

## PREFACE

It is commonly known that César Franck, like Bach before him and Brahms a few years later, left to organists his last musical testament, the three *chorals*. Unfortunately for organists discouraged by the technical and registrational complexities of these massive fantasias, the equally mature but far more accessible collection of manual music called *L'Organiste* is not nearly as well known in this country. A delightful album which is surely among the high points of the manual literature, *L'Organiste* shows the composer at his best, albeit working in small forms and avoiding technical difficulty.

In midsummer of 1890, weary from a full musical year, and in fact suffering the effects of the May accident which was to contribute to his imminent death, Franck went off to his wife's cousin's house in Nemours (Seine-et-Marne) for a few weeks of rest and, as always, joyous work. According to an August letter, his compositional projects for this vacation period included the three *chorals*, a sonata for 'cello and piano (which was never written), and the collection of manual pieces. This last project was the fulfillment of a commission from the publisher Enoch; that Franck took the assignment seriously is apparent from the chronology we can establish from the composer's own completion dating of his manuscripts:

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|--|---------|--------------|
| Choral No. 1 in E Major                                      | Nemours | August 7     |
| <i>L'Organiste</i> pieces in C Major – C Minor               | Nemours | August 16    |
| <i>L'Organiste</i> pieces in D <sup>b</sup> Major – C# Minor | Nemours | August 21    |
| <i>L'Organiste</i> pieces in D Major – D Minor               | Nemours | August 24    |
| <i>L'Organiste</i> pieces in E <sup>b</sup> Major – Eb Minor | Nemours | August 28    |
| <i>L'Organiste</i> pieces in E Minor – E Major               | Nemours | (no date)    |
| <i>L'Organiste</i> pieces in F Major – F Minor               | Nemours | September 1  |
| <i>L'Organiste</i> pieces in F# Minor – G <sup>b</sup> Major | Nemours | September 5  |
| Choral No. 2 in B Minor                                      | Paris   | September 17 |
| <i>L'Organiste</i> pieces in G Major – G Minor               | Paris   | September 26 |
| <i>L'Organiste</i> pieces in A <sup>b</sup> Major – G# Minor | Paris   | (no date)    |
| Choral No. 3 in A Minor                                      | Paris   | September 30 |

(The master died on November 8, leaving *L'Organiste* unfinished.)

As originally planned, the collection was to consist of ninety-one pieces, with seven in each key (more or less evenly distributed between major and minor modes), the keys being those of the tones of the chromatic scale beginning on C. This arrangement, quite possibly influenced by the model of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier as well as by considerations of convenience, called for, in each key group, six short pieces followed by a longer one (usually given a title such as *Offertoire*, *Communion*, *Sortie*, etc.) in itself embodying not only new material, but thematic references to the shorter pieces preceding it in the key group, a cyclic procedure common in the nineteenth century and especially associated with Franck.

Franck actually composed only sixty-three of the proposed set. They cover a broad spectrum of moods and styles, including several settings of old noëls and other folkish melodies, most notably in the D Major-Minor and G Major-Minor groups, both of which are labeled by the composer "For Christmastime". The various lengths and keys available, not to mention the one-phrase "Amen" in each key, make the collection as useful to the parish organist today as it was when Franck, always concerned about the practical problems of service playing, designed the album.

The score presented here is an exact reprint of the original edition published by Enoch (Paris) in 1892, which in turn was faithfully engraved from the second of two autograph manuscripts which – fortunately and unlike those for the larger organ works – are preserved, in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The first manuscript (Cons. Ms. 8608) is a rough composing sketch, the second (Cons. Ms. 8609) a careful copy for the printer, with some minor subtleties added, but virtually identical to the first in musical content. Franck was a painstaking copyist; and the fact that he had not had time to copy out the last four pieces in the A<sup>b</sup> Major – G# Minor group resulted in their not being submitted to the publisher, and thus lacking in the Enoch editions and those based upon them.<sup>1</sup>

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Innocent-looking though it is, this music does present some performance problems. One obvious type of problem arises, as it does in the larger organ works, from the fact that the composer had large hands; furthermore, having begun his career as a piano virtuoso and having come to the organ relatively late, he was always to write more or less pianistically for the organ. More important here, and not immediately obvious, are matters of interpretation resulting from the nature of the French harmonium, the instrument toward which *L'Organiste* is primarily oriented.

As known to Franck and his contemporaries and, indeed, as still very common in France today, the classical French harmonium is a considerably more respectable instrument than its degenerate American relative: while having the same means of tone production (metal reeds), its specifications are more standardized, its sound clearer and stronger, and its total effectiveness considerable, especially in large reverberant French churches, in many of which it is still regularly used as a complement for the *grand orgue*, usually to accompany chancel participants in the Mass.

As French organ composers have traditionally done, Franck indicated the tone colors and pitch levels he had in mind by means of circled numerals and letters referring to the standardized registrational plan of the French harmonium. In *L'Organiste*, this is the scheme<sup>2</sup>:

- 1 Fundamental rank of 8' pitch
- 2 Fundamental rank of 16' pitch
- 3 Reed-like rank of 4' pitch
- 4 Reed-like rank of 8' pitch
- 5 String-like rank of 16' pitch
- E Expression — A non-speaking device allowing subtle dynamic nuances by shutting off the reservoir and causing the wind to go directly from bellows to reed chest
- G *Grand jeu* — Full organ, activated by knob or knee lever
- O *Ouvert* — Open, a non-speaking dynamics device which uncovers a hole over the reeds, letting more sound out; often effects Ranks ③ and ④ only

(Speaking ranks are indicated separately for treble and bass, above and below the brace, respectively, in accordance with the division of the keyboard and stop controls between E3 and F3.)

Franck clearly knew this type of instrument intimately, and wrote with ease around the ostensible limitations of the divided keyboard, frequently achieving the effect of a two-manual organ through the skillful use of range and tone color. Even without a proper French harmonium, American organists can approximate the composer's sound ideal by choice of register and by a willingness to play one or both hands an octave higher or lower than written, where appropriate.

For example, the first piece indicates ① and ④ for the right hand, and ① for the left: thus it can be played as written, since both numerals mean 8' pitch, although one would do well to bring out the right-hand melody on an 8' flute and oboe combination. However, the second piece looks quite different from the sound intended: the right hand is marked ② and lies quite high, while the left carries a ③ and covers the complete bass compass of the instrument, from low C to the dividing-point middle E. Since ② is a 16' rank (of fundamental character) and ③ a 4' rank (of more or less reed-like character), one should at least begin by drawing stops of this sort, if one has them at these pitches, or, if not, by choosing these colors at 8' pitch and then playing the right hand down an octave and the left an octave higher. In either case — unless one has a divided-keyboard harmonium like Franck's — one will need two manuals. In *mélange* situations where Ranks ① and ② are combined, and one does not have a 16' manual stop (a rarer thing in our organs), one has to decide on the basis of range, texture, and voicing whether or not to transfer the hand down an octave: E group No. 1 (p. 56) would work well this way, with 8' and 4' stops, whereas E<sup>b</sup> group No. 5 (p. 48) would become, perhaps, a bit thicker than the composer intended.

This reprint edition will serve to introduce the simple beauty of *L'Organiste* to American organists — whether they play the pedals or not — who seek ideal service music or teaching material within the technical grasp of the beginning or intermediate player, from an otherwise sparse period in the history of organ composition.

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1. The entire collection of sixty-three pieces is not to my knowledge published together. The last four pieces in the composing score have been edited by Messrs. Gaston Litaize and Jean Bonfils, along with works by Mendelssohn and Berlioz, in a volume entitled *Pièces romantiques ignorées* (Volume 17 in the extensive series *L'Organiste Liturgique*, Schola Cantorum, Paris). Note also that another volume, containing thirty earlier pieces (some of them for organ and not harmonium), has been misleadingly subtitled *L'Organiste, 2<sup>e</sup> Volume*: it is in no way a sequel to the album presented here.
2. For more detailed information about the French harmonium, as well as about subsequent editions of *L'Organiste*, see my article "Franck's *L'Organiste* Reconsidered" (*The American Organist*, February 1970), of which this preface is a revised and abridged version. My knowledge of the harmonium is greatly indebted to explanations kindly offered by M. Francois Tricot, organist of L'Eglise St-Louis-des-Invalides in Paris, and by Mr. Robert Bruce Whiting of Schwenksville, Pennsylvania.