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Ces notes de programme sont écrites par l'étudiant-interprète et sont présentées en tant que réalisation partielle des critères de leur cours.

Charles-Marie Widor (1844–1937) was born in France and grew up under the tutelage of his father, François-Charles Widor, who was titular organist at St-François-de-Sales in Lyon. Thanks to his family's friendship with the organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, Widor was sent to study organ technique with Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens in Brussels. Cavaillé-Coll, along with famous composers Camille Saint-Saëns and Charles Gounod, subsequently helped Widor acquire the position of organist at Saint-Sulpice in Paris, a mammoth church that housed Cavaillé-Coll's largest pipe organ. Because of Widor's contact with this versatile instrument, his music became much more symphonic in nature, taking advantage of the instrument's warm sound and orchestral palette, especially when compared to a baroque organ.

Widor's *Symphonie VI pour orgue* was written for the 1878 Paris World Exhibition, where it was premiered. It brings together all of the tonal qualities of the Cavaillé-Coll organ, along with the orchestral influences of the time. Having gone to Bayreuth to watch the premiere of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* two years prior to this symphony's premiere, the symphony's *Adagio* movement resembles the chromatic and harmonically complex language of Wagner's music and its slow, languid atmosphere. The fourth movement, *Cantabile*, is said to be reminiscent of Berlioz's symphonies, with its long and flowing phrases.

When composing for the organ, Widor writes that one should take “the same care with the combination of timbres in an organ composition as in an orchestral work”. The first and the fifth movement of this symphony, along with the third movement of the second organ symphony, are compiled into a work featuring both the organ and orchestra, written four years later – *Symphonie pour orgue et orchestra, op. 42*. In this later version, the percussion section highlights the most brilliant parts, the strings augment the organ's foundational tone, and the brass punctuate the chorale melody in the first movement.

Louis Vierne (1870–1937) is a French composer who was born nearly blind due to a congenital cataract. Despite his very limited vision, he had a very good ear and proved to be a very talented musician. Vierne wrote in his autobiography that he had wished to be an organist ever since he heard the sound of a church organ. He had studied and worked with famous organists of the time, including César Franck

and Charles-Marie Widor, and eventually ascended to the position of titular organist in Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris.

Despite his musical accomplishments, his life was rather tragic; his marriage failed, and he got into an accident that badly injured his leg. Together with the aforementioned blindness, Vierne endured a lot of physical and emotional stress. This angst and frustration is expressed in his music—one might say the common use of string registrations reflects his hazy vision and the chromatic harmonies may reflect his emotional state. His life ended when he died, of either a heart attack or a stroke, at the console of the organ in Notre-Dame Cathedral during a recital.

Vingt-quatre pièces en style libre is a collection of short pieces for harmonium or organ composed between 1913 and 1914 and published in two books. Each one of the 24 pieces is written to fill the duration of the offertory within a church service. Despite being titular organist at Notre Dame Cathedral, this collection is written for small organs. The pieces in the second book, in particular, are dedicated to twelve different people: friends, family, acquaintances, and other people Vierne admired.

The *Préambule* presents a warmth and peace through the prevailing flow of eighth notes. The *Építaphe* has a much more brooding atmosphere, a mirror of Vierne's emotional state. The juxtaposition of borrowed chromatic chords within this work stirs up emotions of sadness within the listener. After the initial presentation of the theme in the form of a chorale, the melody is then supported by a languid stream of eighth notes in the left hand, further adding to the hazy atmosphere set by the string stops. *Scherzetto* was dedicated to Alexandre Eugène Cellier, an organist who Vierne admired for his skills in improvisation. This movement presents a mischievous character alternating with a somber sections; together with the sparse texture of the scherzo, it creates the idea of improvisation.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847) is a Jewish-born composer who was very well known for his role in the revival of Bach's music in Europe. His family converted to the Christian faith when Mendelssohn was a child, adopting the surname “Bartholdy”, in order to escape the discrimination against Jews in society at that time in Germany. Due to his faith, Mendelssohn's proficiency in organ and his love for Bach were cultivated. His Christian faith is also reflected in other genres he cultivated, including the oratorios *St. Paul* and *Elijah*.

While Mendelssohn has a relatively large musical output in other genres, his organ works primarily consist of two sets of pieces: *Six Sonatas* op. 45, and *Three Preludes and Fugues* op. 37. ***Prelude and Fugue in D minor*** was written in 1837. Despite admiring Bach greatly, this piece seems to model Handel more than Bach, given how the contrapuntal lines often merge with each other.

The prelude, interestingly, has its main theme introduced as a fugue subject after the opening fantasia. The theme undergoes a series of transformations exploring different rhythmic figures played against the subject theme. The fugue's subject is

reminiscent of Bach's B-flat minor fugue (Well Tempered Clavier, Book I), where the melody takes a minor-ninth leap upwards.

Rachel Laurin (b. 1961) is a Canadian composer and organist well known for performing, teaching and composing. Laurin's music is always imbued with lots of energy and sparkle, and makes full use of the French romantic instruments that we can still find today in large churches and cathedrals.

Laurin's *Prelude and Fugue in F minor* was written in 2007, and won the Holtkamp-AGO Composition Award. It features a juxtaposition of two different characters—the calm, flowing lines of the prelude complement a playful, bouncy fugue subject. To make both pieces fit together well, the flowing theme is brought up again nearing the end of the fugue. The toccata motif from the prelude is also used at the very end of the fugue.

Bibliography

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