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LOUIS VIERNE
AND HIS UNFINISHED MÉTHODE D'ORGUE

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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ABSTRACT

Louis Vierne and His Unfinished *Méthode l’Orgue*

by

Jian Guang Shi

Louis Vierne, one of the most important figures in the rich French organ literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, made a substantial contribution in the cultivation and the promulgation of an organ playing tradition which was initiated by Belgian organist Jaak Nikolaas Lemmens. Vierne’s aesthetics concerning organ and organ playing were most explicitly given in a treatise which he began during the First World War but never finished in his lifetime and remained unknown to the public until fifty years after his death. This important document was published by Les Amis de l’Orgue in 1987 as a special issue of their periodical *L’Orgue* together with an introductory article and editorial remarks by the Belgian musicologist Dr. Brigitte de Leersnyder. With an English translation of the aforementioned document, a lengthy biography dealing mainly with Vierne’s organ profession, and a survey of the organ methods in Lemmens’ tradition, the present study tries to demonstrate Vierne’s role in that tradition and aims at providing organists a tool for an authentic interpretation in their performance of Vierne’s organ works.
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PREFACE

Louis Vierne, organist of the famous cathedral Notre-Dame de Paris, is chiefly remembered today as one of the greatest and most important composers of the French symphonic organ school. His organ compositions include six organ symphonies, twenty-four Pièces de fantaisie, twenty-four Pièces en style libre, and many others, all of which remain favorites in the repertoire of today's organists. It is probably because of the rich and substantial contribution he made to organ literature that his outstanding achievements in other organ-profession activities are overshadowed. Vierne studied organ with, and remained a disciple of, all three persons who are regarded as the founders of the French symphonic organ school, César Franck, Charles-Marie Widor, and Félix-Alexandre Guilmant. As an organist, he served as suppléant of and deputized for Widor at Saint-Sulpice from 1892, won the Premier prix in organ in 1894, and, in 1900, was named unanimously by a special jury committee as the titulaire of Notre-Dame through a formidable competition of ninety-eight candidates, and held the position for rest of his life. According to Steven George Young, Vierne gave 1,750 organ recitals all over the world during his lifetime.\(^1\) As an advocate and activist in promoting the organ as a concert musical instrument, Vierne helped in the formation of the society of Amis de l'Orgue and in the restoration project of the great Cavaillé-Coll organ at Notre-Dame. As a pedagogue, Vierne assisted Widor and Guilmant in their organ classes at the Paris Conservatory for almost two decades, from 1892 to 1911, and then succeeded Guilmant as the professor of the advanced course in organ at the Schola Cantorum and remained in the position until shortly before his death. It is in this very capacity that Vierne preserved and promulgated the tradition of organ playing which he

\(^1\) Steven George Young, The Life and Work of Louis Vierne (D. M. A. dissertation, Boston University, 1994), 49.
learned from Widor and Guilmant, a tradition founded by the Belgian organist Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens and transmitted to France through Lemmens' French pupils, most notably through Widor and Guilmant. In giving instructions to numerous organ students Vierne faithfully passed on this tradition and exerted profound influence on younger generations. Many of his students became world-renowned organ virtuosos, such as Joseph Bonnet, Marcel Dupré, Maurice Duruflé, and Henri Mulet, to name only a few.

The purpose of this study is to recount the extensive career of Vierne as organist and pedagogue, to present his method of organ playing and organ technique in the line of Lemmens' tradition, and to provide some guidance for an authentic interpretation of the organ music written in this stylistic period by the composers of French symphonic organ school in general, and by Vierne in particular.

The project is divided in three parts. The first part is a biography of Vierne. It chronicles the events in the development of Vierne's career as an organist, from his earliest endeavors to his most outstanding successes. As no full-length biography of Vierne in English was available when this project was undertaken, most of the information presented here is drawn from sources in French, in particular from Vierne's Mes souvenirs, Journal, and from the French biography, Louis Vierne: la vie et l'oeuvre, by Bernard Gavoty.

The second part is a survey of the Lemmens tradition, to which Vierne's organ playing belongs. The understanding of this tradition helps to place Vierne's organ training and organ method in better light.

The third part is an English translation of Vierne's unfinished treatise on organ and organ playing. The original text of this organ method was published by La Société des Amis de l'Orgue in 1987 as a special issue of L'Orgue in homage to Vierne on the fiftieth anniversary of his death. There is no other source that provides more specific details on
Vierne’s ideas about organ playing and organ technique, nor offers more information towards an accurate and authentic interpretation for his organ music than this document. The publication of the document was edited and prefaced with an introduction by musicologist Dr. Brigitte de Leersnyder. The Introduction provides much valuable information concerning the origin and the physical state of the source material. It also is translated into English and included in the third part of this document.
PART ONE

LOUIS VIERNE

A BIOGRAPHY
1. CHILDHOOD

Louis-Victor-Jules Vienne was born on October 8, 1870, in Poitiers, a city of west central France, and was baptized a few days later, on October 17, at the cathedral Saint-Pierre.¹ He was the eldest of four children of Henri-Etienne Vienne, editor of a Bonapartist newspaper, *Le Journal de la Vienne*, and Marie-Joséphine Gervaz-Vienne. The family lived at 7 rue de l’Eperon.² Bernard Gavoty, student and close friend of Vienne, in his biography *Louis Vienne: la vie et l’œuvre*, describes the over-protected environment Vienne had at home during his childhood: “It was in a family atmosphere, warm and understanding, that Louis spent his first years between an imaginative father and a very loving mother.”³

This very sheltered atmosphere resulted from the parents who were attempting to assuage the sorrow they felt, however misguided, for Vienne’s blindness:

I came into the world almost completely blind on account of which my parents felt a very keen chagrin: because of this fact, I was surrounded by a warm and continual tenderness which very early predisposed me to an almost unhealthy sensitivity. This was also to follow me all my life, and was to become the cause of intense joys and inexpressible sufferings.⁴

In 1873 Vienne’s father was appointed as chief editor of the *Paris Journal*, and the appointment prompted the move of the family to Paris, where the three-year-old boy was given a toy piano, and was introduced to and welcomed by his uncle, Charles Colin. Colin, winner of the *Grand Prix du Rome*, was organist of Saint-Denis-du-Saint-Sacrement, and professor of oboe at the Paris Conservatory. It was this uncle who first

³ *Ibid.*, 20. All translations are mine.
recognized Vierne’s musical gift and urged that the boy be given musical training for an artistic career. It was he, too, who played piano for the young nephew, and introduced the music of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schumann to him for the first time.\textsuperscript{5}

Two years later, in 1875, the family moved to Lille where Vierne’s father was appointed as the chief editor of the \textit{Mémoire de Lille}, a position that he held until the fall of the Bonapartist party, which took place following the death in 1879 of the Imperial Prince, Napoleon Eugène Louis. Vierne recalled in \textit{Mes Souvenirs}:

My father, an educated man, while subscribing unreservedly to my uncle’s opinion, felt that the regular intellectual studies were indispensable for developing a broad general culture. He maintained, quite correctly, that through these studies an artist would greatly enrich his particular talent, forming a mind capable of grasping more deeply the interrelations which exist between the various manifestations of human intelligence. The future was to prove more than adequately the wisdom of this point of view.\textsuperscript{6}

In 1876, at the age of six, Vierne began his elementary studies in grammar, history, geography, and arithmetic at the school of Les Sœurs de la Saint-Union.\textsuperscript{7} At the same time he began lessons in piano and the rudiments of music with his aunt Colin and a young lady named Gosset, who taught him to read music using Braille notation, and he made rapid progress with this system.\textsuperscript{8}

Meanwhile, medical advice was sought for improving Vierne’s sight. In November, 1877, the Austrian surgeon, Dr. de Wecker, performed two operations on Vierne’s eyes. The operations restored some sight for Vierne and enabled him to find his way alone, to recognize people, to see objects at a short distance, and to read large letters at a close range: “He

\textsuperscript{5}\textit{Ibid.}, 24.  
\textsuperscript{7}Gavoty, \textit{Vierne}, 27.  
\textsuperscript{8}\textit{Ibid.}, 29.
had to do the homework on large sheets of paper with a very big pencil, because pens could not make the letters visible to him."9

It soon became clear that the young boy was incapable of being instructed with usual methods. His limited vision still prevented Vierne from having a normal education, so it was decided that he should be given instruction based on the Braille system. Thus Vierne was entrusted to Richard Hormann, a former student from the Institution Nationale des Jeunes Aveugles (National Institute for Blind Youths), for instruction in reading and writing with punched letters. With Hormann, Vierne continued working on solfège and piano.10

In 1879, Charles Colin came to Lille for a performance of his Mass at the church of Saint-Maurice. Attending the event, Vierne was impressed by the sound of the organ and he, for the first time, formed the dream of becoming an organist:

It was like being under a spell: the variety of timbres, the duration of the sound, the magical effects of softness, crescendo, and power filled me with a mysterious terror. I was also filled with the desire to play this prodigious instrument.11

When told of Vierne’s desire, Colin decided a specific route for him to follow to achieve this goal: preparation at the Institution Nationale des Jeunes Aveugles, then entry into the organ class at the Conservatory, taught at that time by César Franck, who was a close friend and colleague of Colin.12

After the dissolution of the Bonapartist party, Vierne’s father lost his job at the Mémorial de Lille, and was forced to seek alternate means of employment. He took several jobs before finally finding a position as an editor for Le Figaro.13

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9 Ibid., 28.
10 Ibid., 29.
11 Crawford, Mes Souvenirs, 2.
12 Ibid., 3.
13 Gavoty, Vierne, 30-31.
In 1880, Vierne, then ten years old, moved back to Paris with his family. He was first entrusted to Henri Specht, a blind music instructor at the Institution Nationale who had obtained an accessit (honorable mention) in Colin’s oboe class at the Conservatory. Specht prepared Vierne so well that when Vierne entered the Institution Nationale in the following year he was able to skip the elementary level and go directly into the second-year class.\(^{14}\)

In early 1881, Colin took Vierne to his organ at Saint-Denis-du-Saint-Sacrement, explained to him the manipulation of the instrument and introduced to him the art of improvisation:

What a revelation! I saw all at once what the monster was that haunted my dreams as a little boy, and I realized at the same time that it was possible to create music on the spot, without conscious effort. Nothing more was needed to fire my imagination, and the words “when I am an organist . . .” recurred like a leitmotif in all my conversations.\(^{15}\)

It was also in 1881 that Colin advised Vierne’s parents to take him to Saint-Clotilde to hear Franck, whose playing overwhelmed and profoundly affected the young Vierne:

I clearly remember that mass, for which we arrived early; I waited impatiently. The organ played a mysterious prelude, quite unlike anything I heard at Lille; I was bowled over and became almost ecstatic. There was more to come at the Offertory, where the master allowed himself more time; the theme so unfamiliar yet so attractive, such rich harmonies, such subtle designs, the intense life of all the parts stupefied me. I reveled in such delights and wished they would continue. We listened to the sortie right up to the last note; it was a long paraphrase of the Ite missa est, full of lyrical flights of fancy which conjured up for me heavenly vision of processions of angels chanting Hosanna! At the same time certain harmonies caused me a certain uneasiness which was nevertheless pleasant. I could not restrain my tears. I knew nothing. I understood nothing, but my natural instinct was violently shaken by this expressive music which soaked into every pore. A faint

\(^{15}\) *Ibid.*
presentiment of the true purpose of music arose in me then; I could not express it in precise terms, but when my uncle asked me what I had felt, I was only able to say: “It is beautiful because it is beautiful; I do not know why, but it is so beautiful that I would like to do the same and die immediately after.”

Unfortunately, Vierne’s beloved Uncle Colin could not live long enough to see his nephew’s success. He died of pneumonia on July 28, 1881, prior to Vierne’s entering the Institution Nationale. The intense grief was etched in Vierne’s memory:

With his death, I lost not only a beloved relative, one who had shown me tender affection, but also my firmest supporter, the one who had determined my fate and whose aid would have been so helpful to me in the future. His death was my second sorrow; the first had been the death of my young sister, snatched away in three days by the same sickness. I have devotedly kept alive the memory of my uncle, an unassuming man, with a heart of gold, and a well-informed artist who passionately loved his work.

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16 Gavoty, *Vierne*, 32.
2. YOUTH

Vierne entered the Institution Nationale des Jeunes Aveugles in October 1881, as a boarding student. Thus began the long climb toward the supreme goal of his childhood ambitions. The Institution Nationale, established by Valentin Haüy in 1784, was a foundation that sought to provide practical job training for blind youths. The school was divided into two sections, one for boys and the other for girls. The program of musical courses required three years of solfège, three years of harmony, and two years of composition. The study of piano was obligatory for all students, and each student was also required to play an orchestral instrument. Vierne was assigned to play the violin. The students were classified into divisions, both for piano and for their assigned instrument, starting from the elementary class and proceeding from the seventh to the first class (numbered in reverse order), corresponding to the seven years of study. Normally a student would pass on to an additional class in the eighth year, then to the honors division in a supplementary year of graduate study. After this he was no longer classified in the divisions and therefore was not required to participate in the competitive examinations. The examinations took place three times a year, in January, before Easter, and culminated in a July concours. The last served as the competitive performance examinations for prizes and counted for half of the required points. The studies in general culture spread over six years and covered grammar, history, geography, mathematics, rhetoric, philosophy, physics, chemistry, religious instruction (from the catechism and from lectures on theology), and elocution. But there were no classes in Latin, modern languages, or music history.

Vierne's daily schedule at the school comprised two hours for piano

\[19\text{ Ibid.}\]
\[20\text{ For detail see Crawford, } \textit{Mes Souvenirs}, 246, \text{n. 4.}\]
\[21\text{ Ibid., 5-7.}\]
practice, two hours for the other instrument, four hours for classes in
general culture, one hour for solfège or, later on, harmony, three hours of
study to prepare homework and to learn lessons, a quarter-hour piano
lesson, and two half-hour lessons a week for the violin. There was an hour
of reading aloud from the catechism, as well as elocution lessons conducted
by the assistant principal or by a study monitor on Thursdays. On that day
there were no general academic classes but one extra hour of practice for
the piano and one for the violin. Each day there was an hour and forty-
five minutes for recreation. In Mes Souvenirs, Vierne recalled:

We got up at six-thirty in the morning and went to bed at nine in the
evening. There was group prayer in the morning and evening and
private prayer before and after each class, Angelus and grâce before
and after each meal. Mass on Thursday at nine o’clock and on
Sunday at eight-thirty; Vespers on Sunday at two o’clock. Services
on religious holidays were held the same as on Sunday. One regular
Sunday outing permitted per month; two allowed for those with
honorable mention and for those on the honor roll. We had one day
off on New Year’s Day, two days at Easter, one on Pentecost, one on
July 14, and two months’ vacation in the summer.22

Activities outside of school were varied, but all related to music. In
the same source Vierne wrote:

For our artistic training, we attended Sunday concerts
(Colonne, Lamoureux, Société des Concerts du Conservatoire), to
which we were given free admission, thanks to the generosity of
these associations. Every Wednesday we went to see performances at
the Opéra; box No.11 of the 15th row in the balcony was placed at
our disposal on those days. A few recitals or chamber concerts at
the Erard and Pleyel halls, the six concerts of Guillemot at the
Trocadéro, the Mass on Saint Cecilia’s Day at Saint-Eustache,
repeated at Notre-Dame on Annunciation Day—such were our
contacts with the artistic life in the outside. In short, it was rather
limited.23

Vierne entered directly into the second-year level of study, the sixth

22 Ibid., 8
23 Ibid., 7.
division for piano and violin. He continued piano study with Specht, and took violin lessons from Pierre Adam, viola soloist at the Opéra and violist of the famous Lamoureux Quartet. Adam had been a close friend of Charles Colin, and he quickly transferred his affection to the young Vierne, for whom he would become a wise and sympathetic surrogate father.24

The concert hall of the Institution Nationale and its Cavaillé-Coll organ with three manuals and thirty-six stops were both completed in 1883.25 An inaugural festival was planned for February, 1884. It was for this ceremony that Franck composed his Psalm 150, for the school orchestra, chorus, and the new organ. The conductor of the orchestra at that time was Louis Lebel (1831-1888), organist of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, professor of organ and composition at the Institution Nationale. He composed a cantata for the occasion, based on a text written by the school principal in which there were angels, as well as a description of the Creation, with storm effect and gong. Vierne’s boy-soprano voice at that time caused him to be included with the “angels,” and he was also be chosen to strike the gong, representing the separation of the earth from the water. It was Vierne’s first contact with the public.26

Starting with the fourth division, all students were required to play in the orchestra. Rehearsals took place daily from four to five o’clock in the afternoon. During the first half-hour, the students learned their parts by heart under the guidance of a sectional leader. Then they played in ensemble under the direction of the conductor. The orchestra gave four concerts a year, in addition to concerts at special events such as the one given on the day of distributing the prizes.27

26 Crawford, Mes Souvenirs, 10-11.
27 Ibid., 5.
In October of this same year (1884), Vierne entered the orchestra as a second violinist “which gave me intense joy. There I learned many things; none of the treatises I have read since that time has profited me as much as that living experience.”

It was also Vierne’s first year of harmony study with Julien Héry, organist of Saint-Louis-des-Invalides. Vierne had enrolled in Héry’s solfège class during the first two years at the Institution Nationale, and had some reserved opinion about his teacher:

Our teacher was an able man. Although he used only the ancient treatise of Augustin Savard, we benefited from a host of practical remarks, the fruit of his broad experience as a composer and organist, which was of the greatest advantage to all of us. But on the artistic side, he was rather limited, for he never ventured beyond the strict rules. At the end of three years of this training, we were writing correctly, to be sure, but without the flexibility and freedom which make of harmony an art. Later I had to work extremely hard to acquire a “pen” in the modern sense of the world, and to be able to teach in a musical way. It was another teacher at the school, Victor Paul, organist of the Lazarists on the Rue de Sèvres and choirmaster of our Institution, who initiated me into this conception of harmony by having me work out exercises that were much freer than those given by old Héry.

The year of 1885 saw Vierne’s first trip abroad. A meeting for the improvement of the blind was convoked in Amsterdam, and the school orchestra was invited to give three performances for the occasion. The concerts took place in the Palais de l’Industrie which possessed a magnificent Cavaillé-Coll organ. On that instrument Adolphe Marty (1865-1942), an organ student who had almost completed his training at the Institution Nationale, achieved brilliant success in the course of the three performances in which Vierne participated.

Starting with the third division, the annual competitive examinations

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28 Ibid., 11.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 12.
took place in the concert hall of the Institution Nationale. In 1886 Vierne competed for the first time before an outside jury, presided over by Franck whom he had idolized since childhood. He anticipated that moment with intense emotion and even practiced his every movement in advance. He was afraid that some accident would thwart him. In fact such an accident occurred and was in a form far more cruel than anything he could have foreseen. On June 6, barely a month before the July concours, Vierne's beloved father succumbed to stomach cancer:

As a result of the terrible sorrow that I experienced, I went into nervous shock and was immobilized for a few days, just one month before the examination. The devotion of the head nurse, a nun, helped me make the effort necessary to pull out of it. All the credit was due to that woman whose ardent religious faith bore me up with her power of suggestion. Her eloquence made me to understand that the atrocious test had been sent to me to measure the strength of my will, and that I should come up to what was expected of me.31

In spite of this tremendous grief, Vierne resolved to honor his father's memory, and he emerged from the concours with two first prizes, one in violin and the other in piano. After the examination, Franck had Vierne summoned. Vierne's first contact with Franck was vividly described by himself:

I was then to meet Franck! My heart leapt within me, my ears rang and I became pale. I climbed the steps to the little dais for the jury and found myself facing a tall man, slightly stooped with gray side-whiskers and beard, wearing a black coat, gray trousers and a black cravat.

“How pale you are, my boy. Do I frighten you so much?”
“Oh! yes, Monsieur Franck.”
“Why?”
“Because you are a genius.”
“A genius? Who told you that?”
“My uncle Colin and everyone else here. I heard you at Saint-Clotilde when I was ten and I almost died of joy.”
“But why?”
“Because it was too beautiful and I didn’t want it ever to stop.”

31 Ibid., 13.
"As beautiful as that? But why did you find it beautiful?"

"Because the music sang, my heart was stirred, I felt as if I was in another world. I felt good and unwell at the same time. It made me think of heaven, where such singing is heard."

"In heaven it is better, my child. Here we prepare, there we shall know. Your dear aunt Colin has told me all about you. I liked your uncle a lot, and I have promised his widow, whom you love like a second mother, to look after you and I will do so with all my heart. Your performance was excellent. I am told you did brilliantly at harmony: next year you start on the organ. Apply yourself to it with all your might, and when the time comes I will take you into my class."

Franck encouraged Vierne and cited to him the example of Adolphe Marty, who had just won the first prize in organ in his class at the Conservatory, and promised to take Vierne as a student as soon as he was ready. Wrote Vierne: "From that moment my destiny was irrevocably sealed."

The death of the father could have brought an end to Vierne's further musical education. Indeed, the family separated and lived apart; one younger brother, René, went to live with some distant relatives, while another younger brother, Edouard, interrupted his scholastic pursuits, went to live with a family friend. Vierne, thanks to his mother and his father's Bonapartist friends, was luckier. One family friend secured a small pension for Josephine Vierne, the mother, who further assisted with living expenses by working as an attendant in a hospital until her eldest son finished school. The generosity of his father's friends would be long remembered by Vierne; in 1921, the centenary of the death of Napoleon I, he composed *Marche triomphale*, Op. 46, for brass, organ, and timpani to honor Napoleon as well as his father's Bonapartist friends.

With a heavy heart, Vierne returned to the Institution Nationale
when the new school year reconvened in October. He began organ study with Louis Lebel, professor of organ and conductor of the school orchestra. Lebel, who graduated from the Institution Nationale earlier himself, taught his students from Lemmens’ École d’orgue, but he used only the exercises for the pedal. The students were supposed to have known the part dealing with the manuals already.\textsuperscript{35} Progressing rather rapidly, at the end of his first year of organ study, Vierne received a first prize by playing an improvisation on a theme with double reprises and Bach’s Fugue in G Major at the annual concours.\textsuperscript{36}

The following year, like his school fellows, Vierne took his turn playing for the chapel, where a beautiful three-manual Cavaillé-Coll organ had always been the object of Vierne’s admiration. On that instrument he attempted his first experiments in organ registration and gained his first experience in service playing. At the competitive examination, held this time before the outside jury, Vierne earned first prizes in both organ and composition with a Scherzo et Trio which he “kept for a long time as a prototype of naive and enthusiastic clumsiness.”\textsuperscript{37} Franck graciously gave Vierne his judicious criticism and permitted him to enter his organ class at the Conservatory as a free auditor in the new school year.\textsuperscript{38}

The fall of 1888 marked Vierne’s first year of extension studies at the Institution Nationale and the beginning of following Franck’s course, three times a week, at the Conservatory.

Franck’s organ classes concentrated on the requirements of the concours, established by the Conservatory when it started the organ program in 1819 and continued during the entire period when organ instruction was given by François Benoist (1794-1878): improvisation on a liturgical chant in the forms of both accompaniment and a rigidly

\textsuperscript{35} Crawford, \textit{Mes Souvenirs}, 14.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
prescribed commentary or paraphrase, improvisation of a fugue on a given subject, free improvisation on a given theme and performance from memory of one classic or modern organ composition. As Vierne observed:

Of six hours of class held each week, the Maître devoted at least five of them to improvisation, the most formidable test of the concours. Performance interested him little. When one was admitted as a student, it was assumed that he possessed an instrumental technique sufficient for the interpretation of all of Bach’s works. . . .

Considering the rare lessons devoted to performance, we were in clover, we blind who in our school had committed to memory a great amount of organ music. The others inevitably had a more limited repertoire. In the course of the year they prepared scarcely more than the pieces required for the examinations in January, in June and for the competition. There was no need to worry about manipulation of the organ. Franck drew the stops, worked the pedal combinations, and managed the swell box. Thus everything was simplified and reduced merely to the playing on the keyboards and pedals and the observance of style. All of which explains why, except for Dallier, Marty, Mahaut, and Letocart, none of the first prize winners from Franck’s class ever had any fame as an instrumental virtuoso. But to compensate, the Maître’s teaching produced some excellent improvisers. In that domain, as in composition, his teaching was truly miraculous.39

Franck insisted that Vierne should acquire the habit of writing without the aid of the keyboard, which was completely different from what he learned from Lebel and Héry at the Institution Nationale. Vierne, however, “quickly recognized the superiority of this method, in that it gives complete freedom to thought and also gives the freedom to work anywhere and at any time.”40

At beginning of October 1889, Lebel died. Victor Paul filled the vacancy until the arrival of Adolphe Marty, who had been the first blind organ student at the Conservatory, and had obtained the first prize during his first year studying with Franck and had just finished his study there.

39 Ibid., 33.
40 Ibid., 15.
Besides the organ class, Marty also took the responsibility for the composition class. About him Vierne wrote:

He brought a breath of fresh air which invigorated the instruction in these areas. He opened up for us unsuspected horizons, especially in composition and improvisation, transmitting to us, with all the enthusiasm of a young proselyte, the ideas drawn from the instruction of his professors at the Conservatory. Right away we backed him up, and, considering the general spirit of the school, we were avant-garde, indeed, almost revolutionary... Our new teacher introduced and made obligatory the teaching of counterpoint and fugue at the beginning of the first division of organ. He gave more importance to the course on improvisation and composition, making us profit greatly from an experience which, although still recent, bore the hallmark of the most penetrating observation and the sharpest critical sense. He also brought to us some of his recently composed music which we found very modern. We worked on it like mad, ...⁴¹

Marty’s music never achieved much popularity outside of France, but his teaching was apparently solid and effective. Vierne desired to emulate his new organ teacher during the rest of his student years. Most of Vierne’s early repertoire consisted of compositions by Marty, and he continued to play them throughout his concert career. In addition to his compositions, Marty published a book of pedal exercises intended for use in his teaching.⁴²

Vierne competed that year with Bach’s Fugue in D Major and an improvisation on double themes. He earned the first prize in composition with a short piece for piano quartet, Allegro.⁴³ After the concours, Franck encouraged Vierne with the following comments: “It is still quite young; it is Schumannesque; but there is good stuff in it. Carry on!”⁴⁴

From October 1889 to July 1890 Vierne continued his musical

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⁴¹ Ibid., 17-18.
⁴³ Crawford, Mes Souvenirs, 18.
⁴⁴ Ibid.
training and scholastic life in two parts: he was granted the rare distinction of a second year of extension at the Institution Nationale, and at the same time observed Franck’s organ class at the Conservatory.

Franck advised Vierne to learn counterpoint, with which he had great difficulty at first, but Franck insisted that it would give him complete independence in music writing and would light his lantern “with all the wisdom that characterized his incomparable teaching of composition.” Vierne took the advice seriously, as shown in his composition. His music writing is strongly influenced by contrapuntal devices and polyphonic approaches, and, eventually, counterpoint comprised a major portion of his own teaching. Vierne wrote later in his life:

My worship of Franck was a mixture of passionate admiration, filial affection, and profound respect. I experienced with an intense joy mingled with a kind of mysterious awe the quasi-magnetic fascination that emanated from this man who was yet so simple, so natural, and so truly good. It never occurred to me to argue with him and to make excuses for my instinctive repugnance to mathematics. I simply blamed myself for intellectual laziness, and vigorously lashing my pride, decided without another ulterior motive to “bone up” on counterpoint and then fugue. The future would rapidly reveal to me the wisdom of the Maître’s view.

In March of 1890 Pierre Adam’s health declined to the point that he arranged for Vierne to teach his violin and viola classes when he could not be present. Having made these arrangements, he appeared only two more times; he died in May, leaving Vierne to prepare the classes for the concours. The students performed brilliantly, as it happened, and Vierne was at one time thinking to succeed to Adam’s position. However, the Director of the Institution Nationale, Émile Martin, who had become Vierne’s trusted friend, encouraged him to develop his gift as a virtuoso performer and composer, with teaching as the third side of the triangle.

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46 Ibid., 21.
In July 1890, Vierne’s ninth year as a boarding student ended with a 
concours that brought him a first prize in organ and also one in 
composition. For the latter he presented an academic fugue which was 
rewarded with an accessit.\textsuperscript{48} After the examination, Franck, presiding over 
the jury for the concours as usual, criticized this fugue and told Vierne: “It 
is very satisfactory for six months of practice. Work hard during the 
summer vacation and I will look at your work in October. I want to find 
your writing less cumbersome, more flexible, and with more life.”\textsuperscript{49}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 22.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 22-23.}
3. CONSERVATORY

Thus Vierne completed his nine years of study at the Institution Nationale, passed through the gate of the school for the last time with mixed feeling of melancholy and spiritual joy, and returned home. Here, to his surprise, he found a brand new pedal-board installed under the piano. It was his loving aunt Colin who obtained the pedal-board from the Pleyel Shop for him.\(^50\) And it was on this instrument that Vierne would practice and work during his Conservatory years and realize his dream of becoming a student of Franck. He wrote:

Franck’s opinion on my prospects for a career as a virtuoso and composer reminded me that I had sworn in 1886 to do everything to glorify the name of that modest man, my father. It influenced me to give up the ideal of teaching in the Institution that had raised me, and to fight my way in the battle of life. This implied an effort of the will that I could, with dignity, make as a votive offering to the memory of my beloved father. He had died wishing for me a brilliant future to compensate as far as possible for my native handicap, to which he had never been able to resign himself.

... When the long-awaited day came, the one foreseen by Uncle Colin as far back as my early childhood, I was ready to take the class at the Conservatory honorably and could look forward without too much apprehension to the examinations and the competitions at the end of the year. My secret ambition was to imitate Marty, Mlle Boulay, and Mahaut, that is to say, to win the first prize at my first competitive examination.\(^51\)

Unfortunately, Vierne did not enjoy Franck’s tutelage for long. Franck had been injured in a carriage accident in June. At the concours in July, he was still tired. “The summer vacation will revive me,” he said to his organ students while he was leaving.\(^52\) He seemed much better by the beginning of the new school year. On Thursday October 2, Vierne and

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 25.
\(^{51}\) Ibid., 26.
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 36-37.
other students paid him a visit before his first class the following Saturday. According to Vierne, Franck played the *Trois Chorals*, his last organ compositions, on the piano, with Guillaume Kekeu playing the bass part.\textsuperscript{53}

On October 4, Vierne did plainsong and the exposition of a fugue at the first organ class. It seems that Franck was pleased with the new student’s ability, he said to Vierne: “That will be fine. Work! I believe that you will be able to do like your comrades Marty and Mahaut. I am counting on Tournemire and you for the next competitive examination.”\textsuperscript{54}

Franck caught a cold on October 17 but still came to class the next morning. Vierne recalled:

> “Come on. Let’s refresh the class with a nice free theme,” Franck said to Tournemire on Saturday October 18, to conclude a class in which we had all floundered pretty badly. The *Maître* looked quite pale and was coughing, said to us: “I don’t feel very well. I shall not be here on Tuesday. Work so that I shall find you in good form on Thursday.”

... However, we received words that the class on Thursday would not take place and that a later notice would indicate the date of the next class.\textsuperscript{55}

The notice came on the following Tuesday, November 11, informing Vierne and other organ students that their *Maître* Franck had died the night before.\textsuperscript{56}

I had the feeling of being struck by a thunderbolt, crushed, annihilated. I adored this man who had shown me such a tender kindness, who had sustained me, encouraged me, inspired in me a profound love of music, and filled me with the greatest hopes. And then, brusquely, he was only a shadow, a memory. I had the horrible sensation of having lost my father for the second time.

... To see that room again, that organ, the place formerly occupied by the dear dead one, taken by another? Never!\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{53} *Ibid.*, 33. Other source indicate that Charles Tournemire was the pianist who played the bass part.

\textsuperscript{54} *Ibid.*, 35.

\textsuperscript{55} *Ibid.*, 36-37.

\textsuperscript{56} *Ibid.*, 37-38.

\textsuperscript{57} *Ibid.*, 38-40.
So crushing was the blow that only the strongest insistence of his fellow students could convince Vierne to remain in the organ class.

A few weeks after the funeral service, the Conservatory officially announced that Charles-Marie Widor was going to succeed Franck as professor of organ.58 On Thursday, December 11, at two o’clock in the afternoon, Widor met the organ class for the first time. Vierne recalled:

He was still a young man, his appearance younger than his actual age, rather tall, very strapping, with a slightly military demeanor: marine blue suit, felt hat, polka-dot necktie knotted loosely in a bow, well poised, distinguished looking, and rather austere. In measured terms and in chosen words, he spoke to us of his predecessor, whom he qualified as “an ingenious improviser”; then, at once, he made a declaration, a general statement of principles which can be summarized thus: “In France one neglects performance too much in favor of improvisation; this is more than an error: it is nonsense. To improvise in the artistic sense of the word, one must have ideas, certainly; but that is not sufficient. In order not to betray one’s thoughts, in order to translate it exactly with all the variety, complexity, and flexibility demanded for its development, the organist must possess an instrumental technique capable of executing any pattern whatsoever at any tempo.”59

Thus began the great reform of organ instruction by Widor at the Conservatory which emphasized technique and dealt especially with performance. And it was this reform that gave birth in France to the most brilliant school of organists in the world. For Vierne and his fellow students, Widor’s new approach necessitated a complete relearning of the repertoire. Widor proved to be very exacting to the smallest detail and did not hesitate to make measure-by-measure critiques of each student’s performance. Vierne, like all other students, felt strongly discouraged. He had to verify, note by note, everything he had learned for the last three years from Lebel, from Marty, and from Franck. Of a proud nature, Vierne resolved to come out of this difficulty victoriously by adopting the

58 Ochse, Organists and Organ Playing, 183.
59 Crawford, Mes Souvenirs, 43.
attitude “better die than surrender.”

The students gradually overcame their initial shock and grew to appreciate the new perspective Widor brought to the organ class. Widor’s knowledge in all branches of art soon won the students’ respect. Widor set up two classes a week in improvisation and one in plainsong and performance. Since the organ class was much behind due to the death of Franck and the switching of maîtres, Widor had students take supplementary classes twice a week in the evening at Cavaillé-Coll’s firm. He began the work of correcting the imperfections of technique by showing the students the proper position of the body at the console and that of the hands on the keyboard. Students were compelled to work in detail all the manual and pedal exercises in Lemmens’ method, though it was not pleasant, including the scales. The latter, with some modifications in pedaling, had to be learned by heart so well that Widor could ask students to play any one of them and in any tempo he chose. The early part of this strict training was quite painful for them, but, having understood the necessity for the reform, the students persevered, and progressed rapidly.

Widor was also anxious to expose the students to the riches of the organ repertoire, requiring each student to learn and to bring to class a new piece each week. He said to them: “I do not see why the organist should be the only artist exempt from the necessity of knowing the entire literature of the instrument he plays.” Widor strove for widening the students’ artistic scope and insisted on the study of music in all different genres. Once a month, in one of the improvisation classes, he introduced students to the different symphonic forms, starting with their origins—Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and passing through Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, arriving at the contemporary

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60 Ibid., 45-49.
61 Ibid., 52.
62 Ibid., 57-58.
63 Ibid., 44.
In comparing Franck’s teaching of improvisation and fugue with Widor’s, Vierne wrote:

The former [Franck] applied himself above all to detail: melodic invention, harmonic discoveries, subtle modulations, and elegance of design, in short, to all which touched the domain of purely musical expression. The latter [Widor], on the contrary, brought the main part of his effort to bear upon construction, logical development, the formal side. Curiously enough, however, Franck was more strict in fugue than Widor. It was Reicha who had taught Franck the technique. He allowed liberties, of course, but they had to be strictly justified by the logic of the lines. The examples that Widor gave us often departed from strict counterpoint and did not fail to surprise us.65

In spite of the difficulty of the task that Widor imposed on the students in his organ class, they nevertheless succeeded. When the June examination came round for admission to the concours, the students had made definite progress. Six of them were selected for the competition in July. As expected Tournemire won the first prize and Vierne was awarded the accessit.66 Widor was impressed by Vierne’s “photographic memory” of themes while improvising, and he offered to give Vierne supplementary private lessons in organ and composition, while refusing any fee. He told Vierne:

There are some things of pure craftsmanship that I will teach you, since you are not taking the composition class. I will introduce you to chamber music, little performed at the Conservatory, to symphonic music, for which you seem born, to musical prosody, to lyric declamation, to orchestration. . . . The simple virtuoso seems to me too little to satisfy your curiosities. I have a conviction that you are called to produce: would you not be tempted, for example, to write some beautiful symphonies for organ? They would benefit from your particular aesthetic created by Franck and from the

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64 Ibid., 51.
65 Ibid., 50-51.
66 Ibid., 68-69.
organistic discoveries that I have sown in my eight symphonies.\textsuperscript{67}

Vierne began meeting with Widor on three evenings of each week. When the material of the lesson was exhausted, Widor would read to him works on music history, biographies, analytical studies, chronologies, and music's evolution from antiquity.\textsuperscript{68} Widor, being a man of wide and profound learning, further encouraged Vierne to study Greek and Latin, French literature and art history. Out of these sessions there developed a mutual respect and strong friendship which was to last throughout the lives of the two men.

A few days after the July concours, Vierne was invited to visit Widor's organ loft at Saint-Sulpice where the latter had been organist since January, 1870. He recalled:

How moving it was. I have never forgotten the first impression... with five manuals decked 118 draw-knobs of which 100 were real stops,... I had never imagined the complication of its means for producing color. When I saw the marvelous working of the monster docilely obeying the precise motion of its master, I thought I must be watching some phantasmagoria and said to myself that it would never be possible for me to command such a colossal machine with that extraordinary tranquility. Six months later I was to face the difficulty I had judged insurmountable, and in a few months, thanks to the judicious advice of the Maître, the awe-inspiring instrument would become familiar to me.\textsuperscript{69}

At the beginning of the school year in October, 1991, Widor arranged for Vierne to teach technique, plainsong accompaniment, improvisation, and fugue to the auditors in the class, to prepare them for admission as regular students. "You save me time by allowing me to go more deeply into questions of style." Widor said to Vierne, and added: "One must understand two, three, and four times what one is teaching, and you will be obliged to search for perfection so that the examples you give

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Ibid.}, 167-168.
\textsuperscript{69} Crawford, \textit{Mes Souvenirs}, 70-71.
will be unquestionable."\(^{70}\)

In February of 1892, Vierne was again chosen by Widor to be his assistant at Saint-Sulpice. Tournemire, who had held this position since the preceding year, was just named titulaire at Saint-Médard.\(^{71}\) For Vierne, the joy did not come without terror:

I was certainly happy. Never would I have dared to dream of such an honor or of such an artistic pleasure. But the manipulation of the colossus seemed to me an almost insurmountable difficulty. I confessed this to the Maître, who contented himself with teasing me and smiling: "I won’t drop you in the deep water before having taught you to swim. . . . I shall explain to you everything that might have left some doubt in your mind."\(^{72}\)

During the first month of apprenticeship, Widor remained at Vierne’s side, teaching him how to utilize the resources of the giant instrument. He also took Vierne to his home, giving him lectures on special style required for playing the monumental organ. Vierne took Widor’s advice seriously. He went to the organ loft as often as he could and practiced on the organ diligently.\(^{73}\) One year later he conquered this “insurmountable colossus”:

What reflections and meditations at home in the evening after my visits to the organ loft of Saint-Sulpice! I confess that I often sinned through envy, comparing my physical structure with Widor’s. However, I left from these encounters with my self resolved to approach as closely as I could that perfection of instrumental performance, no matter at what cost of special effort to adapt my own means to the task in sight. And I was eager to justify the choice and confidence of my Maître by doing my best in this office with which he had charged me. I was often timid, frequently awkward, and many times nervous before I felt that I had mastered that enormous machine. However, a year later it was accomplished, and Widor would often ask me to play a movement from one of his

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 72.
\(^{71}\) Ibid., 73.
\(^{72}\) Ibid., 73-74.
\(^{73}\) Ibid., 74-75.
symphonies when he wanted to go and listen to it in the nave.\textsuperscript{74}

One day in May of 1892, after Vierne’s failure in an unfair competition for the nomination of organist at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, due to certain intrigues and duplicity and the indecent deal between the organ builder and the parish priest, Widor comforted Vierne and authorized him to use the title “Assistant Organist of Saint-Sulpice” in public.\textsuperscript{75} Vierne, however, did not take the title but honored himself with one that showed more deference to his Maître, “Assistant to Charles-Marie Widor at the great organ of Saint-Sulpice.”\textsuperscript{76}

Vierne had another disappointment in the concours of 1892, although his performances in both improvisation and repertoire were perfect, the first prize eluded him again. Vierne was the victim of the resentment against Widor among some of the faculty members of the Conservatory.\textsuperscript{77} Members of the jury were not pleased with Widor and allegedly sought to frustrate him by denying his best student, Vierne, the first prize which he merited. Vierne was outraged: “This time I was deeply grieved, for I had had the feeling of complete success in all the tests. I wanted to give up and fight right then, . . .”\textsuperscript{78}

But Widor, aware of these machinations on the part of his colleagues and never uttering evil words against them, consoled and encouraged Vierne in spite of his own disappointment:

What seems to you today, with good reason, an injustice is perhaps a blessing for you. You will probably never have a better competitive examination, but a prolonged stay in the class will be profitable from a much more important point of view than that of obtaining the coveted diploma. You will develop a critical sense that is always lacking in those who have come out too soon. Your double career as

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 75-76.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 76-77.
\textsuperscript{77} Cantrell, “Louis Vierne,” 44.
\textsuperscript{78} Crawford, Mes Souvenirs, 79.
a virtuoso and professor will not suffer by it, believe me.\textsuperscript{79}

At the reopening of the class at the beginning of October 1892, there occurred an event of considerable importance to the artistic development of Vierne and his fellow students. In his memories Vierne wrote:

I mean the discovery of Bach's chorales. I say "discovery," and this is not an exaggeration, as you may judge for yourselves. At the first class in performance Widor remarked with some surprise that since his arrival at the Conservatory not one of us had brought in one of the celebrated chorales. For my part I was acquainted with three of them, published in Braille in the edition that Franck had prepared for our school [Institution Nationale]. They had seemed to me to have no technical difficulties and I had paid no further attention to them. My classmates did not even know that they existed. On looking through the music cabinet where there were several books in the Richault edition we discovered three volumes, two of preludes and fugues and one of chorales, the latter completely untouched, its leaves uncut. The \textit{Maître} spent the entire class time playing these pieces to us, and we were bowled over. The most overwhelming part of the giant's organ works was suddenly revealed to us. We all set to work on them at once, and for three months nothing else was heard in class. We all played chorales at the examination in January, and the surprise of the jury was no less great than our own had been. Upon leaving the hall I heard Ambroise Thomas say to Widor: "What music! Why didn't I know that forty years ago? It ought to be the Bible of all musicians, and especially of organists."\textsuperscript{80}

In 1893, Vierne played a group of twelve of Bach's chorales in the concert hall of the Institution Nationale. Marty was inspired to begin playing Bach chorales at his church and had his students in the Institution study them too.\textsuperscript{81}

In the 1893 \textit{concours}, the same political intrigue denied Vierne the first prize once again, but this time Vierne, not giving up easily, accepted his fate philosophically. Although he failed to win the first prize for three

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}, 85-86.
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.}, 86.
consecutive years, Vierne made impressive strides both technically and musically under Widor's tutelage. Widor encouraged him and assured him that for the fruits of these labors he would be compensated in the future.\textsuperscript{82}

In 1893 Widor moved to a new apartment where Gabriel Cavaillé-Coll, son of Aristide Cavaillé-Coll installed for him a charming little organ with nine stops.\textsuperscript{83} It was there that Widor continued to give Vierne free private lessons, for which Vierne recalled:

He had me study his last four symphonies. These lessons continued even after I left the Conservatoire. I received in them a complete instruction in composition and instrumentation and perfected my technique in writing and improvisation. Until 1907 I did not write a page without showing it to the Maître.\textsuperscript{84}

Before the following year's concours, Ambroise Thomas (1811-1896), then director of the Conservatory, warned the jury that he was aware of the cabal against Widor's students, and he threatened to annul the judgment if he perceived any prejudice.\textsuperscript{85} Thus it was finally in 1894 that Vierne unanimously received the elusive first prize with felicitations of the jury. At the ceremony Vierne received the diploma from the hands of Camille Saint-Saëns.

Two days later Widor had Vierne officially appointed as his teaching assistant at the Conservatory, a position he was to hold for seventeen years. From this position he was to exert a profound influence on an entire generation of organist-composers, including his brother René Vierne (1878-1917), Joseph Bonnet (1884-1944), Marcel Dupré (1886-1971), and Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979).

With the first prize Vierne launched an exciting and rewarding concert career that lasted over forty years with some 1,750 recitals.\textsuperscript{86} He

\textsuperscript{82}Ibid., 87-88.
\textsuperscript{83}Ochse, Organists and Organ Playing, 191.
\textsuperscript{84}Crawford, Mes Souvenirs, 87.
\textsuperscript{85}Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{86}Young, Life and Work, 11.
premiered two works by Widor: the first was the *Troisième Symphonie pour orgue et orchestra* in November 1894 for the dedication of Victoria Hall in Geneva, with Vierne at the organ and Widor conducting the performance; the second was *Symphonie gothique* which took place in 1895 in Caën, several months prior to Widor's own performance of the work in public.\(^{87}\)

While still a student at the Conservatory, Vierne composed several works, including the *Allegretto* in b minor, Op. 1, for organ, and the *Quatour à cordes*, Op. 12. The *Allegretto* was Vierne's first published organ work, appearing in 1894 *L’Orgue moderne* (by Henry Lemoine et Cie.), an album featuring the compositions of Widor’s students.\(^{88}\)

In February of 1896, Ambroise Thomas fell ill and died in March. His death was followed by a reorganization of the Conservatory. Théodore Dubois (1837-1924) was appointed director, whereupon Widor succeeded him as professor of composition. Widor recommended Alexandre Guilmant as his own successor, on the condition that he retain Vierne as his teaching assistant in the organ class. Guilmant was happy to agree to this arrangement, and he was duly appointed professor of organ.

Guilmant was probably the best-known organist in Paris at the time. Like Widor, he was a *protégé* of Lemmens, having been *titulaire* at La Trinité since 1871, and having initiated in 1878 a distinguished series of organ concerts at the Palais du Trocadéro. In 1894 he joined Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931) and Charles Bordes (1863-1909) to establish La Schola Cantorum in Paris, and taught organ there ever since. As the organ professor at the Conservatory he maintained the pedagogical order established by his predecessor, followed his method and procedure, and "imitated Widor's example, carefully monitored by the latter's disciple and acknowledged informant, Vierne."\(^{89}\)

\(^{87}\) *Ibid.*, 12.

\(^{88}\) *Ibid*.

\(^{89}\) Ochse, *Organists and Organ Playing*, 195.
Good Père Guilmant was certainly a professor in the full sense of the word: integrity, conscience, desire to accomplish a work—he had these qualities which mark the true pedagogue, together with an indisputable love for his profession and a great devotion to his pupils.  

... He was a man who knew his profession thoroughly; he had absolute integrity, was a conscientious research scholar, and hard-working honest man, and especially good-hearted. I was to work with him for fifteen years, and not for a day or an hour did the least trouble cloud the close friendship between us. 

... I profited inestimably from my collaboration with Guilmant. His vast experience, his good sense, his profound knowledge of the profession, and also his wisdom, were guides on which I could rely with maximum security. We saw eye to eye, inspired by absolute mutual confidence and by our supreme ambition to see our school rise and send forth its rays abroad. I have never known a man whose friendship was more dependable than that of the Maître. No one has shown a more enthusiastic love for his profession. He devoted his life to it and practiced it like a priest. After Widor, and like the latter, he cultivated in his pupils a perfection in instrumental technique. Like Widor he also very often gave the example at the keyboard, and I believe in the effectiveness of this method. One is more impressed by such a demonstration than by all the verbal theories in the world. Those of his numerous pupils who are still living can testify to the perfection of such instruction. 

During his years as the professor of organ at the Conservatory, Guilmant, after consultation with Vierne, made some changes in the examination requirements, which were to replace the outmoded plainchant harmonization with one of more valid style and to make some modifications in the structure of fugue improvisation. The plainchant harmonization would no longer be note against note, "but in a broader style, admitting melodic ornaments, such as embellishments and passing 

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90 Crawford, Mes Souvenirs, 96.
91 Ibid., 93.
92 Ibid., 107-108.
notes, with chords being reserved only for the principal notes." And in fugue, for the construction of episodes, he required that "the imitations be given strettot-like treatment and be built on a definite tonal plan... The pedal point on the dominant was abolished before the beginning of the strettot, but took place during the strettot in order to support the true strettot." Guilmant's knowledge of the intricacies of organ design and construction benefited Vierne with a thorough understanding of organ registration: Certainly the greatest thing he did for us was to draw our attention to the study and rational use of the timbres. He was a colorist of the first order. He knew with infallible certainty the appropriateness of each organ stop and the sonorous reactions resulting from their combinations. I often walked with him after class to the Gare Montparnasse, where he took the train for Meudon. During these walks he expatiated endlessly on the question of color, which fired his imagination. His broad experience, acquired during an unusual career as a performer, permitted him to make a host of observations which were of great benefit to me, and thanks to this I had auditory pleasures of which I keep undying memories.

Guilmant valued Vierne's assistance at the Conservatory, and confidently left him in charge of the organ class during his concert tours. Vierne meanwhile continued as Widor's assistant at Saint-Sulpice, and took on himself the role of maintaining the tradition of Franck and Widor in the organ class:

From the time that Widor left his class and had named Guilmant, I served as liaison officer between them; that is to say that I kept my dear Maître informed of all that was being done in his former course. We discussed it at the lunch I had every week at Foyot's with the illustrious organist of Saint-Sulpice. From this triple collaboration emerged a solidly grounded doctrine of instruction which was to form the most brilliant generation of artists

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93 Ibid., 99
94 Ibid., 95.
95 Ibid., 96-97.
that our country has given birth to since the end of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{96}

As a teacher, Vierne remained extremely faithful to the tradition of French organ symphony which transmitted through Franck, Widor, and Guilmant, especially as it related to the symphonic organ which was built by Cavaillé-Coll. According to Vierne's conception, the tradition of French organ symphony should not attempt to supplant the orchestral tradition because the organ lacked the full capacity to imitate the orchestra, but should seek to utilize judiciously the expressive resources of the best organs available.\textsuperscript{97} Inspired by the example and encouragement given by Widor, Vierne began the composition of his \textit{Première Symphonie pour orgue}, Op. 14 during the summer of 1898. Completed in the following year, it was dedicated to Guilmant, who performed it with great enthusiasm both at the Trocadéro and in America during his last concert tour there.\textsuperscript{98}

It was also in July of 1898, when Vierne traveled to Caën to be present at the baptism of Charles Mutin's daughter\textsuperscript{99}, for whom he served as godfather, that he became captivated by a lovely girl, Arlette Taskin, the daughter of a renowned baritone and a singer herself. Although Vierne had planned to remain a bachelor, he now found himself attracted by the prospect of sharing his life with another musician. The engagement was announced on October 8, Vierne's twenty-eighth birthday, and the marriage took place on April 20 of the following year. The religious ceremony was held at Saint-Sulpice two days later, with the presence of his mother Josephine Vierne, his mother-in-law Sophie-Louise Taskin, Charles Mutin (who had succeeded Aristide as the director of the Cavaillé-Coll

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Ibid.}, 105.
\textsuperscript{97} Louis Vierne, "J. S. Bach et l'école d'orgue contemporaine," \textit{Revue Rhénane} (Dec. 1, 1921), 953.
\textsuperscript{98} Crawford, \textit{Mes Souvenirs}, 113.
\textsuperscript{99} Charles Mutin had his apprenticeship with Aristide Cavaillé-Coll as an organ-builder and voicer, and succeeded his master as the director of the firm after Cavaillé-Coll's death in 1899.
firm), Guilmant and others. Widor played the organ at the wedding ceremony.\textsuperscript{100} Immediately following the ceremony the wedding party adjourned to the Cavaillé-Coll shop, where a banquet was set for the celebration of the newlyweds.\textsuperscript{101} For his wife Vierne composed the \textit{Trois Mélodies}, Op. 13, and during the Summer 1899 he made sketches for the \textit{Messe solennelle}, Op. 16, which was completed in the following year.

\textsuperscript{100} Young, \textit{Life and Wok}, 24-25.
\textsuperscript{101} Cantrell, "Louis Vierne," 44.
4. NOTRE-DAME

The year 1900 was destined to bring another profound change in Vierne’s life. Eugène Sergent (1829-1900), who was then seventy-one years old and had been organist of Notre-Dame-de-Paris for fifty-three years, was stricken with stomach cancer in February. The cathedral had to find an organist to substitute for the incumbent during his sickness. When the Notre-Dame chapter asked Widor to suggest an interim replacement, he recommended Vierne. Widor strongly urged Vierne to take the opportunity, saying to him:

If I were considering only my interest, I would not propose this to you, because you are accustomed to my organ. But we must consider the future, and there is every reason to believe that Sergent will not be able to return to his post. It would seem to me that the title of organist of Notre-Dame, carried by an artist determined to restore its prestige, should tempt you. I see there a very strong card for the advancement of your career. You must accept it.\(^{102}\)

Although reluctant to leave his position at Saint-Sulpice, Vierne finally agreed to take up the interim appointment at Notre-Dame. Vierne found out beforehand the details of the services and things peculiar to the cathedral from the choirmaster and the choir organist, got the specifications of the organ from Mutin, and learned all of these by heart in the few days preceding the Sunday.

I arrived, on the whole, well-prepared, but I feared certain errors that could result from my habits at Saint-Sulpice. Heaven preserved me, and everything went without a hitch. . . .

For the first time I had the entire instrument at my command. I was able to begin exploring its resources. . . . What nobility! What intensity! What fresh timbre in each stop! A marvel of smoothness, of proportion, and of distinction!\(^{103}\)

As it was foreseen, Sergent died several weeks after Vierne’s first

\(^{102}\) Crawford, Mes Souvenirs, 167.
\(^{103}\) Ibid., 167-168.
Sunday as substitute. Approached by ninety-eight applicants for the vacant position of organist at Notre-Dame, about ten of them rather serious, the chapter of the cathedral decided that only a competitive audition was capable of cutting short the intrigues of all kinds into which the canons, the chancellery, and parish clergy were being drawn by some of the applicants. A jury composed of recognized artists was formed, and the conditions of the contest were announced in the newspaper:

1. accompaniment and embellishment of a liturgical chant;
2. improvisation of a fugue on a given subject;
3. free improvisation on a given theme;
4. performance from memory of an organ composition drawn by lot from a list of five pieces submitted by the candidate.

The order in which candidates appeared would be drawn by lot at the last moment, and each list of submitted repertoire would carry the number of the candidate, who would remain anonymous.  

Such a formidable competition would test the greatest organist. It was no wonder that when these conditions were made known, only five men maintained their candidacy. Vierne was hesitant and contemplated withdrawal:

I had been married a year and was father of a month-old son. My situation as a teacher was entirely satisfactory, and my concert tours were going well. I was still young and active, and my position as assistant at the Conservatory could not be put in jeopardy. At the outset, I was risking a great deal, and furthermore, a position had just been offered me by the Curé at Saint-Pierre-de-Neuilly. An organ of fifty-two ranks had recently been installed there. He offered me a salary double that of Notre-Dame, and the extra services promised to be very profitable in that new and already well-populated district.

Widor intervened and exhorted Vierne to present himself in the

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104 Ibid., 170-171.
105 Ibid.
competition. He reminded Vierne of his artistic ambition for restoring the
great tradition of Notre-Dame, which had been lost since Daquin’s death
and eclipsed for a century, and assured him that his training was such that a
good chance stood for him to win.

Though torn by doubts, I finally yielded to Widor, of course, as
always! I had not done badly on other such occasions. The die was
cast, my confidence returned despite criticism by those around me,
who thought that I was unwise to put the future of my family at
risk.\textsuperscript{106}

In order to prepare for the competition, the candidates were
authorized to practice on the organ for eight hours. Only two hours were
given to Vierne because he had played on the instrument since February. It
was only enough for him to set the registration of the works he had
proposed to play for the jury. In the meantime he practiced some more at
home in the evening, for the daytime was filled with his teaching duties.\textsuperscript{107}

On Monday, May 21, the trial began at two o’clock in the afternoon.
The jury was chaired by Widor and included Guilmant, Gigout, Périhou,
Dallier, Deslandres and Abbé Geispitz. The chapter was represented by
Canon Pisani.\textsuperscript{108} After being ushered in unseen by the jury, Vierne was
told that the chant to be accompanied was \textit{Salve Regina}. Then he was
handed a fugue subject designed by Guilmant and a free theme by
Deslandres. From the repertoire list the jury drew by lot Bach’s \textit{Toccata
and Fugue in D minor}.\textsuperscript{109}

I felt that I had played well, but I refrained from trusting my
instinct alone. In 1892, I had experienced a great disappointment at
the Conservatory under the similar circumstances. After my
audition I went down into the church to listen to my rivals. Two
were excellent. That only increased my fear of failure.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ibid.}, 172.
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Ibid.}, 173.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Ibid.}, 172.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Ibid.}, 173.
After the competition, Widor announced the result, the jury giving first place unanimously to Vierne. Having been instructed about the regulations and his duties, and of the expectations in him from the church authority, Vierne replied with deep emotion: "I shall concentrate all my efforts to attain that end, no matter what it may cost me, if it pleases God, and for His glory and that of His Blessed Mother."\footnote{111}

Thirty seven years later, when Vierne recalled this event in his memoirs, he could honestly say that he had kept his solemn promise and stood on the dignity of a true artist, and that he had responded to God’s calling with an open heart and offered his humble service truthfully:

Speaking in this way, I scarcely suspected what persistence would be required, aside from all artistic question. I was still young and, truthfully, I was tempted by that task. Today I suppose if I had to start over again, I would do the same thing, for, after all, in spite of the obstacles, I have lived up to what was expected of me. I did it for God, for art, and for my country.\footnote{112}

Vierne began his duties on Thursday, May 24, Ascension Day.\footnote{113} He remained titulaire at Notre-Dame for the rest of his life. The years at Notre-Dame brought him great fame as an organist and a composer of organ music. In addition to the regular services and special feasts of the cathedral, he played a good number of national festivals, funerals and requiems for the famous men of France, and for other great religious ceremonies. Among the celebrated musicians who came to visit the cathedral in order to hear Vierne’s performance on the monumental organ were Glazounow, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Nikisch, Clémenceau, Lynwood Farnam, Humperdinck, Granados, and Siegfried Wagner.\footnote{114}

Shortly after his appointment at Notre-Dame, Vierne participated in two concert programs of the Exposition Universelle held in Paris during

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{111}{Ibid., 176.}
  \item \footnote{112}{Ibid.}
  \item \footnote{113}{Ibid.}
  \item \footnote{114}{Ibid., 179.}
\end{itemize}
the month of June. He performed Widor’s *Troisième Symphonie* for organ and orchestra in one concert, and played works by Bach, Saint-Saëns, Tournemire, Guilmant, Vierne, Franck, and Widor in an organ recital at the Trocadéro in which his wife also participated.\(^{115}\)

In 1902, Guilmant returned from a recital tour and discovered that during his absence the Cavaillé-Coll organ at La Trinité, where he was *titulaire*, had been altered without his prior knowledge and consent. The firm of Cavaillé-Coll was going to have this work done after Guilmant’s return, but the church authority had been persuaded to allow the builder Joseph Merklin (1819-1905) to begin the work immediately because he offered to do the job for substantially less money. The result was so poor that Guilmant refused to sign the letter of acceptance because so many unauthorized changes in the voicing had been affected. The church authority accused Guilmant of having a personal interest in the Cavaillé-Coll firm. Dismayed by the modifications to his beloved instrument and by the circumstances under which they had been made, Guilmant had no recourse but to resign. As a tribute to Guilmant, and in protest against the unfortunate affair, Vierne arranged for the chapter to name Guilmant as honorary organist of Notre-Dame. Gratefully, Guilmant continued to play occasionally at Notre-Dame for a number of years, substituting for Vierne when he was away on concert tours.\(^{116}\)

Vierne had enormous enthusiasm for the Notre-Dame organ, but in comparing it to its slightly larger counterpart at Saint-Sulpice he felt strongly that the *Récit* lacked sufficient power. At his behest, and with the advice of Guilmant, a plan of modification to the composition of the *Récit* was carried out in 1903-1904 by Charles Mutin,\(^{117}\) who replaced the 8’ Quintaton with an 8’ Diapason of lager scale, and the 8’ Clarinette with a *Fourniture V*.

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\(^{115}\) Young, *Life and Work*, 28.


\(^{117}\) *Ibid.*, 187-188.
Vierne began the composition of his *Deuxième Symphonie pour orgue*, Op. 20 in 1902. It was completed in 1903 and dedicated to Mutin. Vierne played the first audition of this symphony at the Société Nationale on February 21, 1903, which drew praise from Debussy:

Most of the musicians that we respect and those whom our children will probably love, were heard here for the first time. One can always discover there something of interest; it is thus that on Saturday we heard extracts of an organ symphony by M. Vierne, where the most generous musicianship was united with ingenious discoveries of the special sonority of this instrument. The venerable J. S. Bach, father of us all, would have been pleased with M. Vierne.¹¹⁸

The compositions Vierne produced from 1903 through 1906 were *Praxinoë*, Op. 22, a symphonic legend for orchestra, soloists, and chorus on the libretto by Vierne’s cousin Ambroise Colin, *Sonate pour piano et violon*, Op. 23, and *Trois mélodies*, Op. 26. The sonata was composed for and dedicated to the famous violinist Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931).¹¹⁹

In May of 1906 Vierne experienced a severe setback: he fell into a pit while crossing the street and suffered a multiple fractures of his right leg and torn ligaments.¹²⁰ Vierne later referred to the accident as “the beginning of the catastrophes. . . for thirty years they have succeeded one another without interruption.”¹²¹ The injury was so serious that Vierne could not move until October. It was Dr. Heitz-Boyer who used a revolutionary new method of setting the bones that saved Vierne from amputation.¹²² The accident forced Vierne to relearn his pedal technique and not until December could he play the organ without occasional attacks of tremendous pain. It was during this time that Vierne became acquainted with Tiarko Richepin, a composition student at the Conservatory, who

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¹¹⁸ Young, *Life and Work*, 29-30; translation by Steven George Young.
¹¹⁹ Gavoty, *Vierne*, 300.
¹²¹ Ibid., 192.
¹²² Ibid., 199-200.
served as his driver, taking him to various places and appointments.\textsuperscript{123} Having barely recovered, in January 1907, Vierne was again stricken by typhoid fever, and nearly succumbed to the deadly disease. Vierne was not able to return to his organ loft until three months later.\textsuperscript{124}

In the meantime, his home life was deteriorating. The experience would be the source of much inner torment and bitterness for the rest of his life. One might be struck by the fact that Vierne had never mentioned his wife in his \textit{Journal} and \textit{Mes Souvenirs}. The emotional turmoil of these years was reflected in his \textit{Symphonie pour orchestre}, Op. 24, composed in 1907-1908 and dedicated to Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924). The epigraph on the score showed a poignant regret: "O that it could have been--clear days and summer nights."\textsuperscript{125} A divorce was granted on August 4, 1909, on the condition that he would not marry again.\textsuperscript{125} The eldest son, Jacques, was to live with him and the two younger children were allowed to stay with their mother. Vierne needed to have someone to help with his daily life. He relied on his elderly mother and more and more heavily on Jacques.\textsuperscript{127}


\textsuperscript{123}Young, \textit{Life and Work}, 31.
\textsuperscript{124}Crawford, \textit{Mes Souvenirs}, 200-201.
\textsuperscript{125}Cantrell, "Louis Vierne," 45.
\textsuperscript{126}Gavoty, \textit{Vierne}, 103.
\textsuperscript{127}Young, \textit{Life and Work}, 31.
\textsuperscript{128}ibid.
(1930), and *Ballade du désespéré pour ténor et orchestre ou piano*, Op. 61 (1931). Richepin performed many of his works on tour and in Paris, and Vierne was often her piano and organ accompanist. Richepin worked with him, traveled with him to America and throughout France, and accompanied him for the remainder of his life.

In 1909, Guilmant lost his wife, his most loving and most devoted companion. She had helped and sustained her husband during his outstanding career taking as her responsibility all of the material side of their activities. Vierne soon noticed that Guilmant's own health was weakening rapidly. At the end of January, 1911, Guilmant developed uremia. He left Vierne in charge of the organ class and never returned to the Conservatory again. In the meantime, Vierne's mother fell victim to the same sickness, and after a lengthy period of suffering she succumbed on March 25. Five days later Guilmant died.

The death of both beloved persons within such short time dealt two blows to Vierne. As if this were not enough, another blow was soon to follow. Guilmant had many times expressed publicly the desire and hope that Vierne should become his successor in the organ class. He saw in this the continuation of the tuition begun seventeen years earlier, and which had already given such astonishing proof of its excellence by the formation of a school of organists without rival in France and which commanded admiration abroad. Having virtually carried the job during the concert tours of Widor and Guilmant, and having served the organ class at the Conservatory so faithfully for nearly two decades, Vierne could reasonably have hoped to hold the position, but the Conservatory, acting against Guilmant's wishes, appointed Eugène Gigout (1844-1925) to the post of organ professor. In fact, Vierne was a victim of the tension between Widor, his mentor, and Gabriel Fauré, then the director of the Conservatory. Fauré had been angered by some remarks made by Widor to mutual friends, which might have been the cause for his opposition to
the appointment of Vierne, who was often called by Widor’s enemies “Widor junior.”¹²⁹ Fauré and Saint-Saëns persuaded Gigout, former student of Saint-Saëns and friend as well as classmate of Fauré from the École Niedermeyer, to take the position. Gigout turned down the offer initially, but changed his mind after being visited by Fauré and Saint-Saëns later in the year.¹³⁰ Vierne was extremely disappointed:

I then plunged into the depths of despair. My cherished dream for the last seventeen years was suddenly shattered and I was left unable to rouse myself, not knowing where to turn, my existence suddenly without purpose.¹³¹

In protest, Vierne resigned from his position as teaching assistant at the Conservatory. Vincent d’Indy, director of La Schola Cantorum, a rival institution to the Conservatory, offered Guilmant’s position at the school to Vierne. Vierne accepted the position on the advice of Widor, who, although he did not much care for d’Indy or La Schola Cantorum, wanted the organ tradition that he had established to be kept alive:

It is a post which will enable you to exert a good influence. I will spread the word that the place to go for the real organ tradition is the rue Saint-Jacques.¹³²

Vierne succeeded Guilmant as professor for the advanced organ course at La Schola Cantorum and remained there until 1934. As testified by André Fleury and Maurice Duruflé, many students in Gigout’s organ class at the Conservatory still went to seek Vierne’s tutelage, including Fleury and Duruflé themselves. Furthermore, during the period when Gigout was the organ professor at the Conservatory, most of the first-prize

¹³² Ibid.
bearers were those who had studied privately with Vierne. Vierne related this event later in his life:

I recovered from this set-back and have produced six organ symphonies and seven suites of organ pieces. As Widor forecast in 1911, my music is played all over the world. Another interesting thing: the Conservatory prizewinners (with a few exceptions) have remained my private pupils.

Meanwhile Widor continued to encourage Vierne’s activities in composition:

You are in full flow now. You must pursue your triple career wholeheartedly. Keep writing, because what is written will last. You will get plenty of performances: all your pupils will rally to your support and carry your name to the four corners of the earth. Everyone knows what a succession of artists you have created.

Out of this period came Vierne’s Sonate pour piano et violoncelle, Op. 27 (1911), which was dedicated to the world renowned cellist Pablo Casals, Troisième Symphonie pour orgue, Op. 28 (1911), and Vingt-quatre pièces en style libre pour orgue ou harmonium, Op. 31 (1913). The Third Organ Symphony, dedicated to Marcel Dupré (1886-1971), was composed during the summer of 1911 at Saint-Valéry-en-Caux, where Vierne was invited to spend vacation with the Dupré family. Dupré premiered the Third Symphony in the following year (1912). All those who heard the performance considered that it was Vierne’s best organ work to date, and the Adagio movement became an instant favorite. It was also in that year Vierne composed the Messe basse pour orgue ou harmonium, Op. 30

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135 Ibid.

136 Young, Life and Work, 33.
for and dedicated it to Marcel’s father, Albert Dupré, an organist too. Vierne’s relation with the Duprés, both father and son, can be traced back to 1896 when Dupré was still a child. In both the Journal and the Souvenirs Vierne had the recollection of their first encounter:

At the end of July, 1896, while we [Vierne and his brother René] were spending a few weeks in the country with friends at Saint-Valéry-en-Caux, my brother and I were seized by curiosity to see the organ in the church. It was a very old instrument, made up in a strange way, with an incomplete swell and a French pedal board. “Nothing could be done with that!” was our opinion, not without a certain regret.

On the following Sunday, attending High Mass, we were surprised to hear at the offertory Bach’s “Little” Fugue in G Minor—a rather difficult piece to perform, and hardly one for a beginner—played perfectly, with an excellent legato, exact articulation, and at the right tempo. We were quite intrigued and inquired about the name of the organist. For an answer, we were advised to wait at the entrance to the organ loft. We saw descending the stairs a man who had a slight limp, followed by a little boy dressed in a sailor suit, with a nice face, a direct look that was both sweet and intelligent, and an alert appearance without being forward. I went up to the gentleman, introduced myself, and asked who had played the offertory.

“My son,” he replied to me.
“That nice little man?”
“Yes, Sir.”
“How old is he?”
“He is just ten.”
“It is amazing, incredible! Not an error, and impeccable rhythm! And all that with a French pedal board. It is unheard of.”

I asked the father’s permission to kiss the child. He had stood slightly aside during that brief conversation. His father called him, and I congratulated him and kissed him on the forehead. He blushed when he learned who I was and looked at me with an expression marked by respect and curiosity.

“In September I am giving a concert at Rouen on the organ that Kricher has just built there. Do you want to come and bring that extraordinarily gifted child who will be a great organist if he has the right training?”

“With pleasure, Sir. I am flattered by your opinion of my son
and very honored by the attention you have shown him. I myself am the organist at the Immaculate-Conception in Elbeuf, and a pupil of Guilmant."

Thus I became acquainted with Marcel Dupré and his family.\textsuperscript{137}

Vierne spoke about the child to Guilmant after returning to Paris. The professor set forth an intensive program of studies for the young Dupré. Guilmant himself started the boy on the organ at thirteen, but before that he worked diligently with him at the piano, as well as on the subjects of solfège and harmony. Later Guilmant had Lazare Lévy prepare Dupré to enter Louis Diémer’s piano class at the Conservatory. The young student won first prize in piano in 1905. Also, Vierne worked with him on improvisation and prepared him to enter the organ class. In October 1905 Dupré became an official pupil in Guilmant’s class, and won the first prize in organ at his first concours.\textsuperscript{138} In addition he was a student of Widor’s composition class and won the first prize in fugue (1907) and the\textit{ Prix de Rome} in 1914. Dupré frequently substituted for Vierne at Notre-Dame during his absence from Paris, and he virtually replaced him during the years when Vierne was in Switzerland (1916-1920). He later became Widor’s assistant at Saint-Sulpice and succeeded the latter as titulaire in 1934. Dupré succeeded Gigout as professor of organ (1926-1954) at the Conservatory where he also served as one term of the director (1954-1956). The personal ties between Vierne and Dupré began to loosen during the twenties. There were many speculations about the problem in their relationship. G. Huntington Byles, an American organist who studied in Paris with both Dupré and Widor in the early thirties, suggested that Dupré had his first recital tour in London and he was advertised, wrongly, as organist of Notre-Dame, which was supposed to have caused the rift in the friendship between him and Vierne, for it misled Vierne to

\textsuperscript{137} Crawford, \textit{Mes Souvenirs}, 131-133.
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Ibid.}, 134-138.
get the idea that Dupré was trying to latch on to his position at the Notre-Dame.¹³⁹ Vierne’s oversensitive personality makes people tend to believe this theory. In a recent study, Steven G. Young has included a quite detailed discussion about this matter.¹⁴⁰

The passions aroused by the Conservatory affair gradually cooled down. Fauré admitted publicly that he had “lost his head in 1911,” and continued to send individual students to Vierne. Vierne, at the same time, wrote a biographical-analytical article on Fauré for L’Écho Musical.¹⁴¹ At the end of his Journal, Vierne related how they healed the rift:

He [Fauré] was sixty-nine, and I was forty-four; fundamentally, in spite of everything, our friendship had left me such memories that I could not resist. I then wrote to him, asking him never to make allusion to the Conservatory: “...no matter who is the director of the Conservatory...the person to whom I return with all my heart is Gabriel Fauré, the great artist, the premier musician of the day, the last flower of civilization, the Mediterranean all fertilized by Greece...” He replied to me with a short, emotional letter and asked me to call on him at the new Conservatory in the rue de Madrid. I went early in 1914 and found a man who had grown old, but in whom still burned the flame of art. In the course of our conversation, he confided to me that he had long suffered the same malady as Beethoven, but with the the complication that he almost always heard the bass a third above, and the treble a third lower; he had never told anyone of this and asked me to keep the secret. “You have had your revenge,” he said with a muffled and melancholy voice. Tears came to my eyes and, without replying, I embraced him for a long time. We talked over old memories, some exciting, some sad, some amusing; these cheered him up and we parted. I again took my place on the juries for accompaniment, piano, harmony, counterpoint, and fugue, and in 1915, I was on the harp jury, since he had selected my Rhapsodie for pedal harp as a piece for the concours.¹⁴²

The summer of 1914 was spent at La Rochelle where Vierne brought

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¹⁴⁰ Young, Life and Work, 37-39.
¹⁴² Vierne, Journal, 185.
out his *Quatrième Symphonie pour orgue*, Op. 32. The work was dedicated to William C. Carl (1865-1936), an American organist, student and disciple of Guilbert, and founder of the Guilbert Organ School in New York. Other compositions of this period along with the Fourth Symphony were *Psyché*, Op. 33, a symphonic poem for voice and orchestra based on the poem by Victor Hugo, and *Douze Préludes pour piano*, Op. 36. All these works were produced during a period which Gavoty referred to as “exceptionally creative and fertile despite Vierne’s anguish over World War I.”143 The Fourth Organ Symphony was not given its premiere in France until January 10, 1923, by the blind organist André Marchal at the Conservatory, nine years after its creation.144

In 1915 Vierne suffered his first attack of glaucoma, which threatened him with the prospect of total blindness. He could not be treated with the normal method because of his cataracts. Dr. Eperon, the Swiss oculist, had invented a new method of treatment. Hoping to heal his diseased eyes, Vierne decided to go to Switzerland and left Dupré in charge at Notre-Dame. Being so poor he had to sell all his possessions to go to Switzerland. There he spent five years, received another series of eye operations, and underwent the long and painful treatment. Not much information pertaining to these years is available. An unpublished dissertation in French by Brigitte de Leersnyder is based entirely upon Vierne’s letters and contains a great deal of information about Vierne’s time in Switzerland. It is hoped that this study will soon be made available to the public.145

Meanwhile the First World War was taking its tragic toll. Two members of Vierne’s family were casualties of the war: his son Jacques

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143 Gavoty, *Vierne*, 118-120.
144 Ibid., 302; Kasouf, *Organ Symphonies*, 117.
and brother René. During the period while he was in Switzerland, Vierne composed *Eros*, Op. 37 (1916), a symphonic poem for voice and orchestra or piano; *Spleens et Détresses*, Op. 38 (1916), ten melodies for voice and piano or orchestra; and *Silhouettes d’enfants*, Op. 43 (1918), a suite of five easy pieces for piano (both of these works were dedicated to Countess of Boisrouvray, a family friend, at whose estate Vierne stayed during this period); *Dal Vertice*, Op. 41 (1917), a lyrical ode for tenor solo and orchestra or piano, on lyrics by Gabriele d’Annunzio; *Quintette pour piano et cordes*, Op. 42 (1917), an intense work dedicated to the memory of his son Jacques, whose premature death was an unrelenting loss for Vierne; *Solitude*, Op. 44 (1918), a piano suite, written in memory of his beloved brother René, who was also an organist. René earned his first prize in Guilmant’s organ class in 1906, and wrote a few pieces in a style very similar to that of his brother. Vierne’s great feeling for him probably came from their shared musical experiences. Vierne mentioned him many times in his *Souvenirs*, and regarded him as one of the most brilliant organ pupils at the Conservatory and as his spiritual son.\textsuperscript{146}

Vierne did not compose any work for organ while in Switzerland, but he did commence to work on a treatise on organ playing. Unfortunately Vierne did not finish this project during his lifetime. The completed portion, together with some introductory remarks by Dr. Brigitte de Leersnyder, was published by La Société des Amis de l’Orgue in 1987 as a special issue of *L’Orgue*, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Vierne’s death. This organ method, although incomplete, is a very significant document for it reveals many aspects of Vierne’s aesthetics, offers much valuable information on his approaches to organ playing, and sheds much light on authentic interpretation of the organ works of that stylistic period in general, and on that of Vierne’s own organ works in particular. It is for this very reason I have translated the entire

existent material of this method into English to form one part of the present study.
5. THE LATE YEARS

Upon returning to Paris from Switzerland in 1920, the fragile and impoverished Vierne was faced with the exigent condition of the Notre-Dame organ and the task of rebuilding his shattered life. He found the organ in an alarming state of disrepair: the flood of 1910 had had unhappy consequences for the instrument, and the damage was further intensified by severe weather due to the removal of the stained-glass windows during wartime. Vierne immediately began to raise money for the necessary repairs, and struggled to materialize a complete restoration. Many friends from France, England, and America sent funds to support the restoration project, but he was to wait twelve years to see his attempts accomplished.\textsuperscript{147} It was only through the generosity of some of Vierne’s British admirers that the installation of an electric blower to the organ was made possible in 1924.\textsuperscript{148} Meanwhile, the American organists Edward Shippen Barnes and Lynnwood Farnam were requesting contributions to a fund to aid Vierne with his personal needs. In France, benefit recitals were given by Bonnet, Dupré and others.\textsuperscript{149} Vierne’s associate and friend, Madeleine Richépin, worked rigorously to have Vierne’s compositions published as well as to obtain pupils and to arrange performances for Vierne to play.\textsuperscript{150} It was Richépin, too, who copied out the manuscripts of Vierne’s organ method, obviously with the intention of promoting Vierne’s artistic career and activities in every aspect.

In March 1921 and September 1922 Vierne undertook two tours of Germany and performed in many cities, including Bonn, Wiesbaden, Coblenz, Treves, Cologne, Mayence, Langenschwalbach, Spire, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 205; Young, \textit{Life and Work}, 39.
\item \textsuperscript{148} Cantrell, “Louis Vierne,” 46.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Young, \textit{Life and Work}, 40.
\end{itemize}
others.\textsuperscript{151} Subsequent foreign tours took him to Belgium (March, 1923, and later in January of 1929), Netherlands (March, 1923), England (January, 1924, and again in 1925), United States and Canada (January-April, 1927), and Switzerland (April, 1929). Upon realizing that the public was interested in his music, due to the efforts of Madeleine Richepin, Vierne renewed his interest in performing locally. In France, and particularly in Paris, he appeared in numerous performances and planned many events in which his various compositions were featured. Through his works, his performances, and his teaching, Vierne’s fame as a virtuoso organist, an unrivaled improviser, and the best organ composer of the time was soon spread to every corner of the world.

In 1923, Vierne completed his \textit{Cinquième Symphonie pour orgue}, Op. 47. It was dedicated to his protégé Joseph Bonnet, the virtuoso organist of Saint-Eustache in Paris, and was scheduled for a premiere by its dedicatee. Bonnet, however, did not achieve this task on time. Not wishing to disappoint his beloved \textit{Maître} nor running the risk of his reputation, he declined to perform the symphony shortly before the concert started, announcing he was sick, a “diplomatic sickness” as André Fleury called it.\textsuperscript{152} Bonnet did eventually perform the symphony, but it was not until four years later in December of 1928. Vierne’s biographer, Gavoty, claims that this symphony was premiered by George Ibos in May of 1934.\textsuperscript{153} But Steven G. Young in his recent study proved that at least two early performances occurred before that date; in addition to that of Bonnet, one was in 1825 at the church of Saint-Vincent in Rouen played by Henri Beaucamp, and another was on November 27 of the same year by Guy Weitz at La Schola Cantorum.\textsuperscript{154}

Among Vierne’s foreign concert tours, the 1927 American tour was

\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Ibid.}, 174-175.
\textsuperscript{152} Christiansen, “Hommage à Louis Vierne,” 63;
\textsuperscript{153} Gavoty, \textit{Vierne}, 310.
\textsuperscript{154} Young, \textit{Life and Work}, 44.
his most extensive and most successful one. It was arranged by Alexander Russell of Princeton University. Attempting to raise the necessary money for restoring the dilapidated organ at Notre-Dame, Vierne departed in January and was welcomed in New York at a reception and dinner hosted by the American Guild of Organists. The tour lasted approximately ten weeks. Vierne composed the first set of the *Pièces de Fantaisie*, Op. 51 for his American tour. On February 1, Vierne made his American debut at Wanamaker Auditorium in New York. The program included works by Bach (*Toccata and Fugue in D minor*, and two chorale preludes), and works by himself (*Pièces de Fantaisie*, and movements from his organ symphonies). He played subsequently in Philadelphia, Boston, Quebec, Montreal, Cleveland, Ottawa, Toronto, Buffalo, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Chicago, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Victoria, Seattle, Portland, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Denver, Louisville, Rochester, and Utica. He was heard in fifty solo recitals or recitals with voice (with Madeleine Richepin, the vocalist), eight chamber music programs, and six orchestral concerts. The repertoire of the solo recital was drawn almost exclusively from the works of Bach, Franck, and Widor, as well as his own compositions.\(^{155}\) In two Chicago Symphony Orchestra performances (March 4 and 5), Vierne assisted in a program which included his *Symphonic Piece for Organ and Orchestra* consisting of three movements from his first three symphonies for organ (*Scherzo* from the second symphony, *Adagio* from the third symphony, and *Final* from the first symphony). He also improvised on a submitted theme and, for the encore, played the *Toccata* from Widor’s *Fifth Organ Symphony*.\(^{156}\)

Vierne described the tour himself:

I traveled for 87 days, covering 40,000 kilometers by train, 460 tours in transit, spending 28 nights in Pullman cars... 70,000 Americans attended my concerts. I played in Philadelphia an organ


\(^{156}\) Young, *Life and Work*, 182.
of 240 stops—"the best in the world, of course"—in New York an instrument of 150 stops. In addition, I traveled 16,000 kilometers on the ocean in going to America and returning. I add that the welcome of the Americans moved me greatly; in Chicago, notably, I was recalled to the stage ten times, but I apologize for not being able to give the extra number of ovations.157

During the course of his American tour, Vierne premiered the first set of his Pièces de Fantaisie and completed the second set, Op. 53. The remaining two sets of the Pièces de Fantaisie, Op. 54 and Op. 55, were composed after his return back to France. Many pieces from these last three sets were subsequently dedicated to his American friends, notably Seth Bingham (Lamento), Charles Courboin (Feux follets), Ernest M. Skinner (Clair de lune), Alexander Russel (Toccata), Rodman Wanamaker (Dédicace), and Edward Shippen Barnes (Cathédrales), a way to express his gratitude for the hospitality he received from them during his tour.

Madeleine Richepin accompanied Vierne on his American tour. She not only assisted in working the stop changes and taking cues for orchestral concerts, but also performed vocal music. Some of the songs in their joint recitals were written by Vierne. Moreover, she copied much of Vierne's music for publication, and transcribed much music from Braille into regular notation, in addition to serving in a secretarial capacity. After returning to France, she continued to assist Vierne in his life and work. Even after she was married in 1931 to Dr. Lucien Mallet, which disappointed Vierne, they remained friends. Later Vierne and Dr. Mallet became close friends too. Madeleine and her husband continued to take care of Vierne until his death.

During the American tour Vierne was greatly impressed by the organ consoles that were built in the United States. The tour renewed his hope for the restoration of the organ at Notre-Dame. The Aeolian-Skinner organ company planned to design a new console for the Parisian

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157 Gavoty, Vierne, 149; Cantrell, "Louis Vierne," 46.
cathedral. Many of his American friends organized fund-raising events for the new console as well as for the project of restoration. The collected funds were sent directly to the church of Notre-Dame. Vierne had no knowledge of the disbursement of the funds. It is possible that some of these funds were spent for other church functions, and that Vierne was simply told another story. In *Mes Souvenirs*, he wrote:

In July, after returning to France, I learned that the subscription was being filled rapidly and that an expert was being sent to determine the amount necessary to restore and enlarge the instrument according to the indication in my report. The expert came. He was the organist of King’s Chapel in Boston. He visited me in the organ loft, and we made an appointment for the following Thursday. The day came, I went to the church, and nobody arrived. I have learned since through American friends that the expert, circumvented by a third party, had not taken the trouble to verify what he had been told, and had gone away convinced that I had considerably exaggerated things and that the French could very well take care of the restoration of the organ without resorting to help from abroad.  

Most of Vierne’s final compositions were written between 1928 and 1931. The *Soirs étrangers pour piano et violoncelle*, Op. 56, was composed in 1928, all its five movements being separately dedicated to various individuals, including Paul Bazelaire, who, together with Vierne’s biographer Bernard Gavoty, premiered the work shortly after the composer’s death, on May 17, 1938, at the *Revue Musicale*.  

The *Les Angélus, pour chant et orgue ou orchestre*, Op. 57 (1929) and the *Quatre poèmes grecs, pour chant et harpe ou piano*, Op. 60 (1930) were both composed for and dedicated to Madeleine Richépin, who sang the voice part. Together with the composer she gave the former work its first performance at the cathedral Saint-Sernin in Toulouse on February 2,
1932, and also with Maurice Duruflé’s assistance on the piano, premiered the later work at the Société Nationale in the same year.

Vierne’s last organ symphony, *Sixième Symphonie pour orgue*, Op. 59, was written in 1930 during his summer vacation at Menton. According to Gavoty, Vierne composed this work “facing the sea, bathed in sunshine, intoxicating himself with the spray of the Mediterranean, then, completely permeated with the Latin spirit and the delicate perfume of the blissful beach, returned to his paper, haunted by the play of the wave.” The symphony was dedicated to the memory of Lynnwood Farnam (1885-1930), the brilliant American organist and one of his closest foreign friends, whose death was a great personal blow to Vierne: “[The dedication was made] in witness of my profound admiration for the great musician and the incomparable virtuoso prematurely vanished in the middle of his glory.” The premiere of the sixth organ symphony was given by Maurice Duruflé, the most promising pupil of Vierne, in 1934 (June 3) on the then newly restored organ at Notre-Dame. Both the composition and the performance were warmly received by the enthusiastic audience and highly praised by the reviewer of Les Amis de l’Orgue. To Duruflé Vierne dedicated his *Matines*, the first piece of the *Triptyque pour orgue*, Op. 58 (1931).

The *Messe basse pour le défunt*, Op. 62 (1934) is Vierne’s last completed composition, and also his last composition for organ. Vierne himself premiered this work in May of the following year at Saint-Thérèse-de-l’Enfant-Jésus. This low Mass is Vierne’s only finished work after the year of 1931. In that year Madeleine Richepin married Dr. Lucien Mallet and Vierne poured out his feelings in his *Ballade du

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165 Gavoty, *Vierne*, 310.
désespéré, poème lyrique pour ténor et orchestre, and claimed that this to be his final composition by signing the work “Op. 61 et dernière.” There is an inscription on the manuscript, dated October 16, 1931, which reads:

Behold my task is finished
My long and patient effort
Enclosing my harsh destiny
With a supreme song of death.

After years of fund-raising recitals, enough money had been raised by 1931 to undertake the restoration of the organ at Notre-Dame. Vierne wished the work to be entrusted to Victor Gonzalez, whom he considered the best voicer of the day. But following the intervention of Mutin the project was assigned to Beuchet and Lauffray, the new directors of the Cavaillé-Coll firm. The work was completed under Vierne’s painstaking supervision in 1932. In this restoration a 16’ Violoncelle and an 8’ Bourdon were added to the pedal, an 8’ Flûte to the Grand-Choeur, and a Cymbale III to the Récit. In the Positif, the Plein-jeu replaced 16’ Harmoniques, and the Nasard replaced the 1’ Piccolo. On the Grand-Orgue a 4’ Soprano replaced the 4’ Clairon to balance the 16’ and 4’ Bassons. The layout of the manuals on the console was changed to Grand-Orgue, Positif, Récit, Solo (formerly Bombarde), and Grand-Choeur. A Récit to Pedal coupler, a Récit to Positif manual coupler, and six combination pedals were installed. In addition, the Récit expressive pedal was moved from the far right to the center of the console.

The benediction and inauguration of the restored Notre-Dame organ took place on June 10, 1932. Vierne and Widor presented the dedicatory recital. The latter was eighty-eight years old then and had performed together with Franck and Guilmant at the instrument’s inauguration sixty-

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four years earlier. The program included Bach’s *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*, and chorale prelude *Herzlich thut mich verlangen* [Vierne]; Widor’s *Symphonie gothique* [Widor]; Vierne’s *Cathédrales* (from *Pièces de Fantaisie*, Op. 55), *Adagio* (from *Troisième Symphonie*), and *Carillon de Westminster* (from *Pièces de Fantaisie*, Op. 54) [Vierne]; Improvisation [Vierne]; A sermon by Father Samson; Choral benediction by the *Notre-Dame* Choir; Widor’s *Toccata* (from *Cinquième Symphonie*) [Vierne].

With the completion of the organ restoration, Vierne accomplished another achievement at Notre-Dame. Since his arrival there, Vierne had always desired that the church adopt the custom of having the great organ participate in low Mass, but his requests were rejected by the clergy. Finally, with the restoration, the “Organ Mass” was authorized. In the Mass where no choir participated, Vierne would be playing the organ to “enhance the office being celebrated at the altar. The organ is not intended to distract the worshipers in the church but should help them to pray.”

He believed: “Music is the only art capable of expressing what is inexpressible through words; it is marvelously suited to the ineffable aspirations of the soul toward an infinite that our sense can scarcely conceive with their narrow means of perception and comprehension.”

In the meantime Vierne’s health had declined. He had already experienced cardiac troubles as early as 1924, and an attack three years later, at the end of his American tour, was a great concern to him. He virtually ceased composing, and turned to words to express his feelings and record his experiences. From 1931 he began to pen intermittently his memoirs, drawing on an intimate diary in Braille which he had kept from his early youth. In addition to compiling this *journal intime*, he began to draft a complete history of his life based on those daily notes. He extracted from this journal some of the material relating to his career as an organist,

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composer, and teacher to contribute a series of autobiographical articles to the *Bulletin trimestriel des Amis de l'Orgue*. The series was planned to have nine chapters, of which five actually appeared, published quarterly between September 1934 and November 1937.\footnote{L'Orgue issued a special volume in 1970 in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Vierne's birth. The issue contained these five chapters and part of a sixth found after Vierne's death, edited by Norbert Dufourq and entitled *Mes Souvenirs*.}

Vierne's last years were marred by his increasing blindness, poor health, depression and bitterness which he felt despite his enviable reputation as organist and composer. An oppressive sense of loneliness continued to haunt him:

Today, March 5, 1933, I am writing in the blackest solitudes, for I am alone, irremediably alone, with emptiness in my heart and, as my only companion, old age and its hideous cortège of disillusion, betrayal, infirmity, impotence and sterility. For confidants I have my four walls, since it is no longer possible for me to leave my home without the help of an arm to guide me. A stranger among strangers, with all my being I aspire to the ultimate repose.\footnote{Gavoty, *Vierne*, 169; translation by Scott Cantrell.}

To calm himself, Vierne resorted to taking tranquilizers and sedatives. The bureau in his bedroom was filled with drugs for every conceivable malady.\footnote{Cantrell, "Louis Vierne," 47.} Vierne's heart was further weakened by pneumonia which he contracted in the winter of 1935-1936. G. Huntington Byles recalled, during an interview, that Vierne was as fragile as what he had witnessed in the summer of 1936:

When I heard him play in Notre-Dame, he had to be carried up those ninety-some steps to the organ loft, because they were afraid of his heart. He looked very poorly, I remember. That was the last time I ever saw him, of course, and he had visibly failed, which affected his playing, too.\footnote{Ramsey, "An Interview," 13.}
The year of 1937 turned out to be quite fatal for French musicians; Maurice Ravel, Gabriel Pierné, Albert Roussel, and Charles-Marie Widor all died in the same year. Vierne wrote an article on Widor for the journal *L’Orgue* in remembrance of his most respected teacher and mentor; the article, however, would appear only after his own death. In the meantime, he continued to write his series of autobiographical articles for the *Bulletin trimestriel des Amis de l’Orgue*. At the end of the Chapter Five: Notre-Dame de Paris, Vierne wrote:

For the last time the same satisfaction will be reserved for me on June 2, 1937, when I shall have an elite audience to appreciate my fine instrument, with the collaboration of my pupil and friend Maurice Duruflé. I say “the last time,” for in authorizing the meeting the administrator of Notre-Dame informed Les Amis de l’Orgue that from now on they could not expect a similar favor.

Here closes the chapter of my recollections as organist of Notre-Dame. The splendid instrument whose happy title I have held for thirty-seven years has played a dominant role in my artistic and intellectual life. It is in this environment that I have written these words, and I have formulated for myself the aesthetics of a “cathedral organist,” striving to adapt myself to its majestic sonority, to the grandiose shape of the basilica, to the great religious and national memories attached to it. For want of better, I have brought to the high mission which has been entrusted to me all the fidelity and sincerity of my heart as an artist and a believer.\(^{177}\)

It was in the evening on June 2, 1937, when Vierne was playing his 1,750th organ recital for the special meeting of La Société des Amis de l’Orgue at Notre-Dame, that he died at the console of his beloved instrument. Duruflé recalled this dramatic occasion:

It was my sad privilege to be with him [Vierne] at his death on June 2, 1937). It occurred during a concert held at Notre-Dame by Les Amis de l’Orgue. Vierne had just played with overwhelming emotion his last work, the *Triptyque*. I was beside him to assist with the registrations. As he was beginning the *Siècle pour un enfant défunt*, he grew pale, his fingers clutching at the keys. Just as he lifted his hands after the final chord, he slumped over on the organ

bench, overcome by a cerebral hemorrhage. He was to have improvised on the *Salve Regina* theme. But, instead of his final homage to the Virgin of Notre-Dame one only heard a long pedal note. His foot rested on the key, never to rise again.¹⁷⁸

Gaston Litaize, who was in the audience, observed:

To die in the middle of a concert permitted him to leave this world surrounded by three thousand auditors, all of them friends and admirers, to hear the refined musician, the brilliant organist, the ingenious improviser.¹⁷⁹

Vierne’s life was summed up by Robert Bernard in this obituary:

A great organist, a brilliant improviser, a composer of a very sure method and whose ardent sincerity demands respect, —L. Vierne was one of the most illustrious representatives of our organ school and this largely contributed to its universal renown.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Duruflé, “My Recollections,” 57
PART TWO

THE LEMMENS TRADITION

A SURVEY OF THE ORGAN METHODS BEFORE VIERNE
1. LEMMENS

Jaak Nikolaas (Jacques-Nicolas) Lemmens was born on January 2, 1823, in Zoerle-Parwijis, a village outside Antwerp, Belgium. His early musical training was with his father, a local church organist. As a young boy Lemmens showed remarkable talent and ability in music, singing in the choir and accompanying to the liturgy in the church. François-Joseph Fétis in his *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique* tells us that in 1834, at the age of eleven, Lemmens stayed in Diest, a town not far from his native village, for about six months pursuing his organ studies with the organist Van Den Broeck. In 1839 Lemmens entered the Brussels Conservatory where he studied piano with Leopold Godineau, organ with Christian Girschner, and composition with François-Joseph Fétis. But soon Lemmens' studies at the Conservatory were interrupted when his father became ill and his financial contribution was needed for the family. While he was away from the Conservatory he served as organist at Saint-Sulpice in Diest. He returned to the Brussels Conservatory in 1841 and won first prize in piano in 1843, in the class of Jean-Baptiste Michelot; this was followed by a second prize in composition in 1844, then by first prizes in both organ and composition in 1845. It is known that Lemmens worked from twelve to fifteen hours daily on his musical studies and practicing.

The final stage in Lemmens' organ training was a term of study with the famous organist Adolf Hesse in Breslau (in Silesia). Fétis obtained a government grant to enable Lemmens to study under the German master.

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3 Ibid.


Lemmens went to Breslau in the fall of 1846 and returned to Brussels in 1847. He competed for and won the second prize of the Belgian *Prix de Rome* with the composition of the cantata *Le roi Lear*. In 1849 Lemmens was appointed professor of organ at the Brussels conservatory, replacing his former teacher Girschner who left the Conservatory the year before. Thus was fulfilled the hope which Fétis had for his promising pupil ten years earlier. "Lemmens was the first complete organist and also the first Belgian professor of organ." In order to have a vehicle for expressing his ideas and convictions about organ playing and about sacred music in general, in 1850 Lemmens began to publish his *Nouveau Journal d'orgue* (see below, p. 65).

During the 1850s Lemmens traveled to Paris where he became acquainted with the eminent organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll. Cavaillé-Coll arranged for Lemmens to give several organ performances before the leading organists, musicians and music critics of Paris. Lemmens’ performances, the programs he chose and his style of playing astounded the Parisian audience and had a profound historical influence in the development of French organ music. His playing caused a sensation and was a revelation to the French organists of the day: immaculate legato, robust rhythm, moderate tempos, and austere approach to the organ and its literature. He disregarded fashionable flamboyance and presided at the console with restraint and economy of gesture, wasting not the slightest motion of hands and feet. The playing had "clarity, force and grandeur, with attention given to the tiniest details but always in proportion to the architecture and to the scale of the entire work." Since his epochal appearances in the mid-nineteenth century, Lemmens’s name has never

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dropped from view. Charles-Marie Widor wrote in 1927: "Not one of those who heard Lemmens could forget the clarity, the power, the grandeur of his playing."  

In 1857 Lemmens married Helen Sherrington, the noted English soprano, and thereafter he spent considerable time in England, often taking extended leaves of absence from the Conservatory. Lemmens left his advanced student Alphonse-Jean-Ernest Mailly (1833-1918), and later Joseph Tilborghs (1830-1910), in charge of the organ class during his absence. Lemmens published in 1862 his celebrated method École d'orgue, basée sur le plain-chant romain. Two of his most famous French students, Guilmant and Widor, studied with him during this period. Lemmens resigned from the Conservatory in 1869. The position of organ professor was given to Mailly. Lemmens was devoting himself increasingly to the harmonium and to composition while touring with his wife and residing in England.

The Lemmens family returned to Belgium in 1878 and settled in Zemst, a village near Mechelen where Lemmens spent his final years, trying to raise the musical standard of the Catholic Church. He devoted himself to the study of Gregorian chant. In the Preface to his book, Du Chant grégorien (1886), he explains that he found a twelfth-century manuscript of chant in the British Museum Library, and that on the basis of this manuscript he had developed a theoretical system for the rhythmic interpretation of the chant and for the chant accompaniment. In 1879,

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11 Ochse, Organists and Organ Playing, 170-171.
12 Ibid., 171.
13 Ochse, Organists and Organ Playing, 181.
with the help of Cardinal Deschamps and other Belgian bishops, Lemmens founded the École de Musique Religieuse (commonly known as the Lemmens Institute). In 1880 he convened a conference at Mechelen and organized the Société de Saint-Grégoire, a society analogous to the Cecilian societies in Germany.\(^{14}\) His health failed rapidly after this. Still working on his composition in his sickbed, Lemmens died on January 30, 1881.\(^{15}\)

If Lemmens' playing of the organ in the mid-nineteenth century was still remembered vividly by Widor and others in the 1920s, it is Lemmens' teaching of organ playing that secured for him a notable place in the history of organ music. Lemmens' term as organ professor at the Brussels Conservatory (1849-1869) is certainly central to his career and achievement as an organist. The impression of his extensive influence has been presented in many sources. In the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians Patrick Peire writes:

> As an organist and teacher, Lemmens had great influence in Belgium and France... which contributed to the creation of a new school of organ playing in Belgium. His role... in France was continued by his pupils, among whom were Alphonse Mailly, Alexandre Guilmant, and C.-M. Widor.\(^{16}\)

Of the large number of methods produced in the nineteenth century, few have become as well-known as Lemmens' École d'orgue, which even today commands attention. Lemmens' pedagogical ideas on the subject of legato touch and equal fluency in manuals and pedals were considered by many to be the basis of twentieth-century organ technique. Sandra Soderlund in her Organ Technique: an Historical Approach refers Lemmens's method book:

> Lemmens' École was officially adopted by the Brussels and Paris Conservatories and expounded by a whole school of French organists in the early twentieth century. (In fact, every organ

\(^{14}\)Ibid., 182.

\(^{15}\)Pointer, Role of Jacques Lemmens, 32.

method book currently on the market is essentially a reworking of the Lemmens technique.)

Lemmens' organ method initially appeared as a periodical titled *Nouveau Journal d'orgue à l'usage des organistes du culte catholique*. He began issuing it shortly after his appointment as organ professor at the Brussels Conservatory. Twelve issues were produced during its first year of publication and six followed in the second year (1850-51). It "was soon after in everybody's hands, and exerted the greatest influence on the progressive movement of this art, so profoundly degraded and neglected."18

The first seven issues contain descriptions and exercises for finger substitution and other techniques for achieving manual legato, as well as many short versets and modal accompaniments for the chant, and some organ pieces for manuals by Lemmens. The eighth issue, titled *École de la pédale*, contains instruction on pedal technique, a series of pedal exercises, scales for the pedal, and six *Petit Trios très faciles*. The remainder of the first year of the *Nouveau Journal d'orgue* (issues nine through twelve) consists of forty-eight modulation models for all the major and minor keys, some vocal motets, and thirteen organ pieces which, ranging from modest communions and preludes to the impressive *Scherzo symphonique concertant*, form a repertoire for manual and pedal that allows the organist to put into practice the principles set forth by Lemmens.19

The second year of the *Nouveau Journal d'orgue* contains didactic works, modulation models, preludes, *sorties, prières, fugues*, and other miscellaneous organ pieces with indications of fingerling and pedaling.20 These pieces could serve the needs of the organist in search of suitable

18 Peterson, "Lemmens, His *École d'orgue,*," 64.
19 Ibid., 65.
20 Ibid.
organ music played in the Roman Catholic Church. Fétis stated that the *Nouveau Journal d’orgue* was the fruit of Lemmens’ teaching experience.\(^{21}\)

The *École d’orgue basée sur le plain-chant romain*, published by Lemmens in 1862, was essentially a revised edition of the earlier *Nouveau Journal d’orgue*. It is divided in two parts: the first without pedal, the second with pedal. Some of the repertoire is different, but the most substantial change in the *École d’orgue* is the disappearance of the material on plainchant accompaniment and the use of modes, which seems quite contradictory to what its subtitle suggested “based on Gregorian chant.”

Lemmens assumed the students using his method would already have a good keyboard technique. He emphasized in the preface the importance of prior piano study,\(^{22}\) and limited the manual technique exercises in Part I to those that were either unique to or especially important for the organ.\(^{23}\) These exercises in the first part include finger substitution, glissando, using the base and tip of the thumb, and finger crossing.\(^{24}\) The substitution attracts the most attention and gains special importance in Lemmens’ entire system of fingering for legato playing. Lemmens regards legato as the normal touch for the organ, but he does not make a connection between the legato style and any particular historical period. Lemmens himself did not claim to be the authentic transmitter of the “true Bach tradition” (at least not in his writings). This notion was publicized by Fétis and later by Widor who had studied with both Lemmens and Fétis.\(^{25}\)

Pedal technique in Part II was given a more comprehensive

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\(^{23}\) *Ibid.*, iii.


treatment than manual technique in Part I. Indeed, it was the most complete pedal method available at the time. In Lemmens' view, the pedal technique of organists in Belgium was in need of and ready for reform. Lemmens established in both the *Nouveau Journal d'orgue* and the *École d'orgue* a system of instruction to serve his purpose of realizing this reform. He made only minor changes to the 1850 explanatory remarks for the *École d'orgue*, and reproduced all the pedal exercises. Lemmens maintains that proper pedal playing requires both feet; the organist who plays the pedal with only the left foot, which is obliged to move from one place to another, cannot achieve a smooth legato and cannot play the rapid passages.26

Lemmens begins his pedal technique training with some exercises in which the student is directed to use the alternate-toe technique.27 This is followed immediately by pedal scales in major and minor keys with use of the toe-heel method. In certain arpeggios the student is guided to "pass the left toe behind the right heel."28 After exercises for chromatic and double-pedaling techniques, Lemmens supplies trios and compositions involving the pedal parts.

Two features of Lemmens’ pedal school stand out. First, he relies chiefly on the toe-heel method; the alternate-toe method is no longer regarded as the primary practice in his work. Second, his toe-heel method aims to achieve a smooth legato in pedal playing. To facilitate such a smooth legato in difficult passages, Lemmens advocates the use of two kinds of substitution: one employs both feet,29 the other employs the toe and heel of one foot.30

The second part of the *École d'orgue* continues with two canons and

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26 Lemmens, *École d'orgue*, 42.
27 *Ibid.*, 44.
28 *Ibid.*, 43; see Exercise No. 5, p. 47.
29 *Ibid.*; see Exercise No. 4, p. 47.
30 *Ibid.*; see Exercise No. 3, p. 46.
a repertoire of twenty-six organ pieces, all composed by Lemmens and marked as to their potential liturgical use. Among these pieces nineteen had first appeared in the earlier Nouveau Journal d'orgue, and some of them bear the signs of alteration and reworking.\textsuperscript{31} The pieces in the earlier part of the method, including those in the manual section, are fully fingered. But in the pieces which conclude the book there are only occasional fingering and pedaling marks. In general, these pieces are arranged in a progressive order according to their levels of difficulty; as the book advances toward the end, they demand that the organist acquire a considerable virtuosity in both manual and pedal techniques.

As an educator, Lemmens' accomplishment could make him feel proud that by 1877 four of his former students were in prominent positions in Paris: Clément Loret at the Niedermeyer School and the church of Saint-Louis-d'Antin (1858), Charles-Marie Widor at Saint-Sulpice (1870), Félix-Alexandre Guilmant at La Trinité (1871), and Auguste Andlauer at Notre-Dame-des-Champs (1877). In a letter to Cavaillé-Coll, dated January 13, 1877, Lemmens wrote:

I believe that it was my visits to Paris in 1850, '51, '52, etc., that started the regeneration of the art of organ playing in France. The adoption of my École d'orgue by the Conservatory of Paris, and later the successive placements of four of my students in as many important positions in Paris are proof of the soundness of my method.\textsuperscript{32}

Through both his teaching and his performance, Lemmens fostered a new respect for the written repertoire versus improvisation, which had dominated French and Belgian organ profession up to then, and a new standard for organ performance. He developed a systematic approach to organ playing that offered ideal solutions to the most difficult technical problems in the repertoire. To summarize Lemmens' achievements as a

\textsuperscript{31} Peterson, "Lemmens, His École d'orgue," 67-68.
teacher, Orpha Ochse writes:

Lemmens gave his students more than a set of sophisticated tools to work with, he gave them a sense of mission, and they considered themselves the torchbearers of a great historic tradition. No crusaders ever responded to a call with greater confidence in the validity of their cause, greater determination to fulfill their commission, greater enthusiasm for victory than did Lemmens most gifted disciples, Widor and Guilmant.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{33}Ochse, \textit{Organists and Organ Playing}, 181.
2. WIDOR

Charles-Marie Widor, the world-renowned organist, composer, and teacher, was born on 21 February, 1844. Widor had his first organ instruction from his father, François-Charles Widor (1811-1899), titulaire at the church of Saint-François-de-Sales and music teacher at the Collège des Jésuites in Lyon, for whom he occasionally substituted. The boy showed great musical ability, and at the age of eleven he was named organist at his school.34

Widor finished his general schooling in 1863. Upon Cavaillé-Coll’s recommendation, Widor went to Brussels where he had a rigorous program of organ study with Lemmens and counterpoint and composition with Féris. Widor’s typical day in Brussels began with a lessen from Féris; he practiced the organ in the morning and afternoon, then took an organ lesson from Lemmens for whom he would play an important organ work of J. S. Bach by heart; and finally, in the evening, he worked on counterpoint and fugue assigned by Féris to make ready for next day’s lesson.35 From Lemmens and Féris, Widor was also introduced to music of Adolf Hesse and Johann Christian Heinrich Rinck.36 Widor believed that what he learned from Lemmens was the true tradition of organ playing handed down from Bach, to which Widor remained loyal for the rest of his life.

Following this period of intensive study, Widor returned to live in Lyon and made increasingly frequent appearances in Paris and other European cultural centers as a virtuoso organist. Widor honored his teachers and, at the same time, established his own reputation by the consistently high standard of excellence which he maintained in his playing

34 Ochse, Organists and Organ Playing, 67.
36 Peterson, “Lemmens, His École d’orgue,” 86.
and programming.

While he had substituted frequently for his father at Saint-François-de-Sales in Lyon and for Saint-Saëns at La Madeleine in Paris (1869)\(^{37}\), Widor had not held a church position of his own until 1870, when, at the age of twenty-six, he was called for to succeed Louis Lefébure-Wély (1817-1869) at Saint-Sulpice. Because of his young age, a provisional appointment was given to him for one year only, and it would be reviewed at the end of that time. However, that condition of the appointment apparently was forgotten, and Widor pointed out the fact with amusement that he had served for sixty-four years at Saint-Sulpice without ever being appointed *titulaire!*\(^{38}\)

With its five manuals, one hundred stops, some 6,700 pipes, and innumerable timbres and effects, the Saint-Sulpice organ possessed seemingly unlimited resources that opened an immense span to Widor’s creative thoughts. In the 1870s he produced numerous compositions in various genres, including the monumental organ composition in a new genre, the eight organ symphonies, in two series, Op. 13 and Op. 42.

In 1880 Widor’s first stage work, the ballet *La Korrigane*, was successfully produced at the Paris Opéra. At about the same time he became a music critic for the daily *L’estaffete*, signing his articles with the pen name “Aulétès”. He was also in charge of conducting the Concordia, a choral society specializing in oratorios.\(^{39}\)

After the death of César Franck in 1890, Widor became the professor of organ at the Paris Conservatory. With his appointment a decisive change in organ instruction occurred. Widor brought with him a new philosophy and a new methodology which stressed technique and interpretation. He prefaced the first meeting of his organ class with the

\(^{37}\) *Near, Life and Work of Widor*, 43-45.

\(^{38}\) *Ibid.*, 49

general observation that improvisation had previously been over-emphasized at the expense of performance and repertoire, and declared a reform in organ instruction and study immediately after (see above, p. 19). Widor considered that a well-developed technique was a prerequisite for the execution of works by J. S. Bach, and he regarded those works of paramount importance in organ study. The repertoire Widor taught in his organ class was drawn primarily from the works of Bach, with a few works of other composers, including Mendelssohn, Boëly, Saint-Saëns, and Franck. He took credit for having introduced Bach's organ chorales into the Conservatory repertoire (see above, p. 25). Widor's teaching of organ playing was derived from Lemmens, the standard he required from the students established a new epoch in organ pedagogy. Probably for the first time in the history of the Conservatory the organ students were assigned studies from an organ method book; they had to work their way through the manual and pedal exercises in Lemmens' École d'orgue.


Widor's last two organ symphonies, the Symphonie gothique, Op. 70, and the Symphonie romaine, Op. 73, both paraphrasing liturgical chants, were composed shortly before the turn of the century. Widor was elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1910, and became the permanent secretary four years later. During World War I he used his

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40 Ochse, Organists and Organ Playing, 188-189.
41 Crawford, Mes Souvenirs, 57-58.
42 Near, Life and Work of Widor, 249-250.
43 Ibid., 264.
numerous contacts to obtain money for artists who had suffered misfortunes. In 1916 he introduced the idea of founding the Casa Vélazquez, where French artists could study Spanish culture. With Albert Schweitzer Widor edited five volumes of organ works of Bach. His writings include an ample supplement to Berlioz's treatise on orchestration. Widor continued to perform regularly until the age of ninety; in 1934 he was succeeded at Saint-Sulpice by Marcel Dupré. Widor died on 12 March, 1937.

While Widor did not systematize his organ instruction into a method per se, he did leave many written remarks about manual and pedal technique, such as in his preface to André Pirro's book on Bach. Many features of his viewpoints on and aesthetics of organ performance can also be crystallized from accounts and memories by his pupils, particularly from Louis Vierne's Mes souvenirs. Because of Widor's important position in the late-nineteenth-century French school of organ playing and his leadership in the French Bach revival, the exposition of his pedagogical principles will be important to the modern performer searching for an authentic interpretation of music from that stylistic period.

In regarding how the organ should be played, Widor considered J. S. Bach:

He [Bach] played with the body inclined slightly forward and motionless; with an admirable sense of rhythm, with an absolutely perfect polyphonic ensemble, with extraordinary clearness, avoiding extremely rapid tempi; in short, master of himself, and, so to speak, of the beat, producing an effect of incomparable grandeur.

Widor insisted on attention to every detail of technique. Hands and

feet should be kept as close to the manual and pedal keys as possible. All unnecessary motion must to be eliminated:

All unjustified movement is harmful, because it is a loss of time and of strength. Before deciding that a movement is inevitable you must have tried out its utility during the period of slow practice. That period must be very long. If you have the courage and the conscience to make yourself do it, it will be considerable time gained, and then you will play every virtuoso piece in its exact tempo without difficulty.47

Precision in attack and release was a prime requirement: "Do not flatten the fingers on the keyboard. The key should be attacked with quickness and precision, but without stiffness."48

Note values were given with similar care; legato notes were connected exactly, without gap or overlapping; staccato notes were executed in measured uniformity; repeated notes were separated by a specific rest whose value was equal to that of the smallest note found frequently in the piece and was determined by taking into account the tempo of the piece:

Legato results from the instantaneous carrying over of pressure from one finger to another. If you hesitate in the least it becomes choppy, or else muddy. Although you must play legato, you must also play clearly; otherwise you have no real technique.49

... For staccato maintain the fingers against the keys as much as possible, tighten your wrist slightly and articulate from the forearm. When you have mastered it slowly, rapidity will come of itself without further muscular contraction.

... On the organ repeated notes must be articulated very precisely. If the time values are short, or if the tempo is quick or moderately so, cut short the first note by half its value. If the values are long or the movement slower, cut off a quarter or an eighth. With few exceptions it is reasonable in slow tempos to adopt the smallest time value of the particular piece of music as the fraction to cut from the

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 55.
first of two repeated notes for clear articulation.\textsuperscript{50}

Widor desired an accurate coordination of the hands and the feet on which the clarity of the musical texture depended: "With the organ, as in the orchestra, precision must rule; the perfect ensemble of feet and hands is absolutely necessary, either in attacking or leaving the keyboard."\textsuperscript{51}

Regarding the pedal technique, Widor advised organist to

\ldots begin by placing your bench so that when the tips of your toes touch the extreme edge of the two black keys in the middle of the pedal-board your knees will form a right angle with your thighs. So doing, if you lean slightly forward, your body will take the normal position. The portrait of Bach at the organ can serve you as model.\textsuperscript{52}

\ldots never permitting the feet to rest upon the frame which surrounds the pedals, but letting them lightly along over the keys. Let the free foot hang over the keys always ready either to play or to put on a pedal combination or to open or close the swell-box.\textsuperscript{53}

The heels and the knees should be kept in touch, the former up to the interval of fifth and the latter up to that of octave:

\ldots generally the knees, the heels and the toes must be touching. Then the greatest stretch of the toes (knees and heels joined) gives a fifth; the greatest stretch of the legs (knees joined) gives an octave. As soon as a foot stops playing it should immediately rejoin the one that is playing the normal position, to avoid all defective movement.\textsuperscript{54}

Widor stressed that the foot should attack the key from a position close to the surface without any noise, and with the toe "one or two centimeters from the black keys."\textsuperscript{55}

Never attack the key with a flat foot, but with the inner side of the

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 61-62
\textsuperscript{51} Widor, "Preface," xxiii.
\textsuperscript{52} Crawford, \textit{Mes Souvenirs}, 56.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{55} Widor, "Preface," xxxi.
sole. Keep the feet in constant contact with the edge of the two black keys, never playing the white notes near the back of the pedal, except in changing feet or in crossing. Attack the black notes on the extreme edge in order to facilitate, should the occasion arise, sliding onto a white one.\textsuperscript{56}

Widor advocated the use of the heels as often as the toes, and recommended that the organist not only be able to begin a passage but also to play rapid notes with the heels.\textsuperscript{57} He said to students: “The organist has fourteen fingers, ten on his hands, and four on his feet.”\textsuperscript{58} When there were choices of pedaling or fingering, the one requiring the least motion should be selected: “With the pedal as with the manuals, economy of movement must direct the choice of pedaling. This means that if several possibilities present themselves, one must choose the one that requires the least motion.”\textsuperscript{59}

Widor frequently referred to the importance of the “will” in organ playing:

To play the organ is to reveal a will that is full of the vision of eternity. All organ instruction, whether technical or artistic, has as its only purpose to educate a human being to that pure, higher manifestation of the will. The player must objectify his will in the organ, so as to overpower the listener. . . . If the player doesn’t have that concentrated, communicative, serene will, he may be a great artist, but he is not a born organist. He has simply chosen the wrong instrument, for the organ represents the objective transfiguration of a human spirit into the eternal, unending spirit.\textsuperscript{60}

For us musicians, the will manifests itself above all through rhythm. A mechanical piano doesn’t interest us longer than the tick-tock of a clock; one doesn’t hear it; whereas the mastery of a Liszt or a Rubinstein, who did not play fast, moved the world. Such, at the

\textsuperscript{56}Crawford, \textit{Mes Souvenirs}, 56.
\textsuperscript{58}Crawford, \textit{Mes Souvenirs}, 57.
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid.
organ, [was] the authority of Lemmens.\textsuperscript{61}

Widor disdained empty virtuosity and insisted on slow tempi, maintaining that “the essential character of the organ is grandeur.”\textsuperscript{62} He believed that Bach used only two tempos: one was not very fast, corresponding to the present andante; and the other was rather slow, which would be today’s adagio.\textsuperscript{63} He recommended that, in gauging tempos for Bach’s music, organists start with the smallest note value, playing it rapidly and making it at the same time perceptible clearly to the listener.\textsuperscript{64}

One important aspect in Widor’s teaching is the particular emphasis on the rhythmic vitality which concerns the correct tempo and “the constant manifestation of determination, or will, upon the periodical recurrence of the accented beats.”\textsuperscript{65} For Widor, the basis of articulation and expression in organ playing was a matter of rhythm, that is, proportional adjustments in length to emphasize the important notes, and subtle delays in entry to produce the accents:

- It is only by rhythm that one wins attention. Particularly with the organ, all accents, all effects are dependent upon it. You may bear upon the keyboard with the weight of pounds, with all the strength of your shoulders—you will gain nothing by it. But delay by a tenth of a second the attack of a chord, or prolong this same chord the very least, and judge of the effect produced! Upon a manual not provided with a swell-box one may obtain a crescendo without the aid of a mechanism of any kind: by the simple augmentation of the duration allowed successive chords or detached phrases.

  To play upon an organ is to deal with chronometric values.\textsuperscript{66}

Everywhere there are light and shadow, principal and incidental things, strength and weaknesses. Music cannot escape from that law. Thus having admitted rationally that all melodic or harmonic devices

\textsuperscript{61} Charles-Marie Widor, \textit{L’Orgue moderne} (Paris: Durand & Cie., 1928), 12; translation by Orpha Ochse.
\textsuperscript{62} Crawford, \textit{Mes Souvenirs}, 58.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{64} Peterson, “Lemmens, His \textit{École d’orgue},” 86.
\textsuperscript{65} Widor, “Preface,” xxviii-xxix.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
do not have the same value, we should favor the important ones. That is accentuation. On the organ, the only means that we have to accent is the duration of the note. To lose a slight amount of time on certain notes and to regain it on others, that is the secret of rubato, on which all lively performance depends. However, all of that ought to be accomplished in such a manner that the beat is respected. The listener ought to have no inkling of the method used to draw his attention to what you wish to underline. It is very delicate matter, for the least exaggeration produces a detestable mannerism which all artists of good taste should avoid.⁶⁷

Widor did not like frequent changes of registration or special effects of any kind. Phrasing, registration, changes of manual, and use of the swell box were all related to the architecture of the piece, and should be planned in long lines:

A serious organist will never avail himself of these means of expression [changes of intensity], unless architecturally; that is to say, by straight lines and by designs... The organ is a wind instrument; it requires opportunity to take breath. Like the literary sentence, the musical phrase has its commas, its periods, its paragraphs. As a speaker changes his intonation, so must the organ vary its designs.⁶⁸

Of his own maître, Lemmens, Widor wrote with utmost respect: “Lemmens was an unrivaled virtuoso; the return to true principles and sound doctrine dates back to him. Before him, there was neither theory, rule, nor discipline.”⁶⁹ No one understood the Lemmens method better than Widor. He admitted that all the ideas he disseminated to his organ students came from Lemmens, and regarded seriously his obligation to preserve the heritage. Widor published a new edition of Lemmens’ École d’orgue in 1924 (Paris: Hamelle). In the preface he claimed: “The present edition reproduces that Method faithfully, text and music, without any kind of modification, with the religious respect it deserves, and with which no

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⁶⁷Crawford, Mes Souvenirs, 63.
⁶⁸Widor, “Preface,” xviii.
one is permitted to tamper.”

By the time Widor’s edition was published, Lemmens’ École d’orgue had already appeared in several other versions, including a revised version brought out by Eugène Gigout (Paris: Durand, 1920) then the organ professor at the Paris Conservatory. Gigout omitted one paragraph from Lemmens’ original preface and a number of pieces. He retained all the manual and pedal exercises, the explanatory remarks, and the pieces in contrapuntal style or polyphonic texture, but tended to eliminate marchlike homophonic pieces and those with extensive chromaticism. Gigout also inserted into the repertoire two pieces from other sources, both from Lemmens’ Trois sonates; an Adoration from the Sonate pascale, and a Fugue-Fanfare from the Sonate pontificale. To Widor, the revision carried out by Gigout seemed an intrusion and a violation. With his own new edition of Lemmens’ École d’orgue, by reproducing text and music “without any kind of modification,” Widor responded to Gigout’s “presumptuous” tampering.

It was Widor who most vigorously preserved and disseminated Lemmens’s organ method and pedagogical ideas, on which modern organ technique relies, through his own demonstration, his teaching, his writings, his influence, and his highly visible positions. In all respects, Widor was the most valiant defender of the tradition which Lemmens passed to him, as Sandra Soderlund observed: “It was he [Widor] who established the Lemmens method, expanded by his own ideas, as the standard for all French organists.”

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70 Ochse, Organists and Organ Playing, 179-180.
71 Peterson, “Lemmens, His École d’orgue,” 72-73.
72 Soderlund, Organ Technique, 174.
3. GUILMANT

Félix-Alexandre Guilmant was born on 12 March, 1837, in Boulogne-sur-mer, France. His early organ studies were supervised by his father, Jean-Baptiste Guilmant (1793-1890), an organist and occasional organ builder. The young Guilmant went daily to his father’s church and practiced for as much as ten hours a day.\textsuperscript{73} He studied harmony, counterpoint and fugue with Gustave Carulli.\textsuperscript{74} Guilmant’s progress was so rapid that he was able to substitute for his father at service playing by the age of twelve. He held the positions of organist at Saint-Joseph in 1853 at the age of sixteen, then in 1857 as \textit{maître de chapelle} (choirmaster), and later as organist at his father’s church, Saint-Nicolas. He organized and conducted a choral society, composed and performed several of his own sacred choral works, taught solfège in a local music school, and participated in various civic music activities.\textsuperscript{75}

In 1860 Guilmant heard an organ recital at the Cathedral of Rouen given by Lemmens, and was deeply impressed by his marvelous playing. He went to Brussels to study organ with Lemmens. Various sources disagree as to the exact length of this study. Although the time my have been short, the sojourn in Brussels was consequential. Guilmant acquired a broader and more refined technique, learned the “Bach tradition,” and formed a life-long attachment to Lemmens’ organ method and organ works.

Guilmant’s position as a leading French organist and organ composer in the second half of the nineteenth century is inseparable from the creation of the Cavaillé-Coll organ. The unsurpassed quality and range of these


\textsuperscript{75} Ochse, \textit{Organists and Organ Playing}, 69.
instruments helped Guillemont to promote the organ as a popular musical medium and offered him tremendous inspiration for his creativity. Guillemont attracted the attention of Paris with his many inaugural recitals, of which the most notable were at the organs of Saint-Sulpice in 1862 and Notre-Dame in 1868.

In 1871, the talented young organist, Alexis Chauvet, died at the age of thirty-four. Guillemont was called to take his place as organist of La Trinité. He remained in the position for thirty years.

Guillemont moved quickly to the forefront among French organists. His remarkable capacity for work, his rapport with audiences, his leadership and his musicianship soon crowned him the new king of French organists (Lefébure-Wély was regarded by many as the previous king). In 1878 for the Paris Exposition Universelle, Guillemont was invited to perform a series of organ recitals on a magnificent new Cavaillé-Coll instrument which was temporarily installed in the large concert hall, La Salle de Fêtes, at the Palais du Trocadéro. The recitals were so successful that the organ remained in place and Guillemont was requested to give further series of recitals. During these recitals the public was introduced to organ music of all historical periods and of all countries. The series turned out to be an annual event which continued for eighteen years, from 1879 to 1897, and the responses from the public were enormous.76 As his celebrity rapidly spread, Guillemont was invited increasingly to tour outside France. In those years and many of that followed he gained enthusiastic audiences in England, Germany, Austria, Sweden, the United States, Canada, Russia, Spain, Italy, Holland, and Belgium. He was the first of many French organists to tour and to give organ concerts in the United States.

In 1896 Charles-Marie Widor left the position of organ professor and became the professor of composition at the Paris Conservatory. He

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76 Leupold, “Preface,” xii.
wished that the person who was going to succeed him would continue with the same philosophy and the same methodology that he had had. Widor felt that Guillemant, having been also a student of Lemmens, was the right and best person to continue this direction. Therefore, Widor recommended Guillemant as his successor with the condition that Louis Vierne remain as assistant in the organ class.\textsuperscript{77} Vierne had been Widor's assistant both in the organ class and at the church of Saint-Sulpice for some years. With Vierne continuing as the assistant in the organ class, he could act as the liaison between the two men. Guillemant thought the arrangement satisfactory, and he found it convenient to have a talented and experienced assistant who could substitute for him when he was on tour, and who could supervise and tutor students for both admission to the class and for examinations.\textsuperscript{78}

Guillemant accepted the position and met his organ class when he was fifty-nine years old. By then he was the best-known organist in the world: he had been organist at La Trinité for twenty-five years; he had performed series of organ recitals which attracted record crowds at the Trocadéro for nearly two decades; he had made the first of his three tours to the United States (1893, 1897-98, and 1904). He had written a vast amount of organ compositions, including his eight organ sonatas, eighteen books of \textit{Pièces dans différents styles}, ten books of \textit{L'Organiste liturgiste}, and twelve books of \textit{L'Organiste pratique}. And he had been an experienced and a very successful teacher with both his well established private studio and La Schola Cantorum, a school specialized in training church musicians founded by Charles Bordes (1863-1909), Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931), and Guillemant himself in 1894.

As a musicologist, Guillemant gathered together much information relating to the performance practice of early music in his lengthy article "La Musique d'Orgue," which he contributed to the \textit{Encyclopédie de la

\textsuperscript{77} Crawford, \textit{Mes Souvenirs}, 105.
\textsuperscript{78} Ochse, \textit{Organists and Organ Playing}, 181.
musique et dictionnaire du conservatoire. He devoted much time and energy
to searching and preserving music of past centuries which could otherwise
have been lost to the world, and to editing and publishing several
monumental collections of early organ music, including twenty-five
volumes of École classique de l’Orgue, four volumes of Repertoire des
Concerts du Trocadéro, ten volumes of Les Archive des Maîtres de l’Orgue
des XVIe, XVIIe, et XVIIIe siècles, and Concert historique d’Orgue.

Guilmant remained in the position of organ professor at the Paris
Conservatory for the next fifteen years and taught the advanced organ
course at La Schola Cantorum since its opening until his death in 1911.
Eugène Gigout succeeded him at the Paris Conservatory, and Guilmant’s
position at La Schola Cantorum was passed to Louis Vierne. His students
included Joseph Bonnet, Nadia Boulanger, Georges Jacob, and Marcel
Dupré. Thus for a period of over twenty years, the Conservatory organ
class was guided by two great figures, Widor and Guilmant. Both had
studied with Lemmens early in their careers, both held Lemmens and his
organ method in high regard, and both were devoted to the organ music of
J. S. Bach. Under their influence a new French organ school was
permanently established and significantly developed.79

Regarding Guilmant’s teaching, there were two special areas in
which he reigned supreme: repertoire and registration. No other French
organist even approached a more comprehensive knowledge of organ
repertoire of all periods than he.80 Guilmant, like Widor, centered his
teaching around Bach, but from there he sought to expand his students’
repertoire and knowledge to include a broad choice of styles, both early
and contemporary. And Guilmant’s artistry in organ registration was
legendary. He understood organ timbre both in its historic content and in
its modern manipulations. Besides teaching students the general principles,

79 Peterson, “Lemmens, His École d’orgue,” 86.
80 Ochse, Organists and Organ Playing, 196.
as Widor did, he could also explain the specific character and usage of each stop.  

Guilmant’s systematic approach to organ playing did not appear in the form of a published method book, though it was reported that William C. Carl (1865-1936), a former American organ student of Guilmant and the founder of the Guilmant Organ School in New York, had been given a written method of organ playing and teaching by Guilmant, a legacy of which Carl was the sole possessor.  

Guilmant had the interest of a music historian in organ playing. He was familiar with the most recent studies as well as original sources relating to the development of forms, repertoire, performance practice, and organ building; he manually copied out Herzog’s organ method *L’Organiste pratique*; and his library, now housed at the Institut de musicologie de l’Université de Paris, contained the works concerning organ playing by Georges Schmitt and Johann Christian Heinrich Rinck. Guilmant admitted his inheritance of a systematic method from Lemmens, and he gave credit to his former teacher with the following statement:

> From M. Jacques Lemmens I had the honor of receiving instruction. . . . His efforts to introduce the best style of organ music in France began in 1852. His playing of Bach was a complete revelation to French organists, and formed the foundation of a more serious style of playing and composition.

In two of his writings, the aforementioned article “La Musique d’orgue: les formes, l’exécution, l’improvisation” in the *Encyclopédie de la musique et dictionnaire du conservatoire*, and the 1898 article “Organ Music and Organ-playing,” reprinted in Wayne Leupold’s new edition of

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82 Peterson, “Lemmens, His École d’orgue,” 88.
the complete organ works of Guilmant, he set forth many of his ideas on
the art of organ playing. The information in these articles apparently
reflects the viewpoint Guilmant brought to his daily teaching. Like his
predecessor Widor, Guilmant loved and championed Bach; he considered
Bach’s works of paramount importance in the study of the organ:

Organ music reached its climax with Bach: it may, perhaps,
be said that all music did. At any rate, one thing is certain: if there
has been any progress in music since the day of Bach, it has been due
to him. . .

For pure organ music, Bach still is, and probably will always
remain, the greatest of all composers. Even with all the modern
mechanical appliances that have been attached to the organ, his works
are still very difficult, --perhaps the most difficult of organ
compositions. He must have been as great an organist as he was a
composer. . .

My admiration for Bach is unbounded. I consider that Bach is
music. Everything else in music has come from him; and if all
music, excepting Bach’s, were to be destroyed, music would still be
preserved.85

Guilmant demanded absolute precision in execution and required
strict control of attacks and releases. Each note should receive its exact
value; it was just as imperative for the note to be released exactly at the
right time as to be attacked precisely at the proper moment:

Here I refer to a fault in technique which is often found. Many
organists think it wise not to press down the key too quickly or too
far. I think, on the contrary, that the full pressure of finger should
be made at once, and the key held down solidly until released.86

Guilmant regarded legato the normal touch of the organ playing:
“When there are neither slurs nor dots above the notes it is understood that
one plays the piece in the style lié, which is the true manner of playing the

86 Ibid., xxvii.
keys on the organ." He added that the smooth connection of notes was the goal toward which systems of fingering had progressed: "Never play a note that does not sing." He believed that legato was the style in which Bach's organ music should be interpreted: "The music of Bach must be played in the strictest style of legato, in each individual part; but this does not exclude accentuation."

In the discussion of thumb glissando, Guilmant provided examples by drawing on Bach's organ chorale Christum wir sollen loben schön from the Orgelbüchlein (BWV 611), and explained that the chorale melody in the alto voice of the texture could be played smoothly by using this technique. He also referred to Lemmens' composition, Andantino, in the École d'orgue, to amplify his discussion regarding the same technique in a passage consisting of successive diatonic notes.

Guilmant recommended the use of "détaché" to clarify accentuation and articulation in phrasing the musical passages. He explained that articulation and phrasing gave life to fugue subjects and other motives, and recommended Bach's Wachtet auf to be consulted as a model. To illustrate the proper articulation of chordal texture, he referred to another piece by Lemmens in the École d'orgue, Laudate Dominum Omnes Gentes. He drew attention to notational details in contemporary scores and cited Lemmens' Ite Missa Est to differentiate the proper articulation for the notes détachées (separately beamed) from that of the notes liées (beamed together). He also advised the organist to take into account the

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87 Alexandre Guilmant, "La Musique d'orgue: les formes, l'exécution, l'improvisation" in Encyclopédie de la musique et dictionnaire du conservatoire (Paris: Librairie Delagrave, 1913-1931), 1157.
90 Guilmant, "La Musique d'orgue," 1153-1154.
91 Ibid., 1154.
92 Ibid., 1155.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 1157.
actual acoustical surroundings in adapting the style lié. In a room of larger dimensions one should play less legato than in a smaller place.\textsuperscript{95}

He considered that tempos in modern performances were sometimes too fast to permit the music to be heard clearly: "I think that, on account of the polyphonic character of Bach's works, they should not be played too fast. In ancient music, the Allegro movement was not played so fast as the present day."\textsuperscript{96} He held that the choice of tempo should be influenced by the size of the room and the dimension and resource of the instrument, and said: "As an organist you play a musical instrument; therefore make your playing musical."\textsuperscript{97}

In the discussion of pedal technique, Guillemant stated that one could play smoothly, without agitation, with the pedal method devised by Lemmens in his École d'orgue.\textsuperscript{98} Like Widor, he advocated keeping knees and heels together, eliminating all unnecessary movement, and using the heel as equally as the toe:

As to pedaling, French organ pupils are now taught to hold the knees together and to use the heels much more than formerly. This method results in a quieter style of playing, and gives greater smoothness in phrasing, while it increases speed.\textsuperscript{99}

In the discussion of double-pedaling technique, he mentioned Bach's organ chorale \textit{Aus tiefer Noth} (BWV 686) as example.\textsuperscript{100} In the anthology, \textit{L'École classique}, edited by Guillemant in 1901, he supplied complete pedaling marks for the chorale prelude \textit{Wir glauben all' an einen Gott} (Krebs/Bach, BWV 740), to demonstrate the application of this

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{96} Guillemant, "Organ Music and Organ Playing," xxvii. \\
\textsuperscript{97} Leupold, "Preface," vii. \\
\textsuperscript{98} Guillemant, "La Musique d'orgue," 1159-1160. \\
\textsuperscript{99} Guillemant, "Organ Music and Organ Playing," xxvii. \\
\textsuperscript{100} Guillemant, "La Musique d'orgue," 1160.
\end{tabular}
demanding technique.\textsuperscript{101}

Regarding registration, Guilmant opposed the practice of frequent changes of timbre for imitating orchestral effects: “Organ playing should be essentially musical, and, as far as possible, in the pure style of the organ; it should not involve the necessity of constantly changing the registration.”\textsuperscript{102} He argued strongly for authenticity and believed that one could not perform the music of Bach or his contemporaries well if one did not have the timbres those masters used. He regretted that modern organs did not include the stops needed for the registration of French classic organ music, and felt it was ridiculous to play a composition with stops for which it had not been written.\textsuperscript{103}

As a teacher Guilmant was very strict. His uncompromising standards applied to every aspect of performance. As testified by his students, “nothing escaped his notice.”\textsuperscript{104} Guilmant taught a great many students, both in his organ classes at the Conservatory and La Schola Cantorum, and in his private studio. He said: “If I can leave behind me a correct style and method of organ playing, it is all I ask for”, and hoped sincerely that “the French organists may hold their own before the masters of other countries.”\textsuperscript{105} The history shows that the work done by Guilmant and Widor in attempting to form a national school of organ playing was truly successful. Their influence on today’s organ technique can never be overestimated.

One special mention should be made here about Guilmant’s three tours to the United States. Guilmant’s visits were the first of a chain of


\textsuperscript{102} Guilmant, “Organ Music and Organ Playing,” xxviii.

\textsuperscript{103} Guilmant, “La Musique d’orgue,” 1172.

\textsuperscript{104} Joseph Bonnet, “Quelques Souvenirs personnels sur Alexandre Guilmant suivi d’une notice biographique à propos du centenaire de sa naissance” in \textit{L’Orgue} 29 (March 1937): 9.

\textsuperscript{105} Carl, “Guilmant’s Contribution,” xxx.
events which forever changed the American organ scene. The first trip was prompted by an invitation to represent the French school of organ playing at the Chicago World’s Fair (the Colombian Exposition) in 1893. Guilmant played four recitals for the Exposition\textsuperscript{106} and made a concert tour immediately after.\textsuperscript{107} The second American tour was made in 1897-98, during which Guilmant played numerous recitals in New York City and the eastern part of the country. In 1904, at the age of sixty-seven, Guilmant returned for a third time. He performed forty recitals on an organ at the Saint Louis Exposition, then the largest organ in the world with 148 stops, and followed with a tour of twenty-four recitals in the country.\textsuperscript{108} There was reportedly no single composition repeated in the entire series of forty programs which Guilmant performed during the Saint Louis Exposition.\textsuperscript{109}

The influence Guilmant exerted on this country was enormous. No European organist of his stature had come to the United States before. For the first time, such a diversified repertoire and such a high standard of performance were exposed to the American organ profession and to the American public. One of the consequences of Guilmant’s second tour was the foundation of the Guilmant Organ School by William C. Carl, opened in New York in 1899. Guilmant was named president, and Carl was the director of the school. The school was devoted to training church musicians, offering instruction based on Guilmant’s methods, and contributed much to elevating standards in church music and in organ playing during the first half of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{110} Guilmant’s three American tours opened a whole new world for American organists, many of them going to Paris to study. As one of Guilmant’s students, Joseph

\textsuperscript{106} Ochse, \textit{Organists and Organ Playing}, 112.
\textsuperscript{107} Leupold, “Preface,” xiv.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{i}b\textit{id}.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{i}b\textit{id.}, xv.
\textsuperscript{110} Ochse, \textit{Organists and Organ Playing}, 202-203.
Bonnet, commented:

Formerly, the American organists rarely went to Paris, but instead went to Leipzig, Berlin, or Munich. Since 1893, the date of Guilmant’s first tour to the United States, it’s to Paris that their successors come to pitch their tent and receive our instruction.\textsuperscript{111}

According to a list compiled by Agnes Armstrong, there were 121 American students who had studied with Guilmant.\textsuperscript{112} It is hard to venture even a rough guess as to how many organists have studied with pupils of Guilmant. In any case, the number is only the visible testimony, but the influence is immeasurable and beyond description. Through Guilmant and his students, the Lemmens tradition gradually reached and dominated American organ playing.


\textsuperscript{112} Leupold, “Preface,” xix.
PART THREE

VIERNÉ: ORGAN METHOD

AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION
This part contains an English translation of Vierne's unfinished treatise on organ and organ playing, which was published in 1987 by La Société des Amis de l'Orgue as a special issue of L'Orgue (L'Orgue: cahiers et mémoires 37) to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Vierne's death. The Introduction is written by Dr. Brigitte de Leersnyder, the editor of the manuscript of this document which was copied out by Vierne's friend and assistant Madeleine Richepin in 1921. All the footnotes in the text are also by Leersnyder unless otherwise indicated.
INTRODUCTION

In the organ works of Louis Vierne appear titles of *Symphonies, Pièces de Fantaisie*, or again *Pièces en style libre*, but never that of *Méthode*. And yet, the elaboration of this last mentioned did not cease to occupy the spirit of the organist of Notre-Dame.

Shouldn’t Les Amis de l’Orgue have celebrated the fiftieth anniversary\(^1\) of the death of one of the greatest French organists to have adhered to their movement? What more moving homage can a review render than to publish an unpublished work?

We discovered the manuscript in the musician’s documents, carefully kept in the domicile of Doctor Lucien Mallet\(^2\), who permitted us to view his personal effects\(^3\).

The mystery persists on the origin of the idea of this method. We know that in 1917 Vierne thought much about it; his correspondence bears witness. Then in Switzerland, to nurse his sick eyes, he stayed with some friends of the count and the countess of Boisrouvray, Mr. and Mrs. Vulliemin who owned the villa Rochemont, at Chailly near Lausanne.

It is to there that his cousin Ambroise Colin wrote him, on January 3, 1917:

[. . .] “I finish by passing you a message which I am charged to give you by Durand and his cousin Schwanen. They would very much like for you to profit from your leisure to advance the organ method which you had promised to them. It would be of interest, they think,

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1 To commemorate this anniversary, Les Amis de l’Orgue have proceeded in 1986 to the reprinting of two volumes of their *Cahiers et Mémoires* collection which came out in 1970, and has been exhausted for many years: *Mes Souvenirs, Journal*, original texts of Louis Vierne and unpublished photographs.

2 Dr. Lucien Mallet (1885-1981) was the husband of Madeleine Richepin (1898-1962), the universal heir of Louis Vierne. We are infinitely grateful to him for all what he has accomplished for Louis Vierne and we thank Mrs. Marries Mallet, his widow, for all the help which she gave us.

that this work appear as soon as possible after the cessation of hostilities or even before. As I am convinced from my viewpoint that this publication, which I am certain will achieve world wide success, will greatly serve your material interest and your artistic reputation, I gladly accept the request of the aforementioned merchants.” [. . .]

Vierne replied to him without hesitation, because on January 17, Ambroise Colin writes:

[. . .] “what you have told me of your relationship with Durand Fils & Cie completely modifies my viewpoint. Indeed no, at no price should a new edition of the Lemmens’ method be given to this house for 500 F (because I think that it is this work of which you speak that is the Gospel of the organists). [. . .] If I were in your place, here is what I would do. Instead of republishing Lemmens, I would compose an organ method of mine (helping myself naturally from Lemmens and others, and by the path of acting as critic). And I would publish it myself.” [. . .]

On March 5, 1917, the count of Boisrouvray wrote to Louis Vierne: [. . .] “I hope that the composition and the method advance.” [. . .]

Widor was equally au courant, because he mentions it in a letter of April 12, 1917.

Gaston Choisnel, of the Durand house, remembers it from the agenda of August 23, 1917:

[. . .] “in the meantime . . . I am waiting for my method and I fear that, according to what you tell me, I will wait for a long time. If I dared, I would ask you to think a bit between two original productions; that would rest you a bit.” [. . .]

In a letter of September 17, 1917, he ends: “When will I get my Lemmens!!!”

In reviewing these letters, we can question the real intention of Louis Vierne. Did he conceive an entirely personal organ method from the beginning? Or had his project, submitted to Durand who had already
published a good number of his works, been transformed into a “revision” of Lemmens’ method\textsuperscript{4}? Or had Durand proposed it to him from the start, or had Vierne always desired to republish this Belgian Method and, after months had this work transformed into the “the organ method of Louis Vierne”, or was it suggested by his friends and parents?

It is clear that the Durand house wanted this reissue [of Lemmens’ method], since after Vierne abandoned the project, they turned to Eugène Gigout\textsuperscript{5}.

Materially, Vierne had great worries (he had them all his life!). Did he accept this work for economic reasons? Did the conditions fixed by Durand, emerging as more of an exploitation in the eyes of Vierne, push him to orient himself toward a method entirely his own?

So many questions without answers, even after the perusal of these different letters.

In 1920, Louis Vierne goes back to Paris; he returns with the manuscript of a part of the organ method. A young pupil, Madeleine Richepin, who will help him the rest of his life, takes responsibility, from 1921, to recopy the elements on music staves, which were barely legible in the hand of Vierne\textsuperscript{6}. It is this version which we publish here.

How is it presented? The text on one side, the exercises and the examples on the other. We have photographed one page of the sample autographed by Louis Vierne. We have no doubt of the authenticity of these documents. It is certainly in his handwriting. As for the text, it is

\textsuperscript{4}Nicolas Jacques Lemmens (1823-1881), the great Belgian organist, had the possibility of going to Breslau to work with Adolf Hesse (1809-1863), the guardian of the most faithful tradition of Bach. The exact title of this method is: \textit{École d’Orgue basée sur le Plain-Chant romain} (Mayence, Schott, 1862).

\textsuperscript{5}See their publication of 1920.

\textsuperscript{6}We thank the American organist Alan Hobbs for having amiably communicated to us the content of a letter which Madeleine Richepin had sent him and in which she specified the date of her copying work. She added that Vierne had not left any notes on what is unfinished.
typed; corrections and musical examples carried there are by Vierne himself. The finished part comprises two chapters: the instrument and the playing of manual keyboard. That is all.

Why did not Vierne continue his work? The idea did not leave him. In a curriculum vitae—in which he speaks of the first hearing, on April 2, 1926, of his Poème pour piano—he ends like this:

[. . .] “Currently [I am working on] a very important Traité sur l'Orgue which will be considered as the indispensable monument for today’s organists, because all the modern technique of the instrument will be developed there as well as the Art of the Registration and the History of the Organ.”

From a simple Méthode d'Orgue, its pages have become a Traité sur l'Orgue, in three parts (history, modern instrument, registration). In 1939, Les Amis de l'Orgue publish an In Memoriam Louis Vierne, in which the catalog of the work indicates, in the work in preparation, a Grand Traité de l'Orgue in four parts:

1st Part: Summary of the evolution of the Organ - drawings and plates.
3rd Part: Technique of the Pedal.
4th Part: The Art of Registration.

Drawings and plates were already thought of for the first work; we have some manuscript annotations in the course of the text, but we have not found them.

The title becomes Traité de l'Orgue in four parts - a pedagogical work - in the Louis Vierne of Bernard Gavoty.

Like Madeleine Richépin, we found no documents concerning the realization of these projects.

All this tends to prove that this idea did not leave the organist of Notre-Dame. Why did he not push it to the end? The publication of other

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methods⁹, lack of time, or again, perhaps a voluntary distancing from
organists and all those that gravitate around the restoration of the organ,
after all the difficulties encountered at Notre-Dame¹⁰, etc., pushed him to
leave this outlined work in sleep?

It does not matter if the work is unfinished, what we can read there
already brings us many elements of ideas of Louis Vierne, and our thirst
for original information is found partly satisfied.

In appendices, we publish two documents also found in papers of the
organist.

The first among these concerns a project for Notre-Dame. There is
no doubt about its authenticity: the customary paper, the violet ink, the
characters of his typewriter, the typing mistakes (with a certain attraction
for the "k"!), No date is indicated, but Louis Vierne speaks to us of his
experience at the organ of the Wanamaker Auditorium in Philadelphia. His
tour to the United States dates from 1927; this study is therefore posterior.

The second document is a restoration project of the grand organ of
Notre-Dame-de-Paris, drawn on a letterhead of the house of Gonzalez de
Malakoff, dated May 5, 1928.

There follows a third document, with neither date nor signature.

* * *

Although incomplete, this Méthode d’Orgue tells us of the desires of
the Notre-Dame organist for the instrument and for its playing technique.
Some particular points in these pages illuminate us on his intentions; all
interpreters should be able to refer to it.

Regarding the instrument, Vierne considers that the Barker machine,
mechanical or electrical, brought about a virtual revolution in touch. He

⁹ That of Marcel Dupré, for example, appeared in 1927, published by Leduc.
1986) the chapter devoted to "Notre-Dame-de-Paris", pp. 84-112.
advocates the existence of free combinations (the modern system up to six combinations, and not the Cavaillé-Coll system). He wants a logical classification of console keyboards (arranged in order from low to high: Grand-Orgue, Positif, Récit, then secondary keyboards), sub- and super-octave couplers (both within divisions and between divisions), numerous swell boxes (not limited just to the Récit), swell pedals situated at the center of the console, a crescendo pedal (the organist is a "conductor of orchestra"), minimum usage of the trémolo which Vierne considered to be in poor taste, correct drawing of the registers (gentle but not slow, without any delay in their arrival), reversible combination pedals located at proper distance (enabling the feet to reach them easily), an electric motor-driven bellows and, for Notre-Dame, a lower tribune or a two-part organ case so the rose window can be seen clearly.

Concerning the interpreter, Louis Vierne requires a rational position of the organist and, for hands, an identical position to that of the piano, an attack to the bottom of the key, but not without a certain liberty, because he recognizes that his organ sounds differently when played by other persons than himself. He desires a legato playing, rendered possible by the utilization of many finger substitutions, glissandi, and crossings. Where the substitutions are multiple, one makes them succeed each other in ascending order with the right hand and descending with the left hand.

Finally, he wants a mathematical articulation, repeated notes at half of their duration (or by calculated fractions of duration for the long values), and a staccato playing, which will be made from the wrist.

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After more than seventy years, how should one view this method? The organist of today, scattered and tugged by a quantity of aesthetics often completely opposite, has constantly to choose between: an official school,
which has been the Conservatory since the arrival of Widor until the
departure of Rolande Falcinelli and to which Vierne belongs; a school that
one calls "neo-baroque" (distancing itself from neo-classic); a school of
contemporary music; or an independent one. If one wants to find the
accuracy of a "true" interpretation, he tries to place his proper manner and
his proper sensitivity on what he believes to know of the expressions and
sensitivity of another period. If he wants to teach his art to the young and
to initiate some organ methods, he remains perplexed. Is it necessary to
begin with the study of the piano? Yes, for Marcel Dupré, Jean Langlais,
and Marie-Louise Jaquet-Langlais. Here, the part devoted to the manual
technique is condensed in a few lines, which constitutes an absolute record!
On the other hand, Noëlie Pierront and Jean Bonfils propose a keyboard
method which begins with the organ first. Others wish to begin on the
harpsichord, as in the 18th century. To our knowledge, there are no
"clients" for the clavichord yet, but that will come, it is in the logic of our
time. . .

Thus, for many, the Méthode d'Orgue of Louis Vierne will appear
unbearably rigid. It treats only two types of touches, the legato and the
staccato. Phrases are reduced to an articulation; the usage of the thumb is
increased, and, what is more, on the black keys.

According to what one knows of the teaching of Franck, he was little
interested in these details; this precision of touch was carried over from
Widor's teaching, whose musical message passed by these means:
clearness, logic, but also magnitude and nobility that are suitable for vast
structures. There is something "Roman" in this attitude and it answers
perfectly to the architecture of Saint-Sulpice.

This method interests us because it comes from a man who has
passed all his life seeking after the Absolute, by rigorous ways,
mathematical and precise, which have allowed him to reign over his
extreme and seething sensitivity. Louis Vierne is linked to this order, as
the castaway to his raft, because music thus channeled, which could come out from his fingers and his head, remained the sole support, the sole beacon, in the middle of the series of storms and catastrophes which tormented his life.

Rigidity, indeed . . . but, for the man of a solitary manner, is not the guarantee of force and personality out of the ordinary? Insensitive to chants of sirens, he continues straight on his road. We find there all of the French organ schools whose productivity has been universally recognized. This could be the lesson which Vierne gives today to many organists who flit about like a butterfly and go round and round.

Of course, Vierne borrowed much from Lemmens’ method which he had used; some exercises are taken either literally, or quite often, in a much elaborated manner, to the point that it takes four pages where only a half-page suffices for the Belgian organist.

The importance of this text concerns his aesthetics more. For him, the normal way of playing is legato which is considered as an absolute necessity; the détaché can be made only to half its written value. The Cavaillé-Coll organ of Notre-Dame served as a support for all his creations, but the organ which Vierne wanted to correspond to his desire and his manner of thinking, and which he vainly attempted to bring about since the First World War, including its tribune, Cavaillé-Coll’s solution for timbre, is a modern conception. One knows furthermore how much Vierne sustained the neo-classic aesthetics, in the creation of Les Amis de l’Orgue, and defended this tendency.

What illumination does this method give us on interpreting his symphonies or his pièces libres? How can it guide us?

It is a choice of two things. Either, one decides to restore Vierne to the letter, as others have wanted to play Couperin as Couperin. That is to say, one has to take into account “all” Vierne’s recommendations, without sorting out his aesthetics. It is necessary to be honest with the “playing” of
the organ and to respect substitutions and legato by following the same rigor and strictness as others do for the fingering of Raison or the mixtures of Bach. One must not keep one element and reject the other, because it does not please one or because it necessitates putting extra hours into the development of the performer.

Or, one decides that all of these remain of no importance, and one seeks the spirit of Vierne by fastening on the instruments, in the measure of their possibilities for expressive and musical order. The artist who plays keeps his own personality and creates rather than reproduces, holding as the only guarantee of success his own worth as well as that of the organ, and not the authenticity of elements of interpretation.

With this *Méthode d'Orgue* and some appendices which we publish, as well as authentic recordings of Vierne,¹¹ the organist finds himself in possession of all the elements that are going to guide his choice. [It remains only] for him to play.

CHAPTER 1

THE INSTRUMENT

The organ is an instrument of both wind and keyboard: of wind, because the sound there is produced by the compressed air penetrating the pipes; of keyboard, because the mechanism to distribute the compressed air is controlled by the keys which are disposed after the fashion of those of the piano.

The instrument is divided into three parts which invite separate descriptions: the keyboard console, the case, and the bellows.

The Console

This part of the organ contains the keyboards, the stops, the combination pedals, and the transmission mechanism of these execution agents to the wind-chests of the pipes.

The console is generally a piece of oak furniture, with variable proportions according to the importance of its content. In relationship to the case, the console may occupy three principal positions, adapted according to the convenience of the site where the organ is installed. The disposition en console (in console) is that in which the console is placed in the front and to the center of the case; the organist’s back is to the latter when he is seated in front of his keyboards. In the disposition en fenêtre, the console is placed to the center of the case, the performer facing the latter during performance. Finally, the disposition en côté (at the side) is that in which the console is placed at one side of the case and is externally related to it. These three dispositions are the normal ones, and only exceptionally are organ-builders obliged to adopt the other plan, which is the situation of the organ console at the church Saint-Vincent-de-Paul in
Paris, where the console is found between the two parts of the case. The organ has to be built this way so as not to mask the rose window above the central portal. Equally, in some instruments in concert halls, their consoles are seen in the center of the orchestra or somewhere on one corner of the proscenium, while the organ cases are at the bottom of the proscenium or on some nearby back stages. But these are expedients rarely employed, because these dispositions offer enough serious disadvantages, especially concerning the clarity of the transmission.

The disposition *en console* is, without question, the most agreeable, especially if the console is a bit distant from the case; as a matter of fact, it allows the organist to hear clearly the effect of the instrument while he is playing, which is not always the case with the dispositions *en fenêtre* or *en côté*.

The Keyboards

The number of keyboards contained in the organ console is variable according to the size of the instrument. Organs are sometimes very much reduced and comprise only one manual keyboard, while one counts five of them on the monumental instruments of Saint-Sulpice and Notre-Dame in Paris.

Each keyboard controls a destined tonal group to be played either separately or in ensemble, and serves for the coloration required for the interpretation of music. In the instruments of modern construction, the tonal palette of each keyboard is furnished as completely as possible: this is a definite progress made over the old organs.

The typical organ is an instrument with three manual keyboards and a *pédalier* (pedal keyboard): this disposition provides thirty to sixty stops on the instrument and allows all the mechanical and tonal combinations employed in organ music up to our time.
Nowadays, organ-builders have adopted the following order in the disposition of the manual keyboards: the first keyboard (le clavier inférieur, the lower manual) is called Grand-Orgue (Great), the keyboard of the middle Positif (Positive), the third (le clavier supérieur, the upper manual) Récit (Swell). These keyboards are arranged in terrace-style, a short distance from each other, and at a height calculated so that, if the need arises, the organist could play two keyboards with a single hand.

On the organs with two manual keyboards, the first is the Grand-Orgue, the second the Récit. For those with four keyboards, the added keyboards take names of Bombarde, Grand-Choeur, Écho, or Solo. The five keyboards of the Notre-Dame-de-Paris organ are thus arranged upward beginning from the lowest: Grand-Choeur, Grand-Orgue, Bombarde, Positif, and Récit. Those of the Saint-Sulpice organ, lined up equally from the lowest keyboard, are as follows: Grand-Choeur, Grand-Orgue, Positif, Récit, and Solo. In Saint-Eustache, the order is: Grand-Orgue, Positif, Récit, and Bombarde. In the concert hall of the Trocadéro: Grand-Orgue, Positif, Récit, and Solo, etc.

The compass of the manual keyboard is variable; the one which is generally adopted in France is four octaves and a fifth, with 56 notes, from ut 1 (C) to sol 5 (g‴″). In England, Germany, Switzerland, and America, the modern keyboards have 58 notes: from ut 1 (C) to la 5 (a‴″). In France some instruments have recently been built whose manual keyboards have five complete octaves, 61 notes: from ut 1 (C) to ut 6 (c‴‴″). In all countries are found many ancient instruments, modernized and transformed, whose keyboards have kept the compass of 54 notes, from ut (C) to fa (f‴″), and some of them are incomplete in the bottom of the compass. It would be desirable that all the arbitrariness be abandoned and that organ-builders of all countries cooperate to give all the instruments a
common compass. The one of five complete octaves seems the most rational, the organ being an instrument in *ut* (C).

A good organ keyboard should have an average key depth, of seven or eight millimeters at the most. The resistance under the finger must offer a certain firmness, but without being stiff; the performer should be able to feel as if he were playing a very good piano keyboard. Too much resistance, as well as excessive softness, are causes of unbearable hindrance in the precision of the execution.

Previously, with mechanisms of the direct tracker action, which were heavy and complicated, it was impossible to couple more than two keyboards together. The hand did not have the sufficient strength to maneuver such a great weight. Today, thanks to the Barker lever12 and to the systems of electric action and tubular pneumatic action which have modified the mechanical transmission of the organ, one can play with a muscular effort no greater than operating an isolated sole keyboard, no matter how many keyboards are coupled together. This progress brought about a real revolution in the touch of the organist and enabled all the combinations which now enrich the palette of the composer who writes organ music. Owing to this possibility of general couplings, we can now use all the power of our instruments, while our forefathers who had no such resource could only give some conventional impression of force by superimposing two manual keyboards at the most, commanding a series of suitable registers qualified for *Grand-Choeur* or *Grand-Jeu*.

In modern musical scores, the indications of keyboards are represented by the capital initials of the keyboards’ names at the point

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12Patented in France by its inventor, the Englishman Charles Spackman Barker (1806-1879), the Barker machine is a pneumatic lever in the form of a small bellows positioned between the key and the pull-down mechanism below the pallet of the wind-chest. It was adopted by Cavaillé-Coll to lighten the touch and reduce the key-dip of the Grand-orgue, the keyboard to which all the other manuals of the organ were coupled. Cited by the translator from Rollin Smith, *Toward an Authentic Interpretation of the Organ Works of César Franck* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1983), 51; n. 7.
where they are employed: G. (Grand-Orgue), P. (Positif), R. (Récit), B. (Bombarde), S. (Solo), É. (Écho); the Grand-Choeur is indicated by G.-C. The pedal keyboard is indicated by the abbreviation: Péd.

Some authors indicate keyboards by numerical figures, but it is less clear, since the dispositions on the consoles are not identical; or by abbreviations: G.-O., Pos., Réc., etc., which uselessly overload the texts. The initial alone is simpler and more convenient.

Registers and Combination Pedals

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the console contains keyboards, stops, and combination pedals.

The name registre (stop), or jeu, is used for a series of pipes of similar timbre and of similar scale, commanded by a mechanism which allows the performer to make them sound or to render this series mute. But in fact, the term jeu should apply only to the pipes and the term registre only to the mechanism. The usage of the term for the two parts was likely originated in and was transmitted from other musical instruments and voices; it is thus under the name of register that one designates the different divisions of the tonal scales of those voices or instruments.

We will deal with the tonal part in the chapter on registration\(^{13}\), and describe here only the mechanism of the registers.

In speaking of the layout of registers, one may only say that organ consoles do not resemble each other; fantasy, caprice, or chance seem to be the only guide followed here by organ-builders. The result is that the organist has to make a new adjustment each time he changes instruments.

The form of the registers is quite varied: either they are buttons

\(^{13}\) No document has been found concerning this chapter.
covered with porcelain ending with wooden stems of medium length and size; or they are small levers similar to those of a tiny keyboard which are pressed down for pulling the register on and released upward for pushing the register off; or they are wooden palettes covered with china and pivoting on a metallic central axis; or again they are wooden stems topped with small bowl-shaped china which one presses or releases for pulling on or pushing off the registers.

These mechanical agents are arranged in quite variable manners on the consoles: some are in horizontal rows to the immediate right and left sides of each keyboard, some are in semicircle, and some are placed entirely above the top of the keyboard. It is only on very rare instruments that one finds a logical classification of the registers; everywhere else, it is the disorder of anarchy. It is desirable that this state of situation cease and be replaced by a rational convention, responding to the demands of the correct execution of organ music and allowing the artist to pass the famous help of tireur de jeux, a help which constitutes both danger and slavery: danger by making errors which could involve a third party interposing between the musician and his personal will; slavery in which the organist is dependent on a second person who pulls the registers for him during the execution.

The invention of the so-called "combination registers" (registres de combinaisons) constitutes a real progress in a way that insures the independence of the performer. These registers, once pulled, are prepared in advance and need only a very light movement of the hand or the foot, activating a button or a pedal, to make the stops thus prepared sound; it is desirable that these means be generally adopted by organ-builders, with the condition that these combinations are free, that is to say they can be prepared according to the will of the organist, and not fixed in advance according to the arbitrary taste of organ-builders. There currently exist some instruments on which it is possible to prepare freely two, three, four,
and up to six combinations of registers, without suppressing those of the stops already pulled. Thanks to this system the instruments of which I speak, some of them very important, can be easily played without any assistance despite the most complicated registration of contemporary music.

The adoption of different colors for the registers of each keyboard also seems to me a good thing: the color speaks instantaneously to the eye and avoids a useless and long search which constitutes a regrettable loss of time during the performance. It would be good if the inscription carried by the mechanism of the register were also in a different color following the family to which this register belongs: thus, a rational console could have, for example, its foundation stops inscribed in black, its mutation stops in blue, its reed stops in red, on the buttons or plates of the registers whose shades would be, I suppose, white for the Grand-Orgue, green for the Positif, blue for the Récit, red for the Pédale. These shades would be indicated on plates of the combination pedals: for example, the coupler of the Grand-Orgue to the Positif in the unison would be half-part white and half-part green, that of the Grand-Orgue to the Récit, half-part white and half-part blue, etc. One could also apply this system to the couplers of octave grave or octave aiguë, the so-called accouplements en biais (oblique or octave couplers), to direct the coupler by following the nuances, without prejudice to the inscription of course. At present, these modifications are employed only on rare instruments, but the result for the performer is conclusive: it facilitates enormously the delicate and difficult task of registration.

In summary, each time an organist wants to execute a piece on his instrument, he has to open or close one or several series of registers corresponding to the keys of its keyboards: this opening or closing is carried out by means of buttons or keys of the register.

The combination pedals (pédales de combinaisons) are types of registers opened or closed by means of the foot. They are placed at the
bottom of the console where the organist, sitting in front of his keyboards, can reach them without difficulty. When they are too numerous, they are sometimes disposed in two rows, one above the other: this disposition is preferable to those which are too tightly placed one against the other, which tends to make the foot hesitate at the moment of depressing the pedal and to bring about confusion and accidents.

Mechanical agents activated by the combination pedals are the *accouplements*, the *appels de registres préparés*, and the *boîtes expressives*.

The *accouplements* or couplers unite one keyboard to the other. The *appels de registres préparés* make those registers sound at the moment when one presses on the pedals which control them. The *boîtes expressives* (swell boxes) open or close when the foot of the organist manipulates the pedals joined to the shutters of these chambers (boxes) in a suitable direction and at a desired degree, thus producing the crescendo or diminuendo.

The *accouplements* are of two types: *directs* (direct) when they couple the keyboards to the unison, *en biais* (oblique) when they couple the keyboards either to higher or to lower octaves.

The normal couplers at the unison of an organ with three manual keyboards are: *Positif sur Grand-Orgue* (2 on 1), *Récit sur Grand-Orgue* (3 on 1), *Récit sur Positif* (3 on 2); when these couplers are engaged, the performer makes certain notes speak from the keyboard coupled with others, in unison. The effect is the following:
The couplers of the pedal to the manual keyboards at the unison are: *Grand-Orgue sur Pédale* (1 on Pedal), *Positif sur Pédale* (2 on Pedal), *Récit sur Pédale* (3 on Pedal). The effect is the same as that among the manual keyboards.

Note: The couplers of the pedal to the manual keyboards often receive the name of *tirasses*. The indications between parentheses are employed by some modern organ-builders on the indicative plates of the combination pedals.

The octave couplers make the notes speak an octave lower or higher, either one keyboard by itself, or one keyboard coupled to another.

Effect of the octave coupler of one keyboard by itself:

(Examples in the hand of Vierne)
Effect of the octave coupler of one keyboard coupled to another:

(Examples in the hand of Vierne)

Octave grave coupler on Récit

Grand-Orgue coupled with Récit

Octave aiguë coupler on Récit

Grand-Orgue coupled with Récit

Here are all combinations given by the octave couplers for an organ with three manual keyboards and a pédalier: Grand-Orgue by itself octave grave; ditto octave aiguë; Positif by itself octave grave; ditto octave aiguë; Récit by itself octave grave; ditto octave aiguë; Pédale by itself octave grave; ditto octave aiguë; Positif on Grand-Orgue octave grave; ditto octave aiguë; Récit on Grand-Orgue octave grave; ditto octave aiguë; Positif on Récit octave grave; ditto octave aiguë; Grand-Orgue on Pédale octave grave; ditto octave aiguë; Positif on Pédale octave grave; ditto octave aiguë; Récit on Pédale octave grave; ditto octave aiguë.

The builders never employ these couplers for all possible combinations; it would be too complicated for the console. They choose, rather arbitrarily, those whose effect seems to them the better and more useful, three or four in an average instrument, five or six in a bigger instrument. It would be desirable that organists and organ-builders understand each other in making the opportunities and the choice of these
couplers, and that a rule be established for the sake of a common agreement which would unify the consoles for their doubling effect and would serve as the basis of registration indications when one needs to have recourse to these couplers.

We will deal with effects of these various couplers in the chapter on registration. For now, it is enough for a pupil to know the mechanical function, until the moment when the art of registration is introduced.

The combination pedals which manipulate the boîtes expressives (expressive chambers or swell boxes), called expressive pedals (pédales d’expression), are in two forms: either a simple pedal, somewhat longer and larger than its neighbors (the other combination pedals), which can be stopped in the middle and to the bottom of its course by two notches at both right and left sides of the groove in which it slides; or a flat board covered with fabric material, pivoting on a central axis, which can remain open or closed at any degree desired by the organist, who needs only to withdraw one foot to operate a pedal built this way at the degree he wishes. This last mentioned system is much better, because it allows nuances to be more varied, more sensitive, and more delicate than the other. It has been employed exclusively by organ-builders of all countries for the last thirty years.

The pédales d’introduction de registres\(^\text{14}\) allow groups of registers drawn beforehand to speak only with the aids of these aforementioned pedals: they are a modern invention, like those of the pedal couplers and the expressive pedals. Cavaillé-Coll was the first person who imagined the preconditioning of group registers which, once pulled, became effective only by commanding the corresponding combination pedals. They were first applied to the reeds which, placed on a separate wind-chest, did not receive the necessary wind to make them vibrate until the opening of these

\(^{14}\) Also mentioned by Vierne earlier in the text as the appels de registres préparés; annotation by the translator.
chests, the opening being commanded by the pedals to be activated. Later, organ-builders conceived the *préparables*, first applied only to certain groups of stops, then to all the registers of an instrument: from there are born the free combinations which enable the performer to change the entire palette of an organ, by the rapid opening of two, three, or four pedals, if this is desirable. Since the invention of the systems of electric action and the tubular pneumatic action, free combinations are practicable to infinity. It becomes possible for the performer to prepare a number of colors in advance, arranged according to his will; he may also make them intervene or disappear by means of the combination pedals destined for such purpose. It is the suppression of the intermediary between the artist and his instrument, an intermediary who was generally an inexperienced third person or even a musician himself, and whose function was to pull the registers; what virtuoso has not suffered from the ridiculous obligation of relying on the help of others to color his palette? The adoption of free combinations is therefore a liberation (*affranchissement*), and it is necessary to hope that organ-builders will multiply them on their instruments, sufficient in number for any possible registration, for without them one has to compromise with complicated movements to secure the execution, or has to have recourse to the famous *tireur de jeux* known familiarly under the picturesque name of *piston*.

The invention of the general crescendo pedal (*pédales de crescendo général*) is a practical thing, with the condition that it is applied reasonably and that this pedal is so regulated that the registers can be opened gradually and added successively and smoothly without jolt, without shock, and in a rational order of increase of force, brightness, and profundity. The ideal would be that the organist could prepare his crescendo in the order chosen by himself, and that once this crescendo is recorded, the pedal makes the registers enter in the order they have been prepared. I have once seen this system applied on a great instrument made by a Swiss factory and the result
is excellent.

It remains to describe the old trémolo of our ancestors, if one continues to look for artificial ways of coloration on the organ and tries to make it become effective through the means of a combination pedal, in general. This intermediary of vibration involves nothing more than making the stop called voix humaine tremble; the addition of vibrato to solo reed stops remains in a very bad taste and is no longer admitted by artists concerned with true style.

Lately, German organ-builders have devised suppressing all the combination pedals on their organ consoles except the expressive pedals and the general crescendo pedal. They have replaced these pedals by registers for hands, a serious heresy which invites condemnation. The builders across the Rhine (Outre-Rhine), by adopting this system, prove their absolute ignorance of the musical literature for the instrument they construct. Indeed, ancient and modern organ music is conceived in such manner that the performer has always a free foot with which he can handle the combination pedals, while it is almost never permissible for him to distract a hand to do the keyboard couplings and to prepare the registers to enter, etc. The ideal solution is to have the combination pedals doubled both for foot and for hand. Thus, even in the very rare case when organist’s two feet are occupied he may still use one of his free hands to activate the manual devices which correspond to those of the pedal through mechanical connection.

For a good instrument, the mechanism of the registers and the combination pedals must be precise, rapid, and comfortable to handle: the linkage of registers must be smooth and short; those combination pedals, though neat and easy, are nevertheless without softness, and always make the performer hesitate while he is operating the pedal to open or to close.

Delays in entry or exit of the registers are absolutely inadmissible. The addition or suppression of sonority through the mechanical linkage
between the registers and the pipe-works must be precise, like the keys on a keyboard instrument which obey exactly the will of the performer for underlining his intentions in a timely way. Would the conductor of an orchestra not protest if he had heard a group of instruments entering after the designated instant determined by his baton? The organist is a conductor of an orchestra and has the same demands, the same function, and the same responsibility; therefore, he must be obeyed by a docile and supple instrument if he wants truly to make an art work in his performance.

(Here should be placed reproductions of the organ consoles.)\textsuperscript{15}

The Case

It is, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, a piece of furniture which contains the pipes, the wind-chests, and the wind reservoirs intended to supply the resonant tubes with different pressures of air, as well as the mechanism leading to the keyboards, to the registers, to the combination pedals, and to the console controlled by these different agents.

There are infinitely various forms, according to the size of the organ, in the dimensions and the particular location where the instrument is installed. In an organ method, the case only deserves a rapid general description, for the sake of documentation. Organists who desire to study more closely this part of the instrument will always be able to refer to the special organ-building manuals which we commend to their attention at the end of this work.\textsuperscript{16}

In addition to accommodating numerous and very tall parts of the instrument, the case is the decorative furniture of the organ. Its style should generally adopt to the place in which it is installed. This is to say that the style is absolutely determined by the artistic taste and the practical

\textsuperscript{15} Manuscript inscription of Vieme in the typed text. We have not found these reproductions.

\textsuperscript{16} List not found.
initiative of the builder, who can adorn the sculptures, lines, as well as colors according to his fantasy. Some ancient cases are purely masterpieces of the decorative art. In France especially, they have been classified among its historical monuments.

The pipes of tin which almost always adorn the facade of the case are called Montre. They have given their name to a register, the essential foundation pipes of the organ, the tonal basis on which the entire palette of other colors is established. On some instruments, the facade pipes of the case are active; that is to say they are commanded by a register and sing to its call. However, on most of the larger instruments, the montre which decorates the case is mute.

For reasons of site, the case has often had to be constructed in several parts, separated by empty spaces, but similarly linked to the mechanisms of the console. For example in Paris, the organ case of the church Saint-Vincent-de-Paul occupies two sides of the tribune, the console being disposed in front and at the center of the former, placing the organist in the middle of the pipes of his instrument. This disposition has been adopted to allow the rose window above of the portal of the church to be exposed. One wonders with stupor why the same disposition has not been taken to avoid masking the wonderful rose window above the portal of Notre-Dame-de-Paris. Due to the incompetence of the architect who did the restoration of this admirable cathedral, the tribune is disposed such way that the majestic case of the great organ hides almost entirely this splendid stained-glass window. It is a fault without excuse, the fault which could and should have been avoided, either by imitating what had been done in Saint-Vincent-de-Paul or by placing the tribune some meters lower. What has resulted, despite the desire to preserve the full arch in stone on which the said tribune is built, is that the full arch, not being in the style of the rest of the monument, clashes and contrasts dreadfully with the rib vaults of the latter.
Recently, some combinations have been tried which allow the performer to play on the organ console at some distance from the cases. This procedure presents a serious disadvantage of enormous delay in the transmission and in the hearing of sound. It is to suppose that it will not be generalized, being anti-artistic. In some concert halls, the consoles are mobile, connected to their cases by supple electrical cables. When the electricity becomes less capricious and less delicate as a mechanical transmission agent from keyboards and registers to pipes, one will be able to take the advantage of this possibility to shift the console according to the requirements of certain performance of large ensembles in which the organ participates.

Finally, some instruments are devoid of the cases properly mentioned. Such is the case of that of Saint-Ambroise in Paris, in which the wind-chests and pipes are placed directly on the tribune, in a kind of shapeless packing-box; the facade of the case is an imitation of oil painting on canvas.

In our days, the industry of salon organs has had a great development, and cases are made in harmony with furniture of all different styles. Nothing is more decorative than a beautiful organ case, in a studio or in a great salon.

(Photographs of cases)\textsuperscript{17}

The Bellows

One can say that the bellows is the pulmonary machine of the organ. Like a singer, like a virtuoso wind instrumentalist, the organ must, above all, have good and solid lungs. Even if the mechanism is wonderful and the sound of the instrument is admirable, it will be still a wretched instrument if it does not possess bellows capable of providing it abundantly with the

\textsuperscript{17} Manuscript inscription of Vierne. We have not found these photographs.
compressed air necessary for its function. Old Johann Sebastian Bach, when he was called to appraise and to inaugurate a new organ, would never fail to begin by making the instrument undergo a pulmonary capacity test. In order to do this, he pulled all registers of the organ and played big and very prolonged chords. He declared himself happy only if the sound was absolutely stable, without any alteration, without any shake. Well, what Bach could demand in the time of the cuneiform (wedge-shaped) and direct bellows, how much more should we mercilessly demand it in our day, where the feeding bellows have taken the form adopted by Cavaillé-Coll who later invented the bellow-reservoirs, destined for storing the wind provided by the feeding bellows to the distributor, with different pressures appropriately calculated in proportion to the needs of the instrument.

In the last thirty years, the mechanism of the feeding bellows has undergone modifications that are a real revolution. To the old system with pumps activated directly by men, either with steppers for the feet or with levers for the arms, substitutions were gradually made of bellow-engines, either in the form of pump tractors driven by water, by electricity, by gas, by hot air, or in the form of electrical rotary ventilators sending the compressed wind directly, through conduits or sleeves, to the bellow-reservoirs. Perfected lately, this last system seems to be very superior to all others in the abundance and regularity of air production. It has, moreover, the advantage of being silent, which allows its installation closer to the instrument to provide the wind. It is an appreciable advantage in the very numerous cases where space is strictly restrained to the builder for the erection of an organ. Owing to the invention of the mechanical bellows, today it is possible to provide the organ, limited to the same dimensions, with the tonal means required for a considerable consumption of compressed air. This invention has come just in time, since our modern ears are increasingly demanding in regard to the power, length, and depth of the musical sound.
Previously, the organist, afraid of lacking wind, always hesitated to use the absolute totality of his instrument. Today, he no longer has the same fear, and can use the complete Grand-Jeu sound, with all the volume and majesty required for performing certain organ pieces which give the total sound of the instrument.

(Drawings of bellows and engines)\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{18} Manuscript inscription of Vierne. We have not found these drawings.
CHAPTER 2

PLAYING OF THE MANUAL KEYBOARD

Position of the Organist

The organist should sit in the front and in the exact center of his manual keyboards: the torso straight, without affectation or stiffness. The bench should be placed at a suitable distance so that the performer can reach the keyboards easily, without making an effort which can be harmful to the suppleness of movements. The feet should touch the pedal board very naturally, ready to play. The usual practice, during the repose of the pedal, of supporting the feet, either on the metallic bar which surmounts the combination pedals by some organ-builders, or in the rear, on the bar which often serves to strengthen the bench, or on the pedals manipulating the boîtes expressives (the expressive chambers or the swell boxes), is absolutely wrong, in the sense that it obliges useless movements at the moment of entry in the action of the pédalier: it is also unaesthetic, giving the body of the instrumentalist an awkward and grotesque position. All gestures executed by the hands and the feet for the playing of keyboards as well as for the manipulation of the mechanism of coloration must be short, precise, rapid, and exempt from nervousness: mechanical noises of all sorts must be avoided in the greatest possible measure; they are always disagreeable and unpleasant to the audience.

The position of the hands on the manual keyboard of the organ is the same as that on the keyboard of the piano: the joint of the elbow opens at a straight angle, the wrist and the forearm are in a straight line, the finger is supported on the fleshy part which is the immediate neighbor of the nail, the phalanxes jutting outwardly.
The attack on the key should be rapid and precise: the finger should go down immediately to the bottom of the key, with firmness but not too strongly. The degree of force required for a good attack on an organ whose mechanism is normal should be equal to the effort of playing a *mezzo forte* on a piano with light key-action. This attack remains the manner for the execution of legato passages which are the stylistic foundation of organ music. Hardness of attack produces mechanical noises without reinforcing the sound, since it is always the same mechanically. On the other hand, an attack which is too light risks running one sound into another, is harmful to clarity, and can cause rhythmic problem.

It is a serious mistake to believe that touch makes no difference on the organ because the sound always comes out the same. First, there is no single accentuation for all organ music. Then, the touch on the organ, as well as on all the other keyboard instruments, as far as its duration and emission, is an absolutely individual manifestation of will. The same instrument played by two artists with different touches does not sound the same way for well-trained ears. I have personally experienced this quite often and remain surprised over the changes in sound of a familiar instrument played first by its regular organist (*titulaire*) and then by an assistant (*suppléant*), although both played the same work, the same movements, with the same style and the same registration. Without seeing the organists' switch, I heard the change in technique. I will deal progressively with the particularities of touch in the study of different articulations and accentuations which comprise the organ style.

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19 Manuscript inscription of Vierne. We have not found this photograph.
The Legato

The current style of organ music is that of polyphony in which each sound of a same part must be linked hermetically to its neighbor: the normal playing of the instrument is therefore the connective playing (*jeu lié*) or “legato”. Given the limitation of five fingers of the human hand, to obtain absolute legato, not just for an isolated melodic part but for an entire polyphonic ensemble, the organist has to have recourse to an artifice called substitution. Substitution consists of changing fingers on the same note, without any discontinuity in the emission of sound.

Substitution from one finger to another must be made rapidly, with as little motion as possible as possible. The substituting finger should replace the other without the eye’s being able to discern the effort of achieving this artifice which should remain natural. For obtaining the degree of suppleness and the desirable ability in the flawless practice of substitution, it is necessary to practice the following exercises, very slowly and hands separately at first, and to acquire careful control of the motion which necessitate this study. When the pupil has acquired the habit of smooth substitution without any useless contractions, he may proceed to do these exercises with two hands together.

Note: It is recommended that in the beginning of the study of substitution, one practices the replacement of the finger in some measurable rhythm with the attacks by both the substituting finger and the finger being substituted. Little by little this necessity will disappear, with the habit’s being achieved and the movement’s being made as rapidly and as smoothly as possible. This etude is aimed at achieving precise control of the motion.
Substitution Exercises

Simple Substitution

No. 1

No. 2
Apply the fingering of the preceding exercises to the following chromatic scale.
Double Substitution

No. 12

No. 13
Apply the fingering of No. 14 to the following chromatic scale.
Play with the same fingering of the 16th exercise using as your starting point on each note of the chromatic scale, similar to those in the thirds of No. 15.
Alternate Substitution

Note: To execute this exercise No. 17 correctly, it has to be practiced in the following manner: with the right hand in ascending, first substitute the first finger for the second and then the fourth for the fifth; in descending, first substitute the fifth for the fourth and then the second for the first. With the left hand in ascending, proceed as with the right hand in descending, and in descending, as with the right hand in ascending.
Triple Substitution

Work from the same principle as in the alternate substitution.

No. 18

Quadruple Substitution

No. 19
Note: Organ music does not contain pieces written in such a way that the performer would be forced to practice triple or quadruple substitutions in rapid movements. It is therefore solely among succeeding tones played rather slowly that substitution is used. If in the course of a piece one encounters rapid successive tones comprised of six, seven or eight parts the detached style will be used. We will encounter this articulation a little further on.

Substitution from One Hand to the Other
The Glissando

After substitution, the next most common fingering in the “legato” style is finger sliding or “glissando”.

The glissando is practiced in two ways: sliding either from a black key to a white key with any one of the five fingers, or from a white key to an immediate neighboring white key with the thumb.

For sliding from a black key to a white key, it is necessary to attack the black keys as closely as possible to the white key and, by a supple and rapid movement, to descend on the white key without any discontinuity of pressure. The motion must be practiced so that the two notes are connected perfectly well and clean. If the pressure is too strong at the moment of the sliding, the sound of the first key will blur with that of its neighbor. On the contrary, if the pressure is accidentally insufficient or ceases, there will be a break between the two notes. The glissando must be practiced very slowly and without any tension, seeking for precision in suppleness.

For sliding the thumb on two immediate neighboring white keys, it is necessary, after having attacked the first key, to raise the hand slightly and to bring this key under the first phalanx of the thumb. Then, without ceasing the pressure, to direct the tip of the thumb reaching towards the key. When the tip is well above the key, one lowers it on the key by raising the wrist slightly to produce a clean downward pressure; at this moment, the second phalanx of the thumb leaves the key which has been held and comes to resume its normal place. The connection of the two notes depends here, as in the sliding from black to white, on the continuity of pressure; the clarity is the result of precision in the motion of raising the wrist.

The thumb glissando is practiced especially in the descending motion of the right hand and in the ascending motion of the left hand, but one can also slide the thumbs of the two hands in reverse direction; in this case, it is
necessary to make the reverse movement exactly contrary to that described for the normal sliding. The operation is somewhat more delicate, because the attack of second key by the second phalanx of the thumb is difficult, but with a little training, one succeeds quickly in overcoming this difficulty.

Note: It is possible to slide two, three, and even four black keys to white keys situated both immediately below or above these black keys: this is called double, triple, and quadruple glissandi.

One may proceed the following exercises in the same manner as he practices those featuring the substitution: slowly and hands separately at first; then, after the habit is established, more rapidly and with hands together.
Glissando

Simple Glissando

No. 21

No. 22
Double Glissando

No. 23
Triple Glissando

No. 24

No. 25
Quadruple Glissando

No. 27

Combinations of Glissandos with Notes Held or Tied

No. 28
Glissando of the Thumb on the White Keys in Ascending and in Descending

No. 29

Note: Fingerings for scales ascending with the right hand and descending with the left hand (measures 3, 4 and 5) are rarely used, because the physical motion being very difficult.

Thumb Glissando in Chromatic Scale

No. 30

\[ \text{simili} \]
Linked Octaves (same observations for No. 29)

No. 31

Chromatic Scale in Octaves

No. 32
Finger Crossing

This fingering consists of passing the fingers over or under the other without a break in the legato.

In certain passages, in order to avoid unnecessary or useless motion, this fingering can be used to advantage, especially in rapid passages when, physically, one does not have time to use finger substitution.

Each finger can cross in two directions; however, an exception is made for the thumb which, having only two phalanxes, can only pass under the other fingers.

For the study of finger crossing, it is preferable to hold down a key with the thumb, while playing with the other fingers, in order to keep the hand in a normal position and to avoid the contortions which can occur during the course of these exercises before one is familiar with this technique. Once the skill is acquired, the thumb will no longer need to hold a key down; the movement will be executed with suppleness and without the hand’s leaving its regular position on the keyboard.

It is said that Chopin often practiced finger crossing on the piano in the organ manner; it is certain that many of the features of his music are much easier to execute with this fingering.

It is obvious that this technical challenge requires slow and careful practice: because, at first, finger crossing seems awkward and unnatural in both directions. However, if one practices the following exercises carefully, by breaking down slowly and clearly the motion of a passage, one will be successful, in a relatively short time, in performing these exercises with ease and with a perfectly natural position. It is necessary to practice this fingering without any tension, to cross gently rather than to move abruptly in crossing the finger. Once the finger is passed, one should immediately prepare the remaining fingers on the following keys which they are to play.
Note: For a long time, keyboard instrumentalists have accepted the rule which forbade the use of the thumb on black keys. Nowadays, this rule has become obsolete, and one not only uses the thumb on black keys, but also uses thumb glissando to move from white keys to black keys, or vice versa.

As an exercise of practical training, one practices all the scales using the fingering of C (Ut) major. The purpose of this is to acquire skill in the use of thumb. This should be used only as an exercise specifically for this purpose. When playing passages contain all or parts of scales the particular fingering of each individual scale is always preferable, both for a good hand position and for facility in executing the passage.
Practice the preceding exercises in all keys by transposing them chromatically.

Linked Sixth with Held Notes
Articulation

The "legato" is not the only device which is part of the organistic style. As in all the agents of musical expression, the organ must be able to translate all rhythms, and as a result, to admit all different combinations treating the duration of sound emission. Therefore the style of the organ employs articulation, as do other instruments and voices. Articulation comprises the occasional repeated notes in the course of legato passages, detached chords, and the "staccato" or the continuous détaché by all notes in a pattern. No interpretation of musical texts would be intelligible without a precise, meticulous, and thorough study of these means of sound emission. It is therefore indispensable to establish judicious rules in this respect, by rigorously taking into account the instrumental nature of the organ with its strength and its defects. These rules have taken on the power of law as a result of continuing observation by the elite of artists, who have recognized the accuracy of their codification after its consecration by good taste.

But, as no general rule can be known without its exception, certain details will need to be added to the study of what follows which may modify, based on needs, the statements of some principles which govern that part of correct organ playing. The role of the artist who is truly deserving of this name, consists in interpreting the spirit, not the letter, of the law.

1. Repeated Notes

General principle: the first of two repeated notes in the same part loses half its value, that is to say that two quarter notes are to be executed as an eighth note followed by an eighth rest and a quarter note, two eighth notes are to be executed as a sixteenth note followed by a sixteenth rest and
an eighth note, etc.

Example:

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Example:
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(Examples in the hand of Vierne)

**Given text:**

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**Execution:**

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(Examples in the hand of Vierne)

Exceptions: if repeated notes are of long value or belong to musical phrases in slow tempo, the first of the two repeated notes will lose only a quarter, an eighth, or even less of its value, the suppression by half its value being excessive and producing a void much too great.

Example:

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(Examples in the hand of Vierne)
If repeated notes are found in passages of regular rhythmic value, it is necessary to suppress the first by a quantity which, while producing clean articulation, leaves no ambiguity about the metric value; if repeated notes are found in passages composed of notes of different values, the smallest value should be deducted from the first of the two repeated notes.

If the note value belongs to binary meter, a multiple or a division of two is deducted. In ternary meter, this can be either a multiple of two or a multiple of three:
(Examples in the hand of Vierne)
This mathematical precision of articulation has been adopted to remedy the defect of lacking an attack on the organ, the instrument in which the sound is produced mechanically rather than by direct effort of will and intelligence. On the piano, on string instruments, and on other ordinary wind instruments, the performer is able to give clarity to the articulation by a strengthening or weakening of intensity in the attack: this cannot take place on the organ where the sound is always even, no matter how much physical energy is spent by the artist. Therefore, it is only through duration that one can put difference of intensity into the sound, from which comes the mathematical articulation. Free articulation on this instrument produces a deplorable effect of feebleness and excludes all precision of execution: therefore it must always be avoided.

The principles which applied to repeated notes have been adopted for the execution of all articulated notes, either because of the repetition of this note, or because of the accentuation in passages where two different notes need to be separated from each other. In the style of the organ, as in the style of all music, accentuation plays an essential role: it renders a lively and intelligible interpretation to the musical texts. The absence of accentuation on the organ gives rise to the style macaronique which disfigures the texts and remains the manifestation of the most absolute incomprehension of musical discourse.

Graphically, the sign of articulation is a dot placed above the note:
one also uses a horizontal bar above the dot or the accent mark in the form of small bellows often used in music for other instruments. The simple dot designates the suppression by exactly half of the value of the note which it surmounts, the dot with a bar above or the accent mark indicate a longer duration and generally apply to longer values of the text: they imply therefore the suppressions by a quarter, an eighth, or other proportions of values.

Very rarely did the ancient authors indicate the articulation and the accentuation: one can therefore only reconstitute their organistic texts in this regard, by tradition when it is possible, and by analogy and comparison with similar instrumental and vocal music in the case where traditional precise indication is lacking.

Modern musicians have adopted the habit of annotating their texts with precision and have tried to leave no doubt about their desire for accentuation: one must therefore know exactly the meaning of the characters employed for this purpose and to translate exactly their intention in this matter. How could musicians be content only to read the notes but to exclude all the accompanying indications which give the notes meanings and sense! It shows negligence and carelessness which will lead to worse mistakes: the reading of the texts must therefore be considered as a strict obligation of the instrumentalist who, for want of this awareness, runs the risk of betraying the intentions of the composer and, in that way, fails the strict duty of his mission as interpreter and popularizer of the creators' thoughts.

The following exercises are intended for pupils to familiarize themselves with rational articulation: they should therefore work with extreme care, in a manner allowing the perfect execution of the texts in which one meets either repeated notes or notes detached from their neighbor, differentiated because of accentuation.

Note: The cerebral effort which governs the release of a note must
be exactly the same as that provided for its attack: this is why a note released with indifference loses its force and leads to fluctuation and hesitation in the execution. To begin practicing a piece, it is necessary therefore to determine in advance all articulated notes included in the text and to regulate the attack and the release, by counting scrupulously. For example, suppose there are two quarter notes whose first loses a sixteenth; it will be necessary to count “one” while attacking the first quarter note, “two” and “three” during its duration, and to release exactly at the counting of “four”; the second quarter will be attacked at the counting of “five”. This dividing by determined values for control is indispensable in the exact realization of articulation. If one proceeds otherwise, there will be disorder.
Repeated quarter notes are articulated at half of their value.

Execute the repeated half notes with a separation of the eighth rest in between.
Articulate the repeated eighth notes at half of their value.

No. 42

Articulate the eighth notes at half and the dotted quarter notes at two thirds of their value.

No. 43
Articulate the dotted quarter notes at three fourths of their value and the sixteenth notes at half.

No. 44

Alternate Articulation in Three Parts
Articulate the repeated quarter notes at half of their value.

No. 45

No. 46
Articulate the dotted quarter note at two thirds and the eighth note at half of their value.

Simultaneous Articulation
No. 50

Note: Lift the articulated notes of the left hand in the first two measures and the dotted half note of the right hand at the third quarter of the measure; the dotted eighth notes lose one third of their value and are executed as if the dot were made of a sixteenth rest:
Alternate Articulation in Four Parts

Articulate the repeated notes at a fourth of their value.

No. 51

Articulate the repeated notes at half of their value.

No. 52
Articulate the quarter note at half of their value.

Articulate the repeated eighth notes at half of their value.

Note: The legato of the thumb of the left hand from the first to the seventh measure is difficult; it is necessary to coil up the first phalanx of the finger completely to the left at a right angle.
Articulate the repeated half notes as if dotted quarter notes with eighth rests.

No. 55

Articulate the quarter notes at half and the half notes at three fourths of their value.

No. 56
Articulate the half note of the first measure at the right hand at three fourths of its value and the repeated eighth notes at half of their value.

Articulation of Non-Repeated Notes

All the articulated notes of Exercises 58, 59, and 60 should be lifted by half of their value.
Remark: The execution of passages in which are articulated notes found at the same time as notes tied to the same hand is very tricky: to achieve the essential precision of absolute accuracy of the text one must read the text in advance to determine the ties and articulated notes and to adapt suitable fingering for these passages permitting execution with the smallest and the most natural movements possible. Without observing this principle one runs the risk of an unfavorable impression to expert ears.
2. Detached Chords

In organ music one frequently comes across series of chords which, for reason of accentuation, have to be detached one from the other, either partially or completely. In old texts, it is quite difficult to determine when the different notes belonging to two neighboring chords should be connected, and, on the contrary, when these notes of the chords should be detached: some following passages extracted from J. S. Bach are subjected to discussion:20

When one is somewhat acquainted with the style of the organ, he is able to determine with certainty when one should connect non-repeated notes between chords, and when it is necessary to detach the chords completely from each other, despite different notes. An organist, with a comprehensive musical training, should always be able to proceed by analogy with some similar orchestral versions when he is facing difficulty. In fact, in the past, musicians wrote music for the organ using the same manner of accentuation as those they employed when composing for orchestral instruments: therefore, one should compare organ music with orchestral music rather than with music for harpsichord, which requires articulations of an entirely different order, on an account of the character and nature of the instrument.

In modern music, composers indicate more and more clearly the way they intend detached chords to be executed: chords surmounted with signs of articulation are entirely detached from each other; for those neighboring chords where certain common notes should be connected, the ties or slurs are carried between the notes.

In modern texts, very often, the exact value of articulated notes is

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20 They are lacking.
indicated graphically and one reads: \(^{21}\)
instead of: \(^{22}\)

When the détachés are not realized but only indicated by signs, it is necessary to interpret them as has been said for articulated notes.

Note: The effort to make a chord release with precision is exactly the same as that provided for its attack. Many organists release articulated chords or notes with indifference; an insipid feebleness of playing results, and renders such sound towards the audience as either indifferent or even hostile. It is remarkable that a chord to be released with precision gives power and strength and that, on the contrary, it is weakened if it is released without the willful effort which must govern its departure. It is the observation of these remarks that gives an organist's performance an authority which imposes the texts on the audience and obliges him to listen.

It is also necessary to notice that the articulation, either isolated notes or chords, will undergo some modification in the sense of the duration, according to the resonance of the registers employed: drier with the soft and gentle registers, it needs to be prolonged slightly if the registers are the strong and loud stops. We will return to this consideration in the chapter on registration\(^{23}\).

\(^{21}\) Idem.
\(^{22}\) Idem.
\(^{23}\) The chapter does not exist.
The Staccato

Besides the articulation of repeated notes and detached chords, the style of the organ may comprise continuous staccato for passages or for an entire piece written in view of this effect. The richest example from the modern music is the Toccata which serves as the Final to the Fifth Symphony for Organ by Ch.-M. Widor, the illustrious master, creator of the organ symphony. This entire movement is completely written in staccato.

For the same reasons that make arbitrary articulation proscribed at the organ, one should not admit free staccato at this instrument. It is necessary to note again that free staccato increasingly disappears from the technique of other musical instruments.

The staccato for the organ must therefore be regular, each note equally spaced from its neighbor by an identical silence:

Example:

(Examples in the hand of Vierne)

For a rational execution of absolute staccato on the organ, it is necessary to hold the wrist slightly lowered, a bit contracted by the forearm, in such way that the latter serves as propeller and prevents it
from changing position; the fingers, quite curved, leave the keys only as necessary to allow the latter to release. It is to say that the fingers must remain in contact with the keys constantly and that each note must be detached by a stroke of the wrist; the latter is put in motion by the forearm.

It is necessary to practice the staccato very slowly, to watch scrupulously over the movements of the driving apparatus: one may obtain regularity only under these conditions. After some period of slow practice, one will arrive at great rapidity and absolute ease. It is necessary to avoid practicing the staccato continuously for too long, but to take short rests after each session. One may begin, for example, by working for ten minutes and then taking two minutes of rest, work for another ten minutes and rest again, etc., for an hour. With this procedure, there is no concern about fatigue, which has the consequence of bringing stiffness, entirely incompatible with the touch of the organ. One should work slowly, hands separate, and practice equally with each hand: lacking this precaution, one will find himself stopping during the execution of certain pieces in which the staccato is distributed to two hands in almost equal proportion.

One encounters in organ music simple, double, triple, and quadruple staccato. It is necessary to arrive at the same ease in all cases: this is why one will find further exercises of the same difficulty in these four varieties.\(^{24}\)

It is staccato that serves as a decisive test of the suppleness of the mechanism of an organ: a formidable test for negligent organ-builders, because, with a slow, heavy, or doughy mechanism (as one encounters, alas!, too often), the even détaché becomes impossible. With the achievement of modern organ-builders, organists are entitled to demand instruments whose mechanism is as supple, as precise, and as easy as an excellent piano. To those who declare that the staccato “emerges from the

\(^{24}\)Exercises not found.
organ as it will” (sort à l’orgue comme il peut), it is necessary to reply two things: if the organ is a good one, and if the organist knows his craft, the staccato should have the clarity of a telegraph machine; the principle remains without alteration, even when the organ-builder or the performer is incapable of applying it.

N.B.: In the study of the following exercises, proceed as with the others, taking into account what has been said about the necessary rests for preserving suppleness in the evenness.25

(End of Vierne’s document in English translation)

25Exercises not found.
CONCLUSION

With this method, though it is unfortunately incomplete, organists today have the key in hand to the interpretation of Vierne’s organ music and to the techniques involved in the performance of his organ works.

Vierne’s organ training was first moulded, when he was a student in the Institution Nationale des Jeunes Aveugles, by Louis Lebel, a contemporary of Franck. After Lebel’s death his organ study was under the tutelage of Adolphe Marty, a student of Franck and a prize winner from Franck’s organ class, and later under that of Franck himself. It is quite certain that Franck had much influence on Vierne in the early stage of his career as an organist. At the time Franck was the superintendent of musical studies at the Institution Nationale, in addition to being the professor of organ at the Paris Conservatory, and served as a judge of the annual organ competitive examinations for both schools. In 1887, Franck transcribed many organ works of Bach into Braille, with a total of five volumes, for the students of the Institution Nationale so that they could acquaint themselves with these masterpieces of the organ literature. By the time Vierne entered the Conservatory he had learned many works by memory, obviously from this Braille edition and in the way that Franck prepared for him. The research done by Karen Hastings¹ reveals that Franck not only sought an absolute legato as the normal touch of organ playing but knew how to achieve it, as proved by the evidences of those fingerings and pedalings Franck indicated in the Braille edition. But the technical aspects of Franck’s organ playing are not the same as those of Lemmens’ tradition. During the performance students were instructed to concentrate only on playing the notes from the page and not to worry about dynamic or stop changes; all mechanical manipulations of the instrument

relied on the assistance of a second person, and frequently they were handled by Franck himself. Nevertheless, the art and skills of improvisation were given the utmost attention in Franck’s organ teaching. This is the area in which Franck made his reputation which few could rival. Organ students were required to improvise more than to perform written pieces from the literature, due to the nature of the Mass and the practical responsibilities of organists in the Roman Catholic Church.

A turning point in Vierne’s organ playing occurred shortly after his entering the Paris Conservatory when Widor succeeded Franck as professor of organ. Having been trained by Lemmens in Brussels, Widor immediately launched a reform in organ teaching. He stressed the importance of technique and taught the students to be equally skillful in improvisation and in performing repertoire. He had the students play the organ exactly the way he learned from Lemmens. Widor believed that what he had learned from Lemmens and now passed on to his students was the genuine method in the tradition which could be traced back to Bach. The detail with which Widor dissected technique in his demonstrations stunned the students, including Vierne. For them the method was absolutely new: “it is clear, we don’t know anything.”  

2 Thus Vierne underwent a thorough reeducation in the Lemmens tradition. He reworked everything that he had learned from his previous teachers in the way that Widor taught him. Widor’s successor Guilmant, who also had studied with Lemmens in the earlier years, continued this tradition in organ teaching. During the period when Widor and Guilmant held the professorships, Vierne assisted in teaching organ classes. The techniques which Vierne acquired from Widor became his pedagogy. When Vierne accepted the post and succeeded Guilmant at the Schola Cantorum, Widor exhorted Vierne to remember what he learned and to promulgate this tradition with exactness and faithfulness, and expressed how strongly he felt about the

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continuation of the tradition. The reform which Widor commenced and brought about first in the Conservatory organ class forever changed organ performance in France. It brought the art of execution to the fore, and consequently a virtuosic French organ school emerged.

With almost no exception, all Vierne’s published organ works were composed after his studies with Widor and Guilmant and after the style of his organ playing was converted to Lemmens’ tradition. It is also in this tradition that Vierne wrote this incomplete method of organ playing. It is safe to assume that all organ works of Vierne should be played in the manner recommended in this treatise and in the tradition of Lemmens: correct posture and proper seating of the performer at the organ, logical and economical movements in playing and in manipulating the mechanical devices of the instrument, control of movements during the period of practice to determine if a movement is necessary, precise attack and release of the key or pedal, absolute legato touch achieved by means of finger and foot substitution, glissando, and finger crossing for all parts of the music texture, accurate articulations in a rhythmically measurable manner for staccato, repeated, and accentuated notes, careful observation of all musical texts, expression marks, and articulation signs which should reflect exactly the composer’s intention, and, above all, a very refined technique in which any good performance is indispensable.

With careful study and practice of the method, with application of the principles and the techniques to Vierne’s organ compositions, with the availability of the instrument such as the Fisk-Rosales organ recently installed here in The Shepherd School of Music, an authentic performance of the organ works by this French master is not only desirable but also achievable on this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

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______. “Quelques Souvenirs personnels sur Alexandre Guilmant suivis


De La Salle, Genevieve. “L’Orgue Symphonique en France.” *Revue


______. “Jacques Lemmens, Charles-Marie Widor and the French Bach


