

L'Orgue Grégorien

A year of chant-based organ music from the London Oratory



Ben Bloor



ELEGI ET SANCTIFICAVI LOCVM ISTVM

ARTHUR WILLS (1926–2020)

- 1 Carillon on ‘Orientis Partibus’ 4’ 46

RALPH DOWNES (1904–1993)

- 2 Paraphrase on ‘O filii et filiae’ 4’ 43

NAJI HAKIM (b.1955)

- 3 Antienne (Mariales) 2’ 57

SIGFRID KARG-ELERT (1877–1933)

CATHEDRAL WINDOWS (Op. 106)

- 4 Ave Maria 5’ 24
5 Lauda Sion 5’ 16

MAURICE DURUFLÉ (1902–1986)

- 6 Choral varié sur le thème du
‘Veni Creator’ (Op. 4) 5’ 47

JEHAN ALAIN (1911–1940)

- 7 Variations sur Lucis Creator (JA 27) 4’ 38
8 Postlude pour l’office de complies (JA 29) 5’ 11

CHARLES TOURNEMIRE (1870–1939)

- 9 Diptyque (L’Orgue Mystique,
No. 11: Purificatio Beatae Virginis Mariae) 10’ 34

JEAN-YVES DANIEL-LESUR (1908–2002)

- 10 In paradisum 3’ 40

JEANNE DEMESSIEUX (1921–1968)

- 11 Rorate cæli 3’ 03

MATTHEW MARTIN (b.1976)

- 12 Prelude on ‘Conditor alme siderum’ 2’ 31

AUGUSTE FAUCHARD (1881–1957)

- 13 Le mystère de Noël (Thème. L’ineffable mystère—
Le Divin Enfant—Les bergers—La Vierge Mère—L’étoile—
Prière de la souffrance—Le cantique de l’univers—Final.
L’hymne de l’humanité) 16’ 07

BEN BLOOR

plays the Walker organ of the London Oratory

INTRODUCTION

I have always had a fascination with plainsong melodies and their ability to communicate the meaning and mood of the respective text directly to the listener. By the same token, I enjoy searching out organ music which takes Gregorian chant as its basis, to observe how composers from different locations and backgrounds respond to the timeless nature of the tunes, imbuing them with their own contemporaneous colourful harmonies and inventive musical inflections. It is my hope that this disc will provide a broad, interesting cross-section of organ music from the last 100 years or so which fits these criteria. The programme has been carefully chosen to include mostly recognisable chant which spans the entire liturgical year. The landmark 1954 J. W. Walker organ of the London Oratory Church, designed by one of my predecessors, Ralph Downes, is a bold, exciting instrument. Although largely designed in a neo-classical style, with a

multitude of quints, mutations and cornets, bright mixtures, and reeds with fiery personality, its chameleon-like qualities ensure that an extremely wide range of music works well on it (coupled with the Oratory Church's impressive acoustic). The music on this disc was designed for use in the Roman Catholic liturgy, and the Oratory organ responds incredibly well, not just in the tuttis (which are as exciting as they are hair-raising) but also in the tender, intimate moments of the flutes and strings.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Arthur Wills was Director of Music at Ely Cathedral for 32 years, and wrote extensively for both choir and organ. His *Carillon on 'Orientis Partibus'* is composed in the style of a French toccata, but the motivic material definitely has a late twentieth century British accent. The ancient melody on which the piece is based is linked to the now outdated

Christian feast day on 14 January, the ‘Feast of Fools’, which celebrates the donkey who carried Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus. Wills’ vivid writing helps the listener to imagine the bells of the carillon, ringing out to commemorate the feast.

Ralph Downes was organist of the Oratory from 1936–1977. Until the ‘Novus Ordo’ was introduced in 1969, the traditional ‘Tridentine’ Rite of the Mass was celebrated. Since the *Liber Usualis* contains no proper Offertory chant for the Vigil Mass of Easter, so Downes took it upon himself to compose a piece based on the hymn ‘O filii et filiæ’. The text was written by the Franciscan friar Jean Tisserand, who died in 1497, although the tune first appears in *Airs sur les hymnes sacrez* (Paris, 1623). In this ‘paraphrase’ one can definitely hear the spirit of Downes’ influence on the post-war ‘organ revival’ movement, which prioritised the Baroque principles of sonority and clarity. He rewrote and

reworked this piece a number of times, but this performance is of the original 1943 score, as it would have been heard at the Oratory every Holy Saturday.

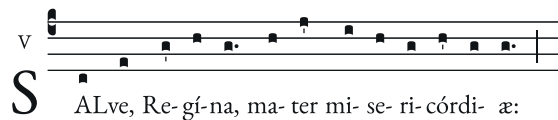
II

A L- le- lú- ia, al- le- lú- ia, al- le- lú- ia.

I. O fí- li- i et fí- li- æ, Rex cæ- lé- stis, Rex gló- ri- æ,

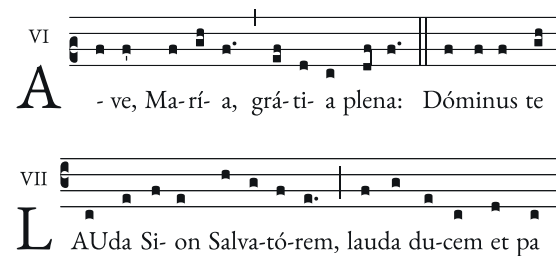
Naji Hakim was born in Beirut in 1955. He is a prolific composer for the organ, and is noted for his exciting improvisations, which fuel much of his compositional style. He studied with Jean Langlais, and was organist of La Trinité in Paris between 1993–2008, succeeding Olivier Messiaen. The *Antienne* from the *Mariales* suite (dedicated to Langlais) is a serene meditation on the famous simple tone *Salve Regina*. Slow-moving harmony lends a sense of mysticism, and provides a warm cushion underneath the well-loved melody

which floats above on a flute stop.



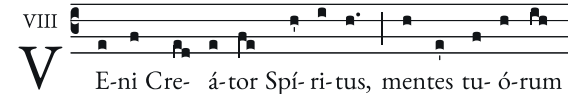
Despite spending most of his working years surrounded by Leipzig's famous organ culture, Sigfrid Karg-Elert came to the organ relatively late in his composing life. He held the *Kunstharmonium* (an instrument no longer in vogue today) in such high regard for its wide range of dynamic expression and colour that he composed over 100 works for it. A friendship with Max Reger (which would unfortunately later sour) spurred Karg-Elert to transcribe many of these works for the organ, and there followed over 250 original and highly impressionistic organ pieces. The six *Cathedral Windows* were published in 1923, and are all based on Gregorian melodies. The chant for *Ave Maria*...[*virgo serena*], subtitled *Sequenza*, is from the *Cantus Selecti*, the text being an extended version of

the 'Hail Mary'. The full range of the organ is used here, starting tranquilly, ballooning to an overwhelming climax, before disappearing to nothing. The more forthright *Lauda Sion*, which quotes the chant for the Sequence of the Feast of Corpus Christi, takes the form of a dignified procession, infusing the timeless plainchant with excitable chromatic flavour.



No composer of the French Organ School was more of a perfectionist than Maurice Duruflé. Despite having an opus count of fourteen published pieces, mostly organ and choral

music, he has a firm place in the musical canon for the undeniable quality of his compositional craft and the emotional depth of each individual work. He was a chorister in Rouen Cathedral, which clearly had an influence on some of his later sacred compositions. Having taken organ lessons with Charles Tournemire at Sainte-Clotilde in his late teens, he became Louis Vierne's assistant at Notre-Dame from 1927, before being appointed a titulaire himself two years later at Saint-Étienne-du-Mont. Duruflé was standing beside Vierne when he died at the console of Notre-Dame, having only minutes before played the *Matines* that was dedicated to Duruflé. The prizewinning *Prélude, Adagio et Choral varié* (Op. 4) which is dedicated to Vierne, dates from 1926, and is based upon the famous Vespers hymn for Pentecost, *Veni Creator Spiritus*. The overly self-critical nature of Duruflé meant that, along with the *Sicilienne* and *Toccata* from his *Suite*, he never programmed the *Prélude* or *Adagio* in concerts, preferring the self-contained variations.



Although Jehan Alain only lived a short life, having been tragically killed in action in the Second World War, he left an impactful legacy, with one of the most distinctive musical voices of his generation. Many of his compositions date from his last decade and exist in numerous versions, making an *Urtext* difficult to agree on. The version of the *Postlude pour l'office de complies* played here is from a manuscript owned by Jehan's sister, Marie-Claire, and written specifically for the organ in the twelfth century Cistercian Abbey of Valloires, where the first performance was given by the composer in 1930. Against a bell-like ostinato backdrop, the chants from *Compline*, *Miserere mihi Domine*, *Te lucis ante terminum*, *In manus tuas*, and *Salva nos Domine* can be heard, often notated freely and *senza misura*.

M I-se-ré-re mi-hi, Dómi-ne, et exáu-di

VIII T E lu-cis ante térmi-num Re-rum Cre- á-tor

VI I N manus tu- as Dó-mi-ne, Comméndo spíri

III S Alva nos, Dómi-ne, vi-gi-lántes, custó-di nos

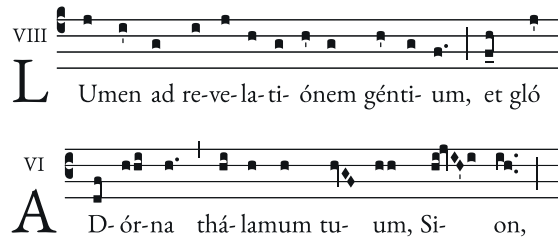
Lucis Creator is the office hymn for Vespers of Ordinary Sundays throughout the year. After the theme is presented on a trumpet as a cantus firmus, the first variation is used to

explore the melody's potential in close canon, while the next and final stanza expands upon this further by turning the tune into the subject of a fugue. The melody then reemerges *en dehors* in the pedal, leading to a satisfying resolution.

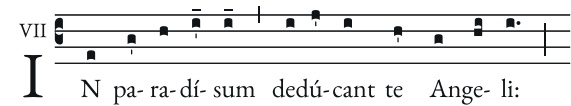
VIII L U-cis Cre- á- tor óptime, Lu-cem di- é

Charles Tournemire was born in Bordeaux, but spent most of his life in Paris. He studied at the Paris Conservatoire with César Franck, and later became professor of chamber music there. He succeeded Gabriel Pierné as the *organiste titulaire* of Franck's old church, the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde, a post he held from 1898 until his death. His most famous musical output is *L'Orgue Mystique*, a colossal series of 51 liturgical suites of plainsong-inspired versets for most of the Sundays and major feasts in the Catholic liturgical calendar of the time.

The suite for the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary (No. 11) is dedicated to Tournemire's friend, Henri Mulet, and the *pièce terminale*, the *Diptyque*, is nothing short of a miniature symphonic poem for organ. Drawing on the two chants used in the procession of candles *Lumen ad revelationem* and *Adorna thalamum*, the piece spans the gamut from meditative swaying on gentle flutes to ecstatic exclamations of joy, all the while coated in the distinctly 'mystical' sonorities which Tournemire liked to evoke from the organ.



Jean-Yves Daniel-Lesur received organ lessons from Tournemire in his early life, and would later go on to act as his assistant at Sainte-Clotilde. So close was his friendship with Olivier Messiaen, Daniel-Lesur gave the first performance of the opening three movements of his *La Nativité du Seigneur*. Along with Messiaen and others, he founded the group *La Jeune France*, which aimed to steer away from the prevailing neo-classical style in Paris at the time, and bring back the more 'human' side to composition. His *In paradisum* from 1933 is a quiet meditation on the final chant heard at Requiem Masses. Largely diatonic, the harmony occasionally breaks loose with a profound mysticism.



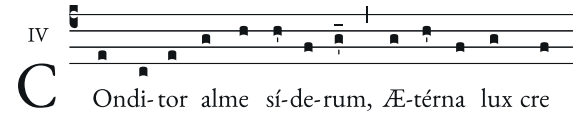
Jeanne Demessieux studied with Marcel Dupré at the Paris Conservatoire, winning several top prizes. She was the

organist of the church of the Saint-Esprit for most of her life, and later La Madeleine. A prodigious performer, she was the first female organist to sign a record contract, and indeed to play recitals in Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral. Her *Rorate Caeli* is from a set of Twelve Chorale Preludes on Gregorian Chant Themes, and is of more moderate difficulty than most of her other organ works. This *choral orné* is a simple yet beautiful presentation of the well-loved Advent chant, on the cornet stop.



Matthew Martin was Organist of the Oratory between 2011 and 2015, before moving to Keble College, Oxford, and then Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge as Precentor and Director of College Music. Knowing that Matthew has an intimate knowledge of plainchant, I had no hesitation

asking him to compose a piece for this disc. This brief prelude on the Advent Vespers hymn *Conditor alme siderum* carries the tune in the pedal, accompanied softly by a lilting ostinato, evoking the hopeful expectation of Christmas.



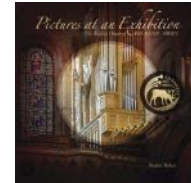
Auguste Fauchard is not a particularly well-known name in the organ world, despite having left many compositions of high quality. He spent most of his life in the town of Laval in North-West France. As a pupil and disciple of Louis Vierne, Fauchard's compositional style takes plenty of cues from the *maître*, but with a heavier bias towards Gregorian chant themes. This is understandable, as he was also ordained to the priesthood in 1903, and explored both these callings in the dual post of Honorary Canon and Organist at Laval Cathedral.

Le Mystère de Noël was written in 1940 and takes the form of a theme and variations on the Gregorian hymn for Christmas Day Vespers, *Iesu Redemptor omnium*. With typically chromatic twentieth century French musical language, Fauchard breathes new life into the timeless plainsong melody, commenting on the various aspects of Christ's Nativity in inventive ways.



BEN BLOOR

ALSO AVAILABLE ON AD FONTES

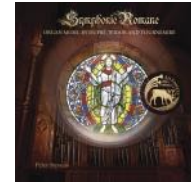


Pictures at an Exhibition: The Ruffatti Organ of Buckfast Abbey (AF001)

Martin Baker *organ*

'Baker is on top form on this recording.' (Choir & Organ)

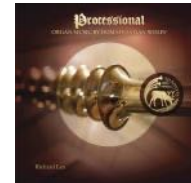
★★★★★ *'A persuasive reading, with nuance, energy, and excitement.'* (Organists' Review)



Symphonie Romane: Organ music by Dupré, Widor and Tournemire (AF006)

Peter Stevens *organ*

★★★★★ *'I heartily recommend this recording to people who, like me are partial to French organ music from this era.'* (Organists' Review)



Processional: Organ music by Dom Sebastian Wolff (AF007)

Richard Lea *organ*

'Richard Lea plays with obvious enthusiasm for the music and uses the Ruffatti organ so well, demonstrating its widely varied registers.' (Cathedral Music Magazine)

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THE WALKER ORGAN OF THE LONDON ORATORY

Replacing an earlier organ by Bishop & Starr (destroyed by fire in 1950), the present organ by J. W. Walker was designed by Ralph Downes who set the pipe scales and supervised the voicing which was carried out by Dennis Thurlow and Walter Goodey. Its specification is quoted in full in *The Cambridge Companion to the Organ* (1998) as the model of modern English organ design, and the late Stephen Bicknell described it in *Choir & Organ* in 1997 as ‘an instrument of peerless tonal quality, perhaps the best of all the organs designed by the late Ralph Downes’. It was restored by the original builders in 2004–5, in consultation with Patrick Russill and with tonal regulation by Michael Broom, preserving the original voicing. All the original pipework, chests and actions were restored, except for the provision of a new chest for the pedal upperwork.

CHOIR *Unenclosed* Manual I

Gedackt	8'
Principal	4'
Rohrflöte	4'
Octave	2'
Waldflöte (conical)	2'
Larigot	1 $\frac{1}{8}$ '
Sesquialtera II (12-17)	2 $\frac{2}{3}$ '–1 $\frac{5}{8}$ '
Scharf IV (26-29-33-36)	$\frac{2}{3}$ '
Cromorne	8'
<i>Tremulant</i>	

GREAT *Unenclosed* Manual II

Quintadena	16'
Principal	8'
Rohrflöte	8'
Octave	4'
Gemshorn (conical)	4'
Quint	2 $\frac{2}{3}$ '
Superoctave	2'
Tertian II (17-19)	1 $\frac{3}{8}$ '

Mixture IV–V (19-22-26-29)	½'
Trumpet	8'
<i>Sub Octave</i>	

SWELL Enclosed Manual III

Baarpyp (conical)	8'
Quintadena	8'
Viola	8'
Céleste	8'
Principal	4'
Gedacktflöte	4'
Nazard (conical)	2 ⅔'
Octave	2'
Gemshorn (cylindrical)	2'
Tierce	1 ⅓'
Mixture IV (22-26-29-33)	2'
Cymbel III (38-40-43)	2'
Echo Trumpet	8'
Vox Humana	8'
<i>Tremulant</i>	

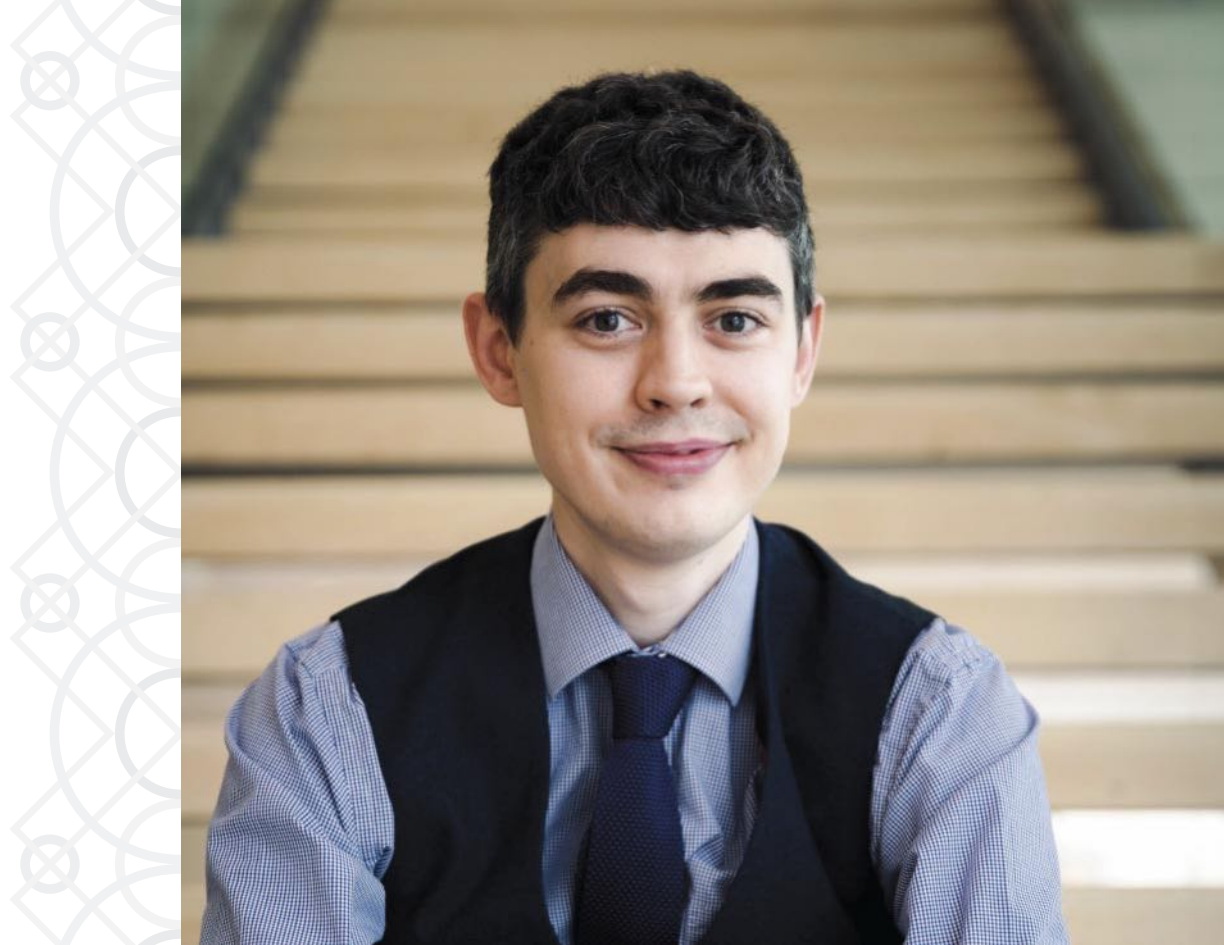
PEDAL Unenclosed

Principal	16'
Sub Bass	16'
Quintflöte	10 ⅔'
Octave	8'
Gedackt	8'
Rohrquint	5 ⅓'
Octave	4'
Nachthorn	2'
Mixture IV (19-22-26-29)	2 ⅔'
Bombarde	16'
Trumpet (extension)	8'
Trumpet	2'



BEN BLOOR

Ben Bloor is the Organist of the London Oratory Church, where he accompanies the professional adult choir for weekly Mass and Vespers and oversees the famous Downes/Walker organ. He combines this with a busy freelance recital career and the post of School Organist at Westminster School, where he teaches organ and plays for services in Westminster Abbey. Ben was the winner of the 2012 Northern Ireland International Organ Competition, and a semi-finalist in the inaugural Wadden Sea International Organ Competition held in Denmark in January 2017. He was awarded second prize in the Boston Bach International Organ Competition 2018 and also the Canadian International Organ Competition in 2021, as well as the Douglas May Award in the 2023 St Albans International Organ Competition. Ben holds a First-Class Honours degree in Music from the University of Oxford and the Limpus prize for highest marks in the 2013 FRCO examinations.





Recorded at the LONDON ORATORY, 10, 11 & 14 March 2022

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Front illustration: Case pipes of the Walker organ of the London Oratory

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*Pipes of the Great Gemshorn 4' (left)
and Superoctave 2' (right)*

L'ORGUE GRÉGORIEN

A year of chant-based organ music from the London Oratory

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Wills | Downes | Hakim | Karg-Elert | Duruflé | Alain | Tournemire |

Daniel-Lesur | Demessieux | Martin | Fauchard

Prizewinning performer Ben Bloor makes his debut recording on the iconic instrument with which he is so well acquainted: the Walker organ of the London Oratory, designed by Ralph Downes in 1954. The carefully constructed programme is one close to his heart: music centred around Gregorian chant, and takes in a liturgical year of plainsong-based works from 20th- and 21st-century France, Germany and England. The instrument's fantastic breadth of colour finds its home in well-trodden favourites by Duruflé and Demessieux, but also in gems recorded here for the first time, including a new commission based on the Advent hymn, *Conditor alme siderum*, by Matthew Martin.



Total running time: 74' 38

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