Cortege et Litanie

Marcel Dupré was born on May 3, 1886 in France to Alice and Albert Dupré. Alice, a born musician, was a proficient cellist and pianist. Albert was a respected organist who was close friends with Cavaille-Coll, the great French organ builder, and Alexander Guilmant, the brilliant organist. Marcel grew up in an environment where music was a high priority, and his great musical gifts thrived under those circumstances.

When Guilmant first saw the young Marcel in the cradle, he prophesized, "He will be an organist!" As a child, Marcel lived in a house with his parents, an aunt, and grandparents, and all taught music during the day. At night, evening musicales involved the entire family.

At the age of fifteen, Marcel entered the National Conservatory of Paris. There, he was to win premier prizes in piano, organ, and fugue. In November of 1921 he made his American debut at New York's Wannamaker Department Store, where a huge organ of six manuals and 451 stops had been installed. Dupré's concerts there were a tremendous success. On one of his programs, he was bold enough to improvise an entire organ symphony, the Symphonie-Passion, Op. 23. Crowds of several thousand people flocked to hear him play.

In 1926, Dupré was elected to succeed Eugene Gigout as professor of organ at the Paris Conservatory. As a teacher, Dupré proved once again to have exceptional abilities, and he was much beloved by his students.

In January of 1934, Dupré succeeded Charles-Marie Widor as the organist of Saint Sulpice in Paris. Dupré had been Widor's assistant for twenty-eight years, and Widor was eighty-nine years old at the time of his resignation and ready to retire from his post.

Four times Dupré performed the complete works of Bach in a series of concerts. In the spring of 1954 he accepted the directorship of the Paris Conservatory. Up until his death on May 30, 1971, Dupré remained very active as a recitalist.

Dupré's "Cortège et litanie" began life as a ballet movement, scored for eleven instruments. Later it was arranged as a piano piece, and eventually was transcribed for organ by Dupré for a 1923 performance at the Wannamaker Department Store. A "cortège" is a funeral procession, and a "litany" is a repetitive, relentless liturgical prayer.
Nicolas de Grigny (1672-1703), a French organist and composer, came from a family of town musicians and organists. From 1693 to 1695 he was organist at St. Denis in Paris. In 1695 he married, and his wife was later to bear him seven children. By 1697 he was appointed the organist at the cathedral in Rheims, the city of his birth. He held this position until his death at the age of thirty-one.

Grigny's output consists of a single volume intended to be performed as part of a Roman Catholic worship service. There are four sections on the Ordinary of the Mass (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei), five hymns, and four other single numbers. The mass is drawn from the plainsong Mass IV of the Vatican edition. Each section of the Ordinary and each of the five hymns are comprised of two to nine movements. Each opening cantus firmus movement (drawn directly from the plainsong) is followed by a fugue based upon one or more motives of the plainsong. The remaining movements may be duos, trios, recits, or other embellished solos. They were designed to be played in alternation with verses of text sung by the choir. Grigny was a developer of old styles rather than as an innovator of new ones. Today you will hear three selected movements from the nine that comprise the Gloria versets.

Grigny's titles of his pieces instruct the organist on how to register them. The "Basse de Trompette ou de Cromorne," for manuals alone, tells the organist to solo out the bass line on a separate manual with a trumpet or crumorne stop, which are both reeds. This verset is in fugal style, and imitation is freely used. The "Récit de Tierce en taille" calls for a tierce stop in the tenor voice. The tierce sound includes pitches at 8', 4', 2', 2 2/3', and 1 3/5'. This piece is highly ornamented and very expressive. In the "Dialogue," the "grand jeu" on the great manual is contrasted with the "petit jeu" on the swell. French organs of the seventeenth century were quite sophisticated, and the petit jeu would have included the principle stops along with the mixtures, and the swell would be coupled to the great keyboard. For the grand jeu, the principles (16', 8', 4', 2'), mixtures, mutations and reeds were all employed. The overall effect was bold and aggressive, with seriousness of purpose and intensity of feeling.

It is of interest to note that Bach paid tribute to Grigny's efforts by copying his work in its entirety for his own study and private use about 1703.

Prelude and Fugue in D Major, BWV 532

J.S. Bach

The festive character of this prelude and fugue is of a caliber achieved by the artistry of only one composer—the inimitable J.S. Bach. The opening section of the prelude is characterized by running scales and broken scales—all on a tonic pedal point, in a style very similar to that of Bach's predecessor, Nicolas Bruhns. Then a pedal is heard
in the dominant, and the manuals respond in stretto fashion. A characteristic flourish up the D major scale completes this toccata-like opening section.

The next section of the piece, the Alla Breve of the Prelude, was composed in a light-hearted style. The main theme is simple and sequential, and a conventional chain of suspensions decorates a seemingly well-improvised bass part. This movement was created from a basso-continuo formulae.

The final segment of the Prelude interrupts the happy-go-lucky Alla Breve with a return to the dark and severe style. Chords incorporating the diminished seventh and Neapolitan sixth are interspersed with short and quick scale passages. Bach's masterful choice of colorful harmonies is guaranteed to send chills up even the most resilient of spines.

The triumphal fugue, marked by a virtuoso pedal solo at the coda, seems to suggest that through all facets of life (the confident, the troubled, the spirited and the times of deepest despair), the truth shall prevail and the lowly shall be exalted. This fugue is characterized by its spaciousness, and its affirmation that the right shall prevail retains its intensity until the final pedal note is sounded.

"Dieu Parmi Nous"  

Olivier Messiaen

Olivier Messiaen was born in Avignon, France, in 1908. His father was an English teacher and translator of Shakespeare, and his mother was a poet. When his mother was pregnant with Olivier, she wrote a book of poetry dedicated to her yet unborn son called "The Flowering Soul." In it, she wrote, "...I carry within me the love of mysterious and marvelous things." In the composer's own words, he was raised "in a climate of poetry and fairytales...such as enormously develops a child's imagination and leads him toward thinking in immaterial terms, and so to music, the most immaterial of the arts."

Messiaen taught himself to play the piano, and began composing when he was eight years old. Indeed, as a child, young Olivier was strongly fascinated with mysterious, magical and supernatural things. His favorite play was Macbeth, and he designed sets for it and enjoyed acting out the play before his younger brother. It was in the Catholic faith, though, that he discovered "this attraction of the marvelous multiplied a hundredfold, a thousandfold." Messiaen says that the main aspect of his work derives from the fact that he was born a believer, a Catholic. He has studied theology, and through his music tries to depict the mysteries of the faith.

At the age of eleven he entered the Paris Conservatoire. A brilliant student, he won first prizes in counterpoint and fugue, piano accompaniment, organ and improvisation, history of music, and composition. Marcel Dupré was one of his teachers.

Messiaen has been a professor of music at the Paris Conservatory for over 35 years, and for more than 47 years has been the organist of the Church of la Sainte Trinite in Paris. He has composed song cycles, orchestral works, piano and organ works, and pieces for chamber ensemble. His "Quartet for the End of Time," scored for violin, cello, clari-
net, and piano, was written when he was a prisoner of war in Tunis.

"La Nativité du Seigneur" was composed in 1934, when Messiaen was establishing himself as a teacher and organist in Paris. The entire work consists of four books containing nine movements, and lasts one hour.

There are five fundamental principles behind the work: 1) our predestination realized in the Incarnation of the Word; 2) God's living in our midst and His suffering; 3) the "three births"—the eternal birth of the word, the particular birth of Christ, and the spiritual birth of Christians; 4) the characters giving the festival of Christmas a poetry of their own; and 5) nine movements to honor the maternity of the Blessed Virgin.

"Dieu parmi nous," the selection heard today, is the final movement from the Nativity Suite which portrays "God among us." The thundering, falling pedal theme depicts the descent of God into the world. The second theme is said to express the love for Jesus Christ of the communicant, of the Virgin, of the entire Church." In many of Messiaen's main works between 1934 and 1948, he would include an "ecstatic movement," for which this piece certainly qualifies.

Messiaen describes himself as a "coloristic" composer. When he hears or reads music, he sees those colors that correspond to the sounds heard. "I do not see them with the eyes, but rather with an interior eye and intellectually. But I see them. And I find that upon repeated hearings of the same chord or sonorities that the same colors reappear."

Among Messiaen's other talents, he is also an accomplished ornithologist and has devised a special notation in which to transcribe the songs of birds. In the "literature" of the birds he has discovered the neumes of plainchant, the different modes, the quarter-tone, and even collective improvisation. Since birds must put all they feel into songs, they become, "the most artistic, the most beautiful, the most extraordinary. But birds, like men, are not equally talented. Some are geniuses, some mediocrities."

Throughout his compositions, Messiaen often used Greek and Indian rhythms. Through his study of these two styles, Messiaen developed his philosophy of regarding rhythm as the accumulation of duration rather than the division of time into equal parts. Writing notes with added values was a Messiaen innovation. Also, he abandoned the use of time signatures because of his different concepts of time.

Messiaen writes that the Nativity Suite represented a renewal of organ-writing. The work gained great success in France and abroad at a time when its Hindu rhythms constituted a great change in organ music. Cesar Franck had previously represented the summit of modernism. Rhythm and harmony are disassociated. Instead of the harmony providing the cadential effect, the rhythms themselves provide the tension and relaxation.

The augmented fourth, or "devil's interval," is important in this piece. Messiaen explores the modes to find new variety in harmonies, adding chords that provide the specific sound he is seeking.
Chorale Preludes formerly called 'The Eighteen'

J.S. Bach

Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele, BWV 654
Wenn wir in höchsten Nothen sein, or Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit, BWV 668

Both of these chorales are taken from Bach's collection commonly referred to as 'The Eighteen.' All eighteen of these chorales have earlier known versions from the Weimar period, and the whole group exemplifies how Bach arranged, revised and collected older material. The date these chorales were composed is not for certain, though some suggest the period 1710-1714.

The text for "Schmücke dich" was written for the Eucharist by J. Franck and published in 1649. The melody by J. Cruger was published with the text and used in Cantata 180 by Bach. It appears in somewhat different form in the Orgelbüchlein, BWV 759.

Commentators have described this chorale as "priceless, deep, full of soul as any piece of music that ever sprang from a true artist's imagination." It is in ritornello form, meaning that there are short interludes before the cantus firmus, or melody, appears. Many motivic derivations from various parts of the cantus firmus generate further development.

The history of the second chorale prelude is much more problematic. Many believe this chorale to be J.S. Bach's last composition before his death, although we haven't been able to document this conjecture. There are three arrangements of this melody by Louis Bourgeois. The first is BWV 641 of the Orgelbüchlein, which is 9 bars in length. The chorale melody here is varied with coloratura elements, and there is three-part accompaniment with no interludes. The second arrangement we have, BWV 668, is only 25½ bars long, and is incomplete because it sets only half of the chorale melody. Only BWV 668 gives the melody the text "Vor deinen Thron tret' ich," which translates to, "Before Thy Throne I Now Appear." Finally, we have BWV 668a, which was published in 1751 at the end of the Art of the Fugue as a compensation to the buyer for the incomplete fugue closing the collection. This piece is titled, "Wenn wir in höchsten Nothen sein," as is BWV 641, and the English translation of the title is "When in the hour of utmost need."

Today you will hear BWV 668a, which contains BWV 641 within itself, enlarging it to 45 bars by means of fore-imitations and interludes, but stripping the melody of its coloratura. In the Art of the Fugue preface, this piece is said to have been 'dictated extempore by the deceased man in his blindness to his friend.'

How do we explain the existence of the half-completed BWV 668, and why was the text altered for this version? Possibly an anonymous scribe was copying BWV 668a, and he completed his work on a page now missing. However, some musicologists speculate that Bach dictated BWV 668 on his deathbed, and a student of his completed Bach's vision for the chorale arrangement with BWV 668a. Whatever the case, as you listen to this chorale prelude, you may develop your own conclusions about the true authorship of this arrangement.
Charles-Marie Widor (1844-1937), the fourth French composer to be featured in this program, was raised in a family of organ builders and performers. In Brussels, he studied composition with Fitis and the organ with J. Lemmens, who was the most recent member of a line of teachers directly connected to Bach. Widor was organist at St. Sulpice in Paris for 64 years.

In the 1870s he produced numerous compositions in various genres, and in 1880 his first stage work, a ballet that debuted at the Paris Opera. He became a music critic and conductor of a choral society specializing in oratorios. He succeeded Frank as professor of organ at the Paris Conservatoire in 1890, and later became professor of composition there. Marcel Dupré was one of his organ students.

His friends described him as witty, spirited, energetic and warm-hearted despite his natural reserve. During World War I he used his numerous contacts to obtain money for artists who had suffered misfortunes.

Widor's organ music is best known of his many compositions. Most are secular and fully exploit the tonal possibilities of the French instrument. He composed ten organ symphonies, and he was the creator of this compositional style. These pieces feature the organ as a self-contained orchestra. The final toccata of his Fifth Symphony for Organ is perhaps his most famous movement.

The Fifth Symphony was composed in 1876, and Widor utilized a wide variety of textures in a very tonal style for this piece. The opening theme is march-like, and it leads into a light scherzo section. The march theme returns with variations, and it is followed by a section clearly imitative of the buzzing of bees. As the last bee dies away, a simple chorale-type texture appears, then the march-like theme returns in a dance-like fashion. From here to the end of this movement, the tempo steadily increases and the harmonic textures vary dramatically. The buzzing bee returns momentarily, then the march-like theme returns in triumph at the end of the first movement.

Besides composing for the organ, Widor wrote five symphonies and three concertos. He wrote sacred and secular music, and chamber and piano works. With Schweitzer he edited five volumes of the organ works of Bach.

Widor also wrote a supplement to Berlioz's treatise on orchestration called "The Techniques of the Modern Orchestra: A Manual of Practical Instrumentation." In his chapter dealing with using the organ with orchestra, Widor refutes Berlioz's claim that the two shouldn't be sounded together. Of the organ, he writes, "It is a stupendous mass, a monument of granite, the most powerful means on earth of expressing what is great, unchangeable, eternal." Widor thus expresses his love and respect for the instrument in verbal terms as well as through his musical language.
Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele
(Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness)

Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness, Leave the gloomy haunts of sadness, render unto him whose grace unbounded Hath this wondrous banquet founded; High o'er all the heavens he reigneth, Yet to dwell with thee he deigneth.

Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten (When in the hour of utmost need)

When we are in the hour of utmost need, We know not where to look for aid; When find our comfort here, alone That we may meet before Thy throne And days and nights of anxious thought Nor help nor counsel yet have brought, cry, o faithful God, to thee For rescue from our misery.
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presents
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organ
in a
SENIOR HONORS RECITAL

Cortège et Litanie
Marcel Dupré
(1886-1971)

Gloria Versets from Mass IV
Nicolas de Grigny
(1672-1703)
Basse de Trompette ou de Cromorne
Récit de Tierce en taille
Dialogue

Prelude and Fugue in D Major, BWV 532
Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

La Nativité du Seigneur
Olivier Messiaen
(The Birth of the Lord)
IX. Dieu Parmi Nous
(God among us)

Chorale Preludes
Johann Sebastian Bach
Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele, BWV 654
(Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness)
Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit, BWV 668
(Before Thy Throne I Now Appear)

Fifth Symphony for Organ, Op. 42, No. 5
Charles-Marie Widor
Part I
(1844-1937)

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