franck is best advised to read first a book by Zola, as this would give better results than reading a book about organ music or reading this article. The exuberance of this time and its music were banished by Widor and his generation. The technical means came first, the artistic consequences became sidelined:

> She wants to sing in strict rhythm, this great voice needs rhythm, phrasing, a desire. Let us admire the cadences in Bach's works which here and there break up the flow of the text, so that we may enjoy a minute rest. Whatever the movement, the Master shuns all suggestion of restlessness, and of hurrying. He never loses his calm and keeps his listeners with him.[29]

We find ourselves again at the *rythme imperturbable*, of Lemmens, elevated and stable, like a *Grand Orgue*. The accents described by Lussy are limited to the metrical and the rhythmic, with the resolute exclusion of the dominant pathetic accents. However, and precisely because of this, the organ gained its allure of greatness and eternity:

> What string and brass instruments, the piano and the human voice gain through the bursting forth of the accent and the unpredictability of the attack, the organ gains as a result of its own majesty, speaking as a philosopher; it alone can display such an eternally unchanging volume, that it creates a vision of the religious and of the eternal. Surprises and accents are strangers to it; one lends them out, they are "adopted" accents.[30]

Through these words, Widor sets himself, for example, against the opinions of Berlioz regarding expression in religious music. Moreover this is completely in accordance with his rejection of Berlioz's ideas about the organ: "Who informs Berlioz, which organist did he so unfortunately seek advice from?" (Widor, *Technique*, p. 176) This regarding the instrumental aspect, but it becomes immediately clear that this fits completely into a broader concept of the organ, which is resolutely against that of Berlioz. Though the citing of accents, and, as a result, expression, as being against the true nature of the organ, one must consider tempo and flexibility of agogics within this same context. The rigid structures of Roman and Gothic architecture are reflected in modern organ playing:

> Rhythm itself will be influenced by modern tendencies: it shall become a sort of elasticity of the bar, though the essential elements shall be preserved. It will allow the components of the musical sentence to breathe when necessary and be phrased, assuming that it keeps hold of the reins, and that it keeps pace . . . And when the essential qualities of the style are defined by the words purity, clarity and precision, then we regard them as the basis of organ music.[31]

Provisional conclusion: the term "symphonic organ music" can be defined in very different ways. The whole spectrum of musical genres in 19th century music is represented. The repertoire is unique in its amalgam of profane and sacred ingredients. The performer must, therefore, continually make decisions. The listener can either follow him, or not. ■

Notes

1. Charles-Marie Widor, *Symphonies pour Orgue*, ed 1901, Preface.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Nicolas Gorenstein, *L'Orgue post-classique français*, Chanvrelin, Paris, n.d., pp. 7–11.
5. Joris Verdin, "The Organ: fit for expression?" in *Het Orgel* 2000/5, pp. 15–22.
6. Mathis Lussy, *Traité de l'expression Musicale*, Paris, Heugel et Cie, 1877, and: idem, *Le Rythme Musical*, Paris, 1884.
7. Hector Berlioz, *Traité d'Instrumentation*, Paris, 1844, p. 169.
8. Joseph d'Ortigue, *Dictionnaire liturgique, historique et theorique de Plain-Chant, et de musique d'église, au moyen age et dans les temps modernes*, Paris, 1853–1860; "Orgue."
9. Ibid., "Expression."
10. H.J. Ply, *La Facture moderne etudiée à l'Orgue de St-Eustache*, Paris 1878, facsimile Leonce Laget, Paris, 1981, p. 18.
11. A. de La Fage, *Le Plain Chant*, 2nd year, no. 7, quoted from Ply, p. 19.
12. Ply, op. cit., p. 19, note 1.
13. Hugo Riemann, *Dictionnaire de Musique, entièrement remanié et augmenté par Georges Humbert*, Lausanne, 1913, p. 235.
14. *Musica Sacra*, 6th year, no. 2, 1886, p. 11.
15. *Musica Sacra*, no. 12, p. 99.
16. Kanunnik Van Damme, cited by Joseph Duclos, "Essai sur la vie et les travaux de l'auteur," in *Du Chant Grégorien, ouvrage posthume de Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens*, Gent, 1886, p. XXXVI.
17. Duclos, op. cit., p. XXXIV.
18. Recent research has revealed the anonymous reviewer to be none other than Fétis; see Annelies Focquaert, *Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens: leven en werk van een organist*, unpubl. dissertation at the Orpheusinstitute, Gent, 2006 (2 vol., 314 + 181 pages).
19. Joris Verdin, "Discussions on César Franck," in *Het Orgel* 2001/2, pp. 5–9.
20. Ply, op. cit. p. 309.
21. François-René de Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres Completes, Tome Premier*, Bruxelles, 1852, p. 251.
22. Ibid., pp. 252–253.
23. D'Ortigue, "Orgue."
24. Chateaubriand, op. cit., p. 262.
25. Ply, op. cit., p. 311.
26. Ibid., p. 306.
27. Charles-Marie Widor, *Technique de l'Orchestre Moderne, faisant suite au Traité d'Instrumentation et l'Orchestration de H. Berlioz*, Édition Revue et Augmentée, Paris, Lemoine, 1925, p. 188.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.

Addenda: summaries of the mentioned articles in *Het Orgel*

"The organ: fit for expression?" (*Het Orgel* 2005/5)

Dynamic and agogic aspects play a major role in 19th-century expression. In this article the first one of these is explored. Based on investigation of period literature we conclude that expressiveness, dynamics and the term "expression" cannot be separated, even are quite inseparable. The importance that is attributed to dynamics is not only documented in general publications about musical aesthetics (Lussy, Riemann), but also, and in the first place, in harmonium methods (Lickl, Lefébure-Wely, Mustel). This makes completely sense, as the harmonium is, among the keyboard instruments, particularly suited to control the parameter of volume. Several quotations from the above-mentioned literature show that there are general "rules" with respect to the dynamic curve of a musical sentence (the up- and downwards movement of crescendo and diminuendo), and that individual musicians, on the other hand, differ from each other, so each of them can individualize his playing.

With regard to the organ we conclude that Charles-Marie Widor represents a school with another point of view: the nature of the instrument, its location and its repertoire demand a less flexible, more objective kind of expression, which is described by Widor as "architecture." Sigfrid Karg-Elert develops the notion of expression into an idea of transcendent art, in which controlling of dynamics is regarded as the most important individual means of expression.

"Discussions on César Franck" (*Het Orgel* 2001/2)

The discussions on the "correct" interpretation of Franck's organ works are mainly a result of the difference between a certain *a priori* concept of Franck and musicological investigation. Whereas this concept is patently based on unverifiable "testimonies," the musicological investigation, led by Joël-Marie Fauquet, results in a coherent whole. A very important aspect is the difference between church and concert music. Interpreting Franck's organ works as religious music requires accepting some assumptions that are contradictory to the entire context of organ playing in France, as well as to the objective indications of Franck himself.

Joris Verdin studied both organ and musicology. This combination is the reason for his preference of reviving forgotten music at the same time as he creates contemporary compositions. He has recorded over 30 CDs as a soloist, spanning many musical eras and styles. After various activities as accompanist, arranger and producer, he now focuses on the organ as well as the harmonium, and has become internationally reputed as a specialist. He teaches at the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp and the University of Leuven.

Master classes, musical editions and articles are an important part of his activities—among them, the first complete edtion of César Franck harmonium works and the first handbook of harmonium technique. The Spanish town Torre de Juan Abad (Ciudad Real) appointed Joris Verdin as honorary organist of the historical organ built by Gaspar de la Redonda in 1763. He obtained the Diapason d'Or and Cecilia award from the Belgian Press in 2001, was named Musician of the Year of the Flanders Festival 2002, and is artist in residence at the Fondation Royaumont, France 2008.

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