



LOUIS VIERNE
ORGAN SYMPHONY No. 4, Op. 32



Pierre LABRIC

*playing the Great Cavaillé-Coll Organ of the
Basilica of Saint Sernin, Toulouse, France*

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I. Prélude 7:45

II. Allegro 6:09

III. Menuet 7:20

IV. Romance: Adagio molto espressione 8:00

V. Final: Allegro 6:10

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NOTES

The world of the organ has known many of the greatest musicians in its ranks who were exclusively devoted to their art. Since the renaissance of the French organ in the late 1800's with Cavallé-Coll the organbuilder, and the musician Cesar Franck, the symphonic organ has proven to be an integral part of the musical life of the world. Two decades of eminent musical literati carried forth the Francko-Widorian message; e.g., Vierne, Tournemire, Dupré, Huré, Gigout, Guilmant, Bonnet.

These symphonies brought to the organ repertoire both the spirit and color of the nineteenth-century orchestral symphony and the classic sonata-allegro form. Vierne was at once a classicist and a romanticist. From Widor he took the the idea of the symphony itself, and from Franck he adopted the idea of writing short canons which appear frequently in his symphonic material, and of writing cyclic themes. It was Vierne who made the church organ a true concert instrument whose only competitor in the field of musical art was the symphony orchestra itself.

Louis Vierne was born blind on October 8, 1870 in Poitiers, France. His father, a man of letters, editor-in-chief of the MEMORIAL DE LILLE, was

advised by his brother in-law, Charles Colin, a professor of oboe at the Conservatoire and organist of Saint Denis-du-Saint Sacrament, to set Louis on the path to an artistic career.

His early organ study began with his uncle and subsequently he studied with Louis Lebel and Adolphe Marty, professors at the Institute for the Blind. Then followed a short period of study with Cesar Franck. It was Franck who made Vierne write without the aid of the keyboard, a most difficult method but certainly one which brought great merit to the young Vierne. The young lad was profoundly influenced by Franck, and with great affection and admiration passionately followed every word, experiencing intense joy and a magnetic fascination for the *maitre*. In return Franck was most tender and kind to the young Vierne, sustained and encouraged him, inspired him with a deep love of music, and aroused in him the greatest hopes. He was to become one of the leading disciples of the symphonic organ movement which was begun in France towards the mid-nineteenth century (1862) and was to continue until approximately 1940 with the advent of the neo-classic organ.

The polyphonic organ which had reigned for over three hundred years no longer carried the interest of the French. The trend was toward a

picturesque, imitative, symphonic texture, an expressive instrument of great color. The Revolution brought great destruction and set the mood for the abandonment of the classic, polyphonic organ. With the Restoration period came the symphonic organ and it was Charles-Marie Widor, a colleague of Franck and a grand maitre who, through various reforms in the performance of the organ, paved the way for a brilliant school of French organists. It was Widor who placed the symphonic organ well on its way to success along with the genius of Aristide Cavaillé-Coll.

This Franck-Widor tradition, combined with the talents of Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, was the beginning of new and exciting inventions for the organ; e.g., new couplers facilitated the coupling of keyboards, the range of the keyboards was extended, bellows were perfected, the tonal pallet was greatly enriched and this generally opened to composers a new vehicle, that of the symphony.

Aristide Cavaillé-Coll was born in Montpellier, France and came from a long line of organbuilders. His father, Dominique, was an organbuilder in Languedoc and Aristide's grandfather, Jean-Pierre Cavaillé built organs in Barcelona. Aristide took the name Coll from

his grandmother, and the renowned firm of Cavaillé had early success in the south of France and the north of Spain.

The most distinguishing feature of the French romantic organ is the full chorus of reed stops; i.e., 16', 8', and 4' on each manual and in the pedal. The full organ is capped by powerful reeds, and the mixtures, unlike the German classic scheme, enrich both the flues and the reeds instead of dominating them. The French reeds are unloaded, their curvature is marked, their shallots are open and with these powerful trompettes and bombardes there is never a feeling of "reserved force". The French organ has kept *au courant* with all the inventions, improvements and methods of building. Indeed, there is no need to recapture the real spirit of the organ for the French never really lost it.

Franck le grand maitre, and in turn Widor and Guilmant, opened the organ to romanticism, but Vierne became the most brilliant exponent of the movement, carrying it to great heights. It was in the orgue symphonique that the soul of Vierne found a home, constantly ravaged, never at peace. He, like Widor, explored the details of his instrument, lovingly developed his art, and left monumental works of composition. The solid musical form, the

richness and clarity of Vierne's writing, the statement of his themes, this is so much a part of Vierne's inheritance from the *maître* of Saint-Sulpice, Père Widor. He learned and created so much, aided by his nobility of thought, his distinction of ideas, his generosity, his profound sincerity. Throughout the works of Vierne one notices the same hallmark, the same law, that of the symphonic organ.

It is possible to see three distinct periods of creativity in the works of Vierne: the first began in 1895 until 1905, a period in which the first two symphonies appeared, until the beginning of the war (1916) in which Vierne wrote his third symphony; the last period extended from 1917 until 1931, the period of maturity in which he wrote the last three symphonies. With the progression of years Vierne's art became perfected, a strong musical tongue developed and his writing became more tormented, his thoughts more anxious, and oftentimes marked with deep soul-searching, a certain sadness which poured out from every corner of his soul.

Vierne took unusual interest in using strange rhythmic structures and exploring the peculiar characteristics of each division of the organ. Although noted for the clarity of his expositions, the logic of his developments, the knowledge of rhythm and his value of music,

Vierne achieves greater distinction from his ability to assimilate the art of Widor and pour forth a more noble offering. He was imbued with a certain humanness of mind and emotion yet his was truly an art of intelligence.

After the themes of Franck, none are more beautiful, more simple in the French organ literature than those of Vierne; witness the adagios of the first and third symphonies, the choral of the second, the long motifs with their rhythmic themes as in the allegros of the second, third, and fourth symphonies, the finales of the first, third, fifth and sixth symphonies.

This great romanticist, poet laureate and painter of musical portraits, channeled all his energies in capturing the profuse colors of the symphonic organ, projecting them to a musical canvas and unfolding in patterns of extreme richness, the grand sound of Cavallé-Coll.

Out of 89 candidates who applied for the post at Notre Dame de Paris in 1900, Vierne was unanimously appointed after an intensive audition by the jury. It was at Notre Dame that he composed five of his six symphonies and actually started work on his seventh. The magnificent Cavallé-Coll organ of Notre Dame played an artistic and intellectual role in the life of Vierne as did that of Saint Clotilde for

Franck, Trinité for Guilmant, and Saint-Sulpice for Widor. Except for a period of four years (1916-1920) when Vierne had various eye operations for glaucoma, his entire creative span was spent in the shadow of the organ of Notre Dame. Although blind from birth, Dr. de Wecker of Paris was able to restore partial sight to Vierne so that he was able to get about, recognize people, and read large type at very close range.

Vierne's harmonic style, especially in his symphonies, can only be described as a chromatic one, rather than diatonic or nonharmonic, and although he often changes key signatures and tempo indications within the confines of a movement, he never changed the meter during a movement, a practice used by some of his contemporaries. The classic imprint of Vierne found its way within the confines of the rigid metric system. His symphonies of the period, the fourth, fifth and sixth, show evidence of his strong association with his teacher, Franck, with the use the cyclic principle, and use of octave canons in all but his second symphony.

His works usually carried two themes, one staccato which carried the color, and the other which carried the melody or poetry. Each of his symphonies were basically constructed along

classic lines; i.e., they each contained the usual four movements: an allegro, andante, scherzo and finale. However, to this arrangement Vierne would always add an additional movement. In the first symphony he introduced a fugue, undoubtedly due to the influence of Guilmant to whom it was dedicated. There was also a prelude. In the second symphony he added a choral, a cantilene in the third, a menuet and prelude in the fourth, a prelude in the fifth and an aria in the sixth. The form was one of the most essential elements of the art of Vierne. This science of counterpoint, this habit of exposing two themes in the allegro movement and then utilizing them in a combination of ways only to return to the original pattern brought a character or spirit to his art. His two themes were always in opposition to each other, that is, the rhythmic idea was responding or challenging the melodic exposition.

Again the Widorian influence often appears and one hears bits of the choral from the *Symphonie Romane* of Widor which was first performed by the composer in the Church of St. Sernin de Toulouse, 1894, on which these recordings were made.

There is no doubt that these symphonies are the result of an extraordinarily subtle brain,

unique in many, many ways, and certainly they rank among the classic treasures of the organ literature.

Vierne's attachment and concern for the church was total, for he lived, moved, and was inseparable from the great organ and church of Notre Dame de Paris. A generous, devoted friend, eager to share with others his great love of music, gentle and endowed with a wealth of musical knowledge, he was a most sensitive individual. He was totally committed to the art of the church organ and it was before the five-manual Cavaillé-Coll of Notre Dame De Paris that he died during a recital he was giving for the association of Amis de l'orgue, June 2, 1937. He was a believer of the highest order, a grand maitre of the orgue symphonique Française.

The last paragraph of his "Souvenirs" provides a fine portrait of this unique musician:

"Here closes the story of my memories as the Organist at Notre Dame de Paris. The splendid instrument whose happy title I have held for thirty-seven years has played a preponderant role in my artistic and intellectual life. In its shadow I wrote what I have written and formulated for

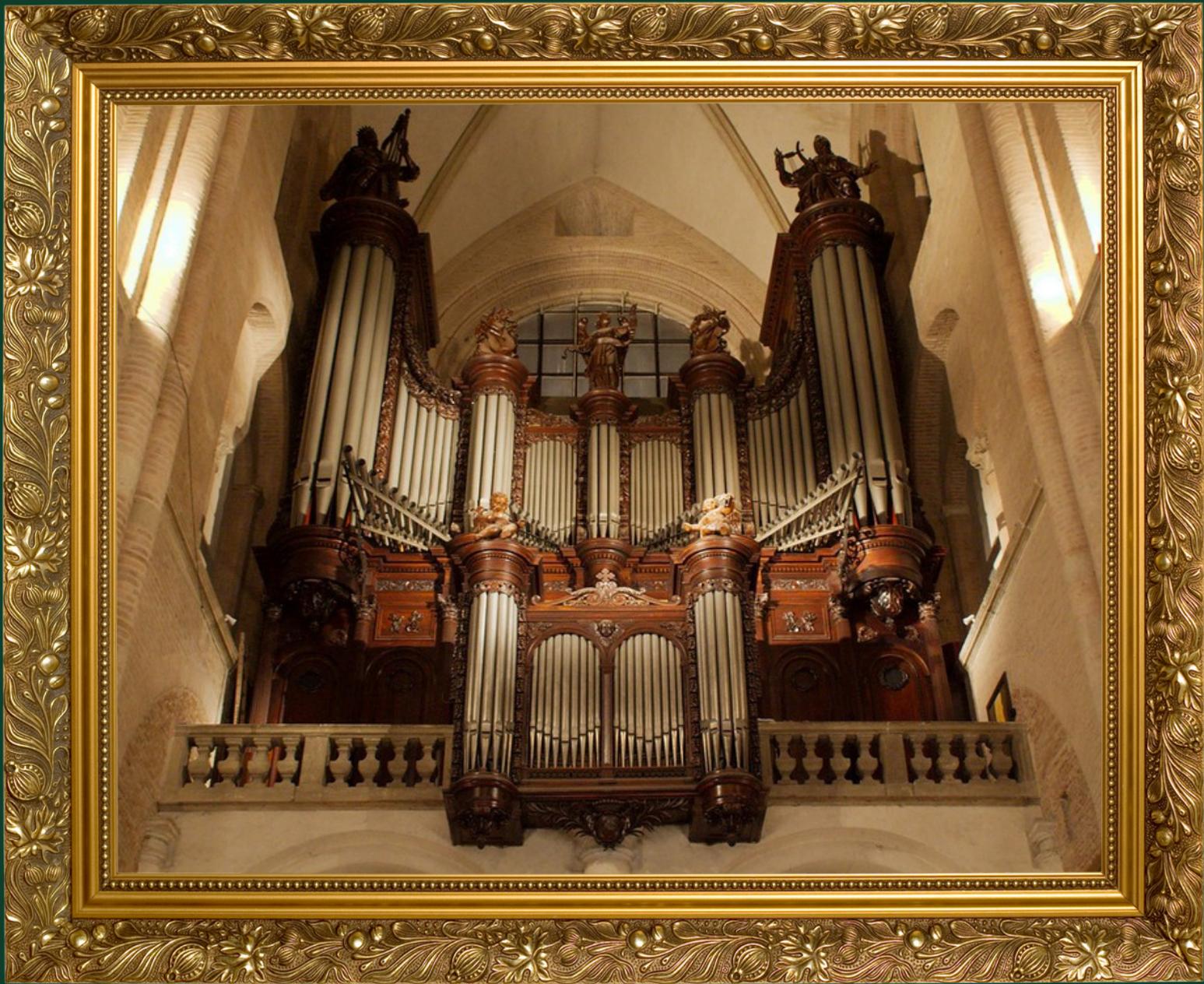
myself the aesthetics of a "cathedral organist", working to adapt myself to its majestic sound, to the grand frame of the basilica, to the great religious and national memorials connected with it, To the high mission which was entrusted to me I have brought, for want of anything better, all the fidelity and sincerity of my heart as an artist and a believer."

PETER J. BASCH

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born at Conches (Eure, France) in 1921, Pierre Labric at fifteen years of age played the monumental Cavaillé-Coll organ at Saint Ouen at Rouen, France. A student of Dupré and Duruflé at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris, he worked also with the late Jeanne Demessieux, glory of the French organ school, from whom he acquired his dazzling and transcendent virtuosity. It was in 1949 that he obtained a first prize in organ with Pierre Cochereau. His repertoire is boundless, but his forte is that of the French symphonic school. As an example, the performance/ recording of Vierne's symphonies two to five were performed in three short evenings. It has been said that he alone is the organist who can play in concert the Demessieux Six Etudes Pour Orgue which are considered extremely difficult for organ and organist, Labric is truly a romanticist, modest and replete with a sensitive musicality. He has one composition for organ.

Monsieur Labric has used the following editions for this recording: First Symphony, Hamelle; Second Symphony Hamelle; Third Symphony, Durand; Fourth Symphony Schirmer; Fifth Symphony, Durand; Sixth Symphony, Lemoine.



The GREAT CAVALLÉ-COLL ORGAN - BASILIQUE SAINT SERVIN DE TOULOUSE

RECIT EXPRESSIF

2 Octavin
 4 Flute octaviante
 8 Voix celeste
 8 Voix humaine
 4 Clairon
 4 Prestant
 8 Gambe
 8 Flute harmonique
 8 Diapason
 8 Hautbois
 8 Basson
 8 Trompette
 8 Clarinette
 V Cornet
 16 Quintaton
 16 Bombarde

POSITIF

4 Prestant
 4 Clairon
 4 Flute douce
 III Carillon
 8 Unda Maris
 8 Cor de unit
 8 Salicional
 8 Montre
 8 Trompette
 8 Hautbois

GRAND ORGUE

2 Doublette
 2 2/3 Quinte
 2 Clairon doublette
 4 Clairon
 4 Flute Octaviante
 4 Prestant
 8 Montre
 8 Bourdon
 8 Gambe
 8 Flute harmonique
 8 Trompette
 8 Salicional
 16 Bourdon
 16 Bombarde
 V Grand Cornet
 IV Cymbale
 V Fourniture
 8 Trompette en Chamade

PEDALE

4 Clairon
 4 Octave
 8 Trompette
 8 Grosse fute
 8 Violoncelle
 12 Grosse quinte
 16 Flute ouverte
 16 Soubasse
 16 Bombarde
 32 Contra bombarde

THE FOLLOWING STOPS WERE ADDED:**RECIT**

2 2/3 Nazard
 2 1/3 Tierce
 III Cymbale

POSITIF**III Fourniture****Composition of the Carillon:**

2 1/3 Tierce
 2 2/3 Quinte
 1 Piccolo
 8 Cromorne

GRAND ORGUE

The Corner of V Ranks was augmented to VII Ranks.

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