

CHAPTER 11

The Last Years (1984-1991)

July 1, 1984, Stroke

Dol-de-Bretagne, former capital of Brittany, is less than 20 kilometers from La Fontenelle, the birthplace of Jean Langlais. It has a magnificent Gothic cathedral built between the 12th and 16th centuries and dedicated to Saint Samson, one of the founding saints of Brittany. In 1978 Langlais had personally monitored the Beuchet-Debierre company's restoration of the cathedral's organ, something which—except at St. Clotilde— he never did, feeling that organ building was not his skill. But he loved the organ at Dol, where he often gave recitals and where he liked to walk in the dark aisles along the long and narrow nave of this majestic edifice with its splendid acoustics.



Cathédrale of Dol-de-Bretagne

Figure 57. (photograph Sylvie Mallet and collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

On Sunday July 1, 1984, Jean Langlais had decided to play the high mass at the Cathedral of Dol-de-Bretagne to celebrate the jubilee of his old friend Father Orrières, archpriest of that cathedral.

At the end of the mass, which was extremely long, he seemed to have trouble mastering the stiff mechanical action of the manuals during his “Te Deum,” but he finished the work and descended the narrow steps of the spiral staircase that connected the organ loft to the interior of the cathedral. Once he got to the bottom of the stairs, he lost consciousness. He was quickly taken to Saint-Malo hospital, where the doctors diagnosed a stroke with aphasia (loss of speech), and paralysis of the right side. The prognosis was bleak, and the medical team pessimistic. When he regained consciousness, he spoke his first words from his hospital bed ... in English!

Then, very quickly, all language disappeared.

Only one week after the stroke, he nevertheless made clear his strong desire to go home. There, in our house in La Richardais, he was in a quasi-vegetative state for two and a half months, saying only a few words (in French this time). He even seemed to have difficulty understanding what was said to him.

Back in Paris, ten weeks after the stroke, he had a consultation with a prominent neurologist, Professor Jean-Louis Signoret, at the hospital of The Salpêtrière. Professor Signoret realized very quickly that, while his speech and language abilities had been seriously impaired, all Jean Langlais’ musical abilities seemed preserved. While the composer did not know any longer how to read and write language using Braille, he was still able, with the same alphabet, to read and write music, which astonished the doctor. Based on this, Professor Signoret began a therapy regimen intended to support and improve the musical abilities of his patient. He later described Jean Langlais’ progress in an important article in the *Revue de Neurologie*:

A week after the first consultation, in accord with our plan, the patient played for us Franck’s “Pastorale,” which he had recorded in 1975. This performance, which we were able to record, is exemplary, without the slightest weakness of technique, and demonstrates qualities of interpretation, particularly of sensitivity, that are perhaps superior to those of his 1975 recording for the company Arion (this personal opinion was shared by musicians who heard it).

During the week before this performance, the patient had had to go back over the score several times, which was unusual according to his relatives.

Should we interpret this as evidence of fragmentary memory loss of this work?¹

To this hypothesis, I will add my personal testimony: after 1984, the composer had to work hard (sometimes several hours per day) to remember a fraction of his original repertoire—a few isolated pages of Bach (chorales, *Tocatta and Fugue* in D Minor, fugues in D major or G minor), several works of Franck, Tournemire or the old French masters.

He could remember virtually **none** of his own works, not even his “Te Deum” played hundreds of times in the past, or his more recent creations. His own music was essentially

⁵⁶¹Jean-Louis Signoret, Philippe Van Eeckhout, Michel Poncet, P.Castaigne, “Aphasia Without Amusia In A Blind Organist And A Composer. Verbal Alexia And Agraphia Without Musical Alexia And Agraphia In Braille,” in *Revue de Neurologie*, Masson, Paris, 143:3 (1987). 172-181.

erased from his memory. All that remained intact that he could play without any problem was the “Francaise” from his *Suite francaise*. Why only this piece? A mystery.

I had already tested in the first weeks after the attack his loss of memory of his own music when I played for him "The Fifth Trumpet" from his *Five Meditations on the Apocalypse*, a work which he particularly loved. I asked him, “What do you think of this work?” He made me understand that he liked it. When I asked him if he knew **who** had composed it, he shook his head no.

Three years after the onset of the stroke, in the article quoted above, Professor Signoret summarized the case of Jean Langlais.

SUMMARY

A 77 year old right-handed male was blind since the age of 2. He presented with an infarction involving the territory of the left middle cerebral artery involving the temporal and the inferior parietal lobes. He had learned to read and write language as well as read and write music in Braille, ultimately becoming a famous organist and composer.

There were no motor or sensory deficits. Wernicke’s aphasia with jargonaphasia, major difficulty in repetition, anomia and a significant comprehension deficit without word deafness was present; verbal alexia and agraphia in Braille were also present.

There was no evidence of amusia. He could execute in an exemplary fashion pieces of music for the organ in his repertory as well as improvise. All his musical capabilities: transposition, modulation, harmony, rhythm, were preserved. The musical notation in Braille remained intact: he could read by touch and play unfamiliar scores, he could also read and sing the musical notes, he could copy and write a score.

Nine months after the stroke his aphasia remained unchanged. Nevertheless he composed pieces for organ which were published. Such data highly suggest the independence of linguistic and musical competences, defined as the analysis and organization of sounds according to the right hemisphere in the anatomical-functional processes at the origin of musical competence. The use of Braille in which the same constellations of dots correspond either to letters of the alphabet or musical notes supports the independence of language and music.

On October 9, 1984, a little over three months after his stroke, Jean Langlais resumed his duties at Ste. Clotilde. Because his abilities as an improviser had not suffered, on October 24th he recorded for French television a series of improvisations of the same quality as his earlier ones.

From the time that it was clear that both his ability to improvise—that is, to create an organized musical language—and his ability to write music using Braille were intact, the question that remained was whether Jean Langlais could still compose.

Theoretically, nothing would prevent him from composing again, but what would be the musical value of his future works?

Would they be consistent with and an extension of his earlier previous works?

Crucial questions, of course.

A new life (1984-1991)

The breakthrough happened at Easter 1985 during a mass at La Richardais, when the celebrant read the following verses of chapter V of the *Gospel of St. Mark* on the daughter of Jairus:

Then came one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus, who, seeing him, fell at his feet and begged him urgently, saying, "My daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her so that she may be healed, and may live." Jesus went with him. And a great crowd followed him and pressed on him...

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue: "Fear nothing, only believe..." He took the child's father and mother and those who had accompanied her, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum," which means, "Little girl, get up, I say to you!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk.²

Jean Langlais was very struck by this story, which he had obviously fully understood, especially the part about the child's resurrection. Leaving behind the depression in which he had found himself since the accident, he took up his work again, for the first time, following to the letter the two injunctions of Christ as related by St. Mark, "Fear nothing, only believe" and "Talitha koum."

Between May 28 and June 10, 1985, almost a year after his accident, he wrote four pieces for organ, a score called *Talitha Koum* and subtitled "Resurrection," which he dedicated to the three main architects of his rebirth: Professor Jean-Louis Signoret; the speech therapist Philippe Van Eeckhout, with whom he had two sessions a week, without interruption, from October 1984 until April 1991, just a bit before his death; and finally our little daughter Caroline, who was only 4 years old at the time. All parts of this collection of four pieces (except the last, cryptically titled 1. 7. 8) are based on Gregorian melodies dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Consolation, the last resort in case of adversity:

- 1 - Salve Regina
- 2 - Regina Caeli
- 3 - Alme Pater

indicating that he had not forgotten his Marian faith. This first work after the 1984 stroke was awaited with eagerness and also anxiety by the therapists, since the severity of the brain injury was likely to have fundamentally changed the creative abilities of the artist.

Scrutinizing *Talitha Koum*, immediately published by Combre in 1985, reassured us all. Certainly the composer seemed to cling to chant like a lifeline. But the pages of this score, as uncluttered as they were, had a musical sense; they realized perfectly, in particular, the way Jean Langlais wanted to harmonize the plainsong, the entire ordinary of Mass X, for "feasts of the Blessed Virgin", more commonly known as Mass "Cum Jubilo," fully a symbol. This harmonization for 3 or 4 voices was at once simple and daring in its chord changes; this work, written for organ, "could be equally sung by plain chant admirers," as the introduction states. Here again, the Gregorian chant and the Virgin Mary whose protection he invokes for this

² Mark 5: 22-43

collection is, above all, an immense act of devotion and gratitude to the Virgin, a kind of musical "ex voto," the first testimony of an artist in search of a new language.

The journey was arduous: deprived of any opportunity to communicate, Jean Langlais had to sit at the keyboards and play each voice separately to a copyist who understood his thoughts well enough to correctly assemble the pieces of the puzzle, which was not always done without problems. The copyists varied according to the circumstances and availability of each. Between 1985 and 1990, the following took turns: Pierre Denis, Jean Bonfils, Pierre Cogen, Naji Hakim and Marie-Bernadette Dufourcet-Hakim, Yves Castagnet, Daniel Maurer, Pascale Mélis and myself. All showed themselves to be patient and admirably skilled. Similarly, during this same period, all comments carried on scores (titles, subtitles, registrations) were mine, but always after obtaining the approval of the composer.

Jean Langlais, however, gradually adapted to his new life. Driven by a great life force, helped by his family and friends, among whom was Olivier Messiaen, who supported him so that, on November 21, 1984, he was awarded the Paul-Louis Weiler Special Composition Prize by the Institut de France, he gradually returned to his professional activities. He took up again both his service at Ste. Clotilde and his private lessons, compensating for his difficulty with words by playing multiple examples on the keyboard.

Only giving a concert now seemed too difficult, and he appeared in recital for the last time in France at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris on Sunday, March 2, 1986, in a program of Tournemire, Langlais and improvisation. Kathleen Thomerson, present that evening, gave the following report:

His program opened with two works of Charles Tournemire, very mystically played, "Eli, Eli, Iamma sabachtani" (*Sept Chorals-Poèmes d'Orgue*) and the Communion from the Epiphany office of *L'Orgue Mystique*. Langlais continued with four of his *Neuf Pièces*.

Here, for the first time some memory lapses occurred, but always well under control, with no effect on the rhythmic pulse of the piece. Indeed, it was rather interesting to hear the spontaneous recreation of a couple of passages. The time when my blood ran cold, however, was during the second half of "Mon âme cherche une fin paisible": Langlais had experienced difficulty remembering this part, but made a successful conclusion. I fully expected him to convert the first ending into the final cadence, thankful that he arrived safely at the end. But no, he calmly took the repeat and played through the second half again, this time perfectly.

What courage! After that, he played a thrilling, heartfelt "Imploration pour la Croyance" and concluded with an improvisation on "Salve regina" which showed much creative power and imagination.³

This phenomenon of memory lapses, absolutely unknown to him in the past, prompted him to give up playing in public, except for participation in certain short and exceptional events, to which I will return later.

Besides, for a long time he had shown a growing dissatisfaction for giving recitals, and this forced shutdown did not seem to bother him. Indeed, quite the contrary, for it allowed him to focus all his attention on composition.

³ Kathleen Thomerson, "An Eightieth Birthday Tribute." *The Diapason*, 78:2, (February 1987), 8-11.

When Bornemann offered to commission a collection for the 300th anniversary of the birth of Johann Sebastian Bach, Langlais accepted and composed it in Brittany during the months of August and September 1985. *L'Orgue* reviewed it with the following comment:

Following the cantor of Leipzig and many other later musicians, Jean Langlais was inspired by the four BACH notes (B-flat - A - C - B-natural). In composing these six pieces for the tricentennial of the birth of one of the great musical geniuses of all time, he wanted specifically to contribute to this celebration.

One will find in these pages not a grand sound fresco as one finds in Liszt, but short pieces, "fioretti" in tribute neither to Landino or Frescobaldi, but to the "master of the organ." Through a unifying theme that one hears in different parts of the manual as well as in the pedal, these six beautiful flowers make up a magnificent small bouquet of harmoniously diversified colors that showcases the clarity of the precise registration. We find in it the personal touch of Jean Langlais, where polyphony does not exclude poetry, and where rhythmic freedom unites with the melodic sense.

The Sunday organist will take pleasure in introducing these pieces during the service in intervals that are too short for songs and hymns.⁴

If *Talitha Koum*, vibrant tribute to Our Lady through its Gregorian melodies, represented the first steps, still shaky, of a composer throwing himself into the reconquest of himself, *B.A.C.H.*, in contrast, shows Jean Langlais seeking his total creative freedom. Without concerning himself at all with the work of the Leipzig Cantor, Langlais focuses exclusively on the four notes which form the name BACH, this famous unit obtained through the correspondence of German letters and musical notes which generated so many scores in the nineteenth century, starting with the virtuosic *Prelude and Fugue on BACH* by Franz Liszt. Langlais is going to detach himself completely from that, proof that he had found, intact, his sense of the renewal of the form.

The first five sections of this new B.A.C.H. explore five ways to treat this group of four stubborn notes: sketch of counterpoint and rhythmic progression in N° 1, fragmentary presentation within short contrasting sections in N° 2, 3 and 4, and, in N° 5, harmonized version with some superb lyrical sequences.

The 6th and last piece, a sort of rhapsodic finale, reprises short fragments from the preceding five parts without mixing them (something that is new to Langlais). Each time, the repeats are extremely short, only one or two measures, avoiding any development, so that alone, floating, stubborn, the BACH motif appears in one or another voice.

Does the brevity of the components of this collection, artificially masked by the multiple repeats, relate to the structure of the piece as the composer designed it, or does it perhaps betray the precariousness of his state of health? That, of course, was the question.

Perhaps the answer would come later. Then, the composer received the following proposal from the American publisher Fred Bock :

October 25, 1985
Dear Mr Langlais,

⁴ Maurice Vanmackelberg, "La Musique, Jean Langlais, *B.A.C.H. Six Pièces pour orgue.*" *L'Orgue* 197 (1986): 28.

As I believe you know, I purchased the H.T. FitzSimons Company as of July 1, 1985... Perhaps you would be interested to write another organ collection for us. (Already, since July, when we took over the company, we know that your *Folkloric Suite* is the best-seller of the organ catalog. It is now being reprinted and we will send you a new edition in a week or so when it arrives from the printer). Roger (Wagner) and I thought it would be very interesting for you to do a book of Langlais interpretations of American hymn tunes/folk tunes.

I am thinking of hymn tunes like "Amazing Grace," "Shall We Gather at the River," and/or any of the shaped-note Southern Harmony selections such as "Come, Come Ye Saints," or "When I can Read My Title Clear." If these are not known to you, I could easily and readily send copies for you to look over. A new Jean Langlais organ book in the FitzSimons catalog would be very exciting for us and I know we could market this very, very effectively, and I also know it would create new interest in the other Langlais books in our catalog. I will be interested to know your feelings about doing some new writing for us.

I hope that we might someday meet in person.

Sincerely,

Fred Bock⁵

The publisher enclosed with his letter several pages containing a selection of Methodist, Baptist, and Southern Baptist hymns. When I played him the melodies, Jean Langlais showed little enthusiasm; he seemed reluctant in the face of their very rigid rhythm and obvious tonal structure, far removed from his personal ideal. More importantly, he did not at all know these hymns, and from a religious point of view, they meant nothing to him.

I questioned his doctor, Professor Jean-Louis Signoret, about this, and he was very clear: composition, he said to me, is fundamental for your husband's equilibrium and for his progress in language. Take the risk, and insist that he create this collection. It can only be beneficial to him.

So I again played him the proposed themes, and he chose those that seemed to him to have the most popular rhythm ("Amazing Grace," "How Firm a Foundation," "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood," "On Jordan's Stormy Bank I Stand," "When I Can Read My Title Clear"). He decided to treat these as varied chorales, with the famous "Battle Hymn of the Republic" taking the form of a rondo with verses and refrain. Fred Bock published this collection and personally gave it the title *American Folk Hymn Settings*. Thus, a year and a half ago after his stroke in 1984, even while reading and writing were still impossible him, here was Jean Langlais back in the world of composition!

Very quickly, he threw himself with energy into a project that had long been very close to his heart, paying tribute again to Charles Tournemire. I have already noted that after 40 years of reflection, he had thoroughly reworked his "Rhapsodie Grégorienne" (*Neuf Pièces*, 1943) dedicated to Tournemire, which he had considered a failure. But even his new version did not satisfy him, so in December 1985, he decided to compose a completely new organ piece in memory of Tournemire.

Using the form of the Gregorian paraphrase, he composed a long work of about 16 minutes, entitled *In Memoriam*, in the manner of Tournemire's last works for organ (*Symphonie-*

⁵ Fred Bock, letter to Jean Langlais, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

Choral op. 69 in six continuous parts, or *Symphonie sacrée* in four continuous parts). Echoing some of Tournemire's favorite improvisational themes, Langlais slipped into his steps, following the plan used by Tournemire in his *Triple Choral* (*Sancta Trinitas*) *for organ* op. 41, composed in 1910, and built a vast rhapsody on the following three Gregorian themes: Kyrie of the Mass XII ("Pater Cuncta"), "Gaudeamus omnes in Domino" (Introit of the "Feast for All Saints" and "Vexilla regis" (Hymn for Vespers for Passion Sunday.)

But unlike his habit before his stroke, in *In Memoriam* Langlais treats each of these themes in turn without ever trying to mix or superimpose one on the other, all while observing a very elaborated language (see the introduction to "Vexilla regis" with its successive imitations to the third, the augmented fifth or seventh, and the development of the same gregorian theme combining polymodality and polyrhythms).

Again in 1986, the composer received a new request from the publisher Fred Bock:

March 31st, 1986

Dear Mr Langlais :

... We would love to have you consider doing a setting for SATB voices of UBI CARITAS. Accompanied or unaccompanied makes no difference to me, although accompanied might be better since so many other settings, primarily the Duruflé, are unaccompanied. We would love to publish a Langlais setting of this popular text filled with lovely, warm, rich harmonies. Is this something that intrigues you? Let me know your thoughts on this. No real rush. ...

Sincerely,

Fred Bock⁶

Although such a project required the writing of music to Latin words--words which he was unable either to read or to write, or even to understand, Jean Langlais decided to accept the this challenging principle. So he composed a piece built not on the Latin text itself but on the number of syllables in each word, which caused some difficult moments for him as well as for me, the transcriber at that time ...

Without listening to Duruflé's *Ubi Caritas*, of which he had no memory, he set to work and succeeded in this perilous exercise with a self-mastery so misleading that no one was able to guess that this *Ubi Caritas* was the work of an aphasic.

He had already worked on the anthem "Ubi caritas" for the Office of Holy Thursday in the "Meditation" section of his *Suite médiévale* in 1947, but it appeared in a fragmented way in this work for organ. In his new vocal piece, however, he complied simultaneously with the rhythm, the original 6th mode and the exact melody, which appears in full after 17 introductory measures, including four on the organ alone and 13 with voices exactly doubled by the organ. This doubling technique will be used throughout the work, except towards the end, when the "Ubi Caritas" appears, sung by the soprano solo, accompanied only by the organ with perfect chords in root position. The effect of this contrast is assured.⁷

This characteristic technique of Langlais' in his vocal music is present throughout this piece, which is as praiseworthy in all respects as those works that preceded it from the

⁶ Fred Bock, letter to Jean Langlais, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

⁷ Dedicated to his former student James David Christie, first performed live and recorded October 12, 1986 in Boston by the choir of The Church of the Advent directed by Edith Ho; James D. Christie organ.

composer's great periods of musical composition (*Mass in ancient style*, *Missa Misericordiae Domini*, among others).

A new commission, this time from Combre, came to him in Brittany during the summer of 1986. Now it was a matter of composing *Neuf Pièces* for trumpet and organ, in the vein of his previous pieces for this instrumental duo (*Pièce*, *Sept Chorals*, *Sonatine*). Inspired by the flavors of his native Brittany, he returned to earlier compositions that he adapted for trumpet and organ: thus it is that in *Pièces* 1, 2, 4 and 6 of his new collection, he reuses, almost note-for-note, two of his *Vingt-Quatre Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue*, "Pour une Sainte de Légende" (n°17) and "Paraphrase sur le Salve Regina" (n°5). This proves that he had not forgotten them, much like the "Danse bretonne" from his *Suite Armoricaine* for piano (1938) or his "Légende de Pontkalleg" from *Mosaïque*, volume 2, for organ (1976).

These examples of Langlais' successful reusing previous works sound as good on the trumpet as on the oboe or even the flute or the saxophone, even though these instruments are not indicated on the new score. It was clear now that Jean Langlais had recovered all his faculties as a composer. However, he did not feel ready to write the 30 pieces Fred Bock asked him for in the following letter:

October 27th, 1986

Dear Mr Langlais :

... My reasons for the writing of 30 two-page ELEVATIONS are more commercial than artistic (for which I apologize in advance!) but it seems to me that I can market and sell a 64-page collection easier than I can a 20 page collection. The additional pages give the book a bigger « feel » to the consumer and seem to be worth more in his eyes than a short collection...

It is important that these ELEVATIONS be mostly for manuals, minimum pedal as you indicated, and that they be able to segue into each other in the event a longer selection of music is needed. I say FULL STEAM AHEAD (how does that translate into French?) and we'll be looking to hear from you with manuscripts by February 1, 1987.

Let me know what length you decide is the best for you.

Sincerely,

Fred Bock⁸

The commercial approach seemed to predominate in Bock's letter, but Jean Langlais, who initially thought about refusing, found a solution that seemed to him to be balanced: cutting the pear in half, he agreed to write 15 short "elevations" while proposing that the other 15 be composed by his pupil Naji Hakim, whose first published works were already having lively international success. Fred Bock replied with the following letter:

November 24th, 1986

Dear Jean (am I being too informal? You may call me Fred if you wish!)

Yes, it would be agreeable to us to have you write 15 selections and Naji S. Hakim write the other 15 selections for a collection of 30 ELEVATIONS. Remember the original criteria for these was to be fairly easy, minimum pedal, and segue from one into the next...

Sincerely,

Fred Bock

⁸ Fred Bock, letter to Jean Langlais, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

The composer felt ready for this new approach to the organ, even more bare and minimalist than in his *24 Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue* or in his *Organ Book*. He introduced a mixture of personal themes, tunes from folklore (an Old French Noël in N° 5; a Scottish wedding song in N° 4) and chant ("Alleluia" of the Most Blessed Sacrament in N° 6 and Kyrie "Pater Cuncta" in N° 15). Along with this project, he wrote between September and October 1986 *12 Verses* for organ where he also, in very short pages, aimed for a minimalist writing in which emerge here and there, *en ostinato*, several Gregorian themes: "Salve Regina" (N° 8) and "Alleluia from the Office of the Most Blessed Sacrament" (N° 11 and 12).

Let us pause now to appreciate the work done by Langlais since returning to composition in June 1985: we have counted 216 pages of music between *Talitha Koum* (June 1985) and *Fantasy on Two Old Scottish Themes*, composed at the request of his Scottish pupil Marjorie Bruce Morgan (December 1986), a considerable amount for a period of nine months only, especially for an artist with aphasia, who is nearly eighty years old. About *Fantasy on Two Old Scottish Themes*, the organist Colin Andrews wrote:

Maestro Langlais is in fine form with this idiomatically, typical treatment of "Island Spinning Song" and "Lewis Bridal Song," two Scottish airs. Dating from 1986, the work displays textural and harmonic similarities to his *Triptyque* (among others) plus the humor and improvisatory quality frequently present in Langlais' works. The opening presentation of thematic materials sets the scene for a sequence of variations. Good for advanced students and recital programs.⁹

This amazing proliferation of works written in such a short period of time greatly impressed those who took care of Jean Langlais, both Professor Jean-Louis Signoret and Philippe Van Eeckhout, his faithful speech therapist. The latter also wrote an article about him published in an anthology entitled *L'Aphasique*¹⁰: Here are some of his comments about Jean Langlais:

Music Recognition

Jean L ... is able to identify a piece played by one of his students. Of course he has trouble naming it.

Most often he moves to the organ to play the selection. The execution is perfect. The student plays the "Prière" by Franck. Jean L... says "Yes, I know, it is the great Lady¹¹ saying to God, I pray, I pray...."

Reading of Notes, Reading of Words

It is particularly interesting to discuss, using the case study of J.L... the relationship between reading music notation and reading letters and words. Braille is an ideal system, since the same arrangement of points may correspond either to a letter or a word. Now the patient cannot read a single word or a single syllable, and is mistaken three times out of four in reading letters. In contrast, reading a musical score in Braille, he is able to sing, naming the notes without any mistake.

He is fully capable of playing, without singing them, the different notes of the score written in Braille; but faced with a literary text written in Braille, he is unable to link together letters and words...The different ways of processing information coming from the same basis, Braille, constitute the most remarkable fact in this study that confirms the independence of language and music in the brain. Highlighting good musical performance allows JL ... to regain confidence in himself, to play music, and

⁹ Colin Andrews, "Fantasy on 2 Old Scottish Themes, Jean Langlais." *The Diapason* (Dec. 1989). 12.

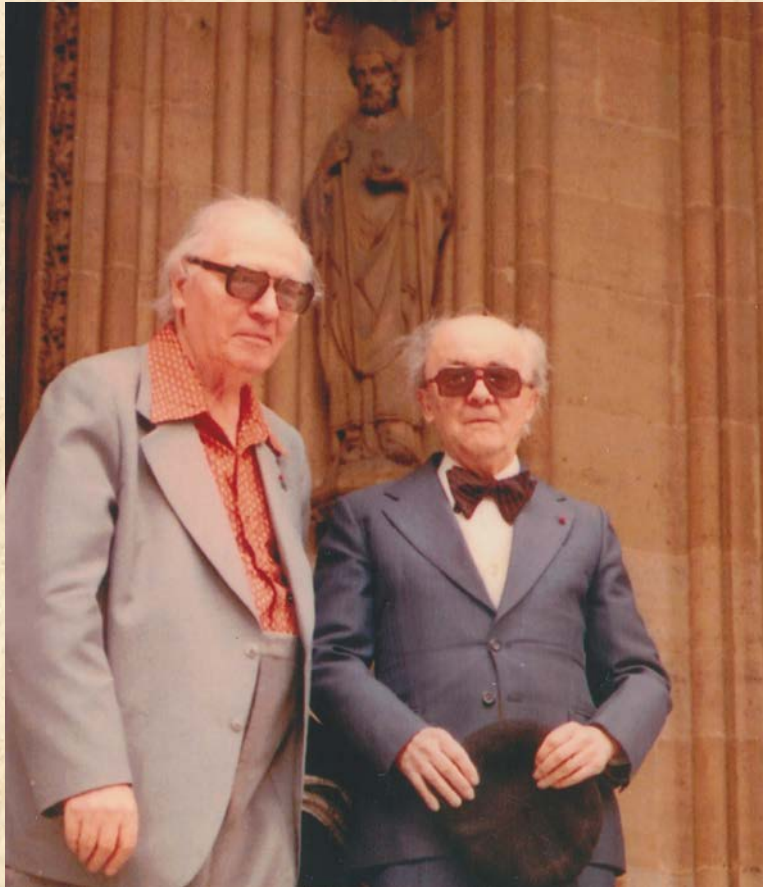
¹⁰ Philippe Van Eeckhout, « *L'Aphasique* », éditions Edisem, St Hyacinthe, Québec (1991), chapter 5. 90-97.

¹¹ This was his name for the Blessed Virgin Mary.

to create music. Thirty two pieces were written after the stroke.

The language that is otherwise broken is experienced in a different way... Currently, J.L... always uses many circumlocutions to overcome his lack of words. He has no difficulty in getting a message across, and talks about his troubles with humor while insisting on his continuously improved creative work.

A touching photograph of May 24, 1986, at the marriage of his Austrian pupil Thomas Daniel Schlee to Claire Aniotz at Ste. Clotilde, shows him with Olivier Messiaen on the porch of the Basilica:



Olivier Messiaen and Jean Langlais at Sainte-Clotilde, May 24, 1986

Figure 58. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

During this marriage, two improvisations that he played on the organ of Ste. Clotilde (the simple tone "Salve Regina" and the "Alleluia" of the Office of the Blessed Sacrament) were recorded "live"¹² and beginning at that point, he decided to consider a CD of improvisations. The ones recorded on May 24, 1986 were to be supplemented by others recorded later.

At a session on November 11, 1986¹³, without any editing and without a break, he improvised at length (over 20 minutes) on both the simple and solemn tones of the "Salve Regina" all in one movement. During the same session, he improvised on the "Alleluia" from the *Mass of the Holy Sacrament* and on the Offertory "Confitebor tibi" from the *Mass of the*

¹² Recorded by Michel Coquet

¹³ Recorded by Robert Martin

Holy Name of Jesus, stating and then successively commenting on each theme, demonstrating with perfect orchestral art the richness of the sound palette of the solo stops and the dazzling full sonority of the Ste. Clotilde organ.

A final improvisation dating from January 31, 1987 combines the "Te Deum" and the Kyrie "Pater cuncta" Mass XII: introducing the first notes of the "Te Deum," 3rd mode, minor, he states them in powerful fortissimo chords, maintaining the minor key of the theme. The contrast is complete when he suddenly introduces the Kyrie "Pater cuncta," 8th mode, whose major color and simplicity form a striking contrast with the above. Toccatas, canons, modulations, sudden changes in color, all flow together without discontinuity, alternating poetry and brilliance, and ending with a grandiose praise to God ... this is very great Langlais.

This recording, he knew, also signified his farewell to Ste. Clotilde and to the organ he had so loved. In fact, 1987 was the year of his 80th birthday, and he had always said he wanted to stay at his post one year longer than Tournemire.

César Franck, first titular organist at Ste. Clotilde from 1859 to 1890, remained 31 years at the keyboard; Charles Tournemire, stayed 41 years until his death in 1939. Jean Langlais therefore wished to remain 42 years. Appointed in 1945, he kept his word and took his leave on November 1987, 42 years to the day after he assumed the position on November 4, 1945... Never, afterwards, did he show the slightest regret at having retired, knowing that he was no longer able to shoulder this responsibility, which had become too heavy.

His disc of improvisations appeared in late 1986 just before his 80th birthday; organist Jean Galard wrote this laudatory review:

What an amazing man is Jean Langlais, who, at 80 years of age, delivers these two great improvisations on four Gregorian themes, recorded in Sainte-Clotilde on November 11, 1986. What a fascinating artist who does not refuse to give us, from his rostrum/podium, a lesson in youth! This disc was made in record time since the master mounted the steps to the organ to play for 25 minutes twice: one take, that's all.

The first improvisation on two themes of "Salve Regina," a simple and solemn tone, introduces and develops its elements in six parts, like a colorist, but in an atmosphere that is sometimes dense and harsh, resolutely very contemporary. The ideas flow with invention and rhythmic freedom, imagination is on the move.

The second improvisation is built on the "Alleluia" of the Mass of the Most Blessed Sacrament and on the Offertory of the Mass of the Holy Name of Jesus. The construction is very classical...

What can one say after listening to "these privileged musical moments" except that all this will take your breath away and will speak to you if you will allow it. The means used are the simplest: solo stops, foundations, vox humana, etc ... All this we have heard, but not in the same way, and the extraordinary personality of the author makes something more happen... A memorable testimony, a recording people will go back to again and again, one for any organ aficionado to own.¹⁴

Another testimony, this one from Theodore Marier, who wrote to Jean Langlais:

Your recent recorded improvisations Salve Regina, Alleluia and Confitebor tibi, have given me such enjoyment and cause for reflection. I feel as though this recording is your musical homily on the meaning of these age-old chants. There is

¹⁴ Jean Galard, "Jean Langlais improvise à Sainte-Clotilde." *L'Orgue*, 200 (Oct-Déc. 1986). 26.

mystery and wonder in the slow passages and vigorous affirmation in the passage of turbulence and grandeur. I am fortunate to have a new stereo system in my living room and the recording resounds very beautifully, creating a sense of presence as if you were right here playing and praying many miles away from Ste. Clotilde.¹⁵

To celebrate the birthday of the composer in the proper fashion, a great tribute concert was held on February 1, 1987 in the church of La Madeleine in Paris, which was preferable to Ste. Clotilde because it was well-heated in this very cold time of year.



Jean, Marie-Louise and Caroline Langlais at la Madeleine, February 1, 1987

Figure 59. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

The choral part was provided by the Maîtrise d'Antony, led by a faithful from among the most faithful, Father Patrick Giraud. The organists, three in number (François-Henri Houbart, titular organist of La Madeleine, Pierre Cogen, assistant and then successor at Ste. Clotilde, and Georges Bessonnet, the organist of the Maîtrise d'Antony) shared the solo parts and the accompaniments.

The program consisted of works by Langlais exclusively, with pages for organ alone and several sacred choral works (*Messe Solennelle*, *Miserere Mei*, *Sacerdos et Pontifex*, *Psaume Solennel n° 3*). Worried, Jean Langlais kept saying, a few days before the concert: "There will be no one ..." But the church was packed. A large crowd had traveled from all corners of France as well as from abroad, and included some notables: Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod, Gaston Litaize, André Fleury, Marie-Madeleine Duruflé, Marie-Claire Alain, as well as a crowd of friends and former students. Jean Langlais was deeply moved by the many proofs of affection which were lavished on him.

This French tribute was followed by similar events in Europe and the US, and several

¹⁵ Theodore Marier, letter to Jean Langlais, June 16, 1987. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

journals devoted lengthy article to the composer. The English, meanwhile, marked the occasion in their own way by awarding to Langlais the "Doctor Honoris Causa" of the Royal College of Organists. This honorary degree was given to him in London on July 11, 1987 during a very solemn ceremony.

All these celebrations, however, did not divert Jean Langlais from composing, and between March and November 1987, the year of his 80th birthday, he wrote several works for solo instruments or ensembles. He received right away a commission from Jonathan Dimmock, a former Associate Organist at St. John the Divine Cathedral in New York, for a piece highlighting the famous *trompette en chamade* of the organ whose outstanding features he detailed:

Dear Maître Langlais,

I was delighted to receive your letter and learn that you are willing to accept a commission to write an organ piece for the Cathedral...

The Solo Tuba is under 25 inches of wind pressure, and also makes a joyful noise! The State Trumpet over the West Door, is nearly 500 feet away; consequently the time delay to the console itself is nearly a full second. The reed is under 50 inches of wind pressure (more than any other reed in the world that I know about)...My experience of what works best with that reed is a type of alternatim between the reed and the full organ, or the reed and the tuba.¹⁶

This was not exactly the solution Jean Langlais employed in this *Trumpet Tune* published in 1989 by FitzSimons (Fred Bock). The composer began straight away with the solo *trompette en chamade*, which was then accompanied by the full organ, but he gave priority to a dialogue between the full sonority of the organ marked "Remainder of Organ FFF" and the *trompette en chamade*, which he treated not only in a single melodic line but in harmony, with two or three tones in the spirit of a majestic and powerful English eighteenth century "Trumpet Tune," such as by Boyce, Purcell, Greene or Stanley. In the second part of the piece, he even connects the State Trumpet with the full sonority of the organ!

It was at this time that the German publisher Pro Organo requested *Mouvement* for flute and keyboard. The composer, thinking of his Breton ancestors, chose as a thematic thread an old Breton Christmas carol, "Salut ô Sainte Crèche, berceau du Roi des Rois," which his mother sang to him when he was a child.

At the same time, he wrote for--and at the request of-- his son, an important work of chamber music, *Vitrail* ("Stained Glass") for clarinet and piano. Drawing his inspiration from the death knell rung by the bells of La Fontenelle¹⁷ and Escalquens¹⁸ interspersed in an almost obsessive way through the eight continuous movements of the work, sounded by either the clarinet or piano, these two themes blend the indelible memory preserved by the composer from his childhood in La Fontenelle with the memory of his adulthood in Escalquens, the home village of his first wife. Moreover, with this persistent theme of the death knell, how can we not think of an obsession with death, which Jean Langlais, in his eightieth year, feels drawing more and more close?

¹⁶ Jonathan Dimmock, *letter to Jean Langlais, 23 February 1987*, collection Marie-Louise Langlais

¹⁷ The three notes E flat- F- G.

¹⁸ The four notes E flat- D flat- B flat- G.

On September 1, 1986, a new curé, Father Joseph Choné, arrived at Ste. Clotilde, upon the retirement of Father Karyl Kamnitzer, who had served for 18 years. Having learned of Father Choné's great Marian devotion, Langlais decided to dedicate his *Trois Antiennes à la Sainte Vierge* for one voice (or unison choir) and organ to him.

Shortly after, on 12 November 1987, Langlais gave his last public appearance abroad, at Royal Festival Hall in London, as part of the series "Religious Masters" (five organ concerts devoted to the music of Maurice Duruflé and Jean Langlais).

Langlais improvised and I performed works by Franck, Boëly and Langlais. In his final improvisation, after having developed at length the theme "Salve Regina" which had been submitted to him that night by Ralph Downes, organist in residence at the Royal Festival Hall, Langlais introduced, first in a fragmentary and discreet manner, then gradually in full light, so to speak, a triumphant "God Save the Queen," arousing the enthusiasm of the audience. *The Musical Times* wrote about it:

Ralph Downes submitted the theme for Langlais' improvisation which has pools of nostalgic harmony and a warm serenity, Langlais making good use of the organ's colours. *God save the Queen* wove its way into the texture with humour before the improvisation concluded massively.

"I wanted," said the composer after the concert, "to bring together in the same improvisation the Queen of Heaven and the Queen of this country."¹⁹ In return, in an indignant letter, Ralph Downes complained that "such a great Master" dare mix these two themes; when this letter ²⁰ was read to him, Jean Langlais gave this unexpected and humorous quip:

"I am happy to finish my concert career in a shouting match ..."

Now, no longer having a forum or giving any more recitals, he still had composition, and again he agreed to work for FitzSimons-Bock publishers, responding favorably to the following letter:

December 7th, 1987

Dear M.Langlais,

Again I think you will be pleased with the sales and marketing on your publications in the FitzSimons catalog. I think especially noteworthy is the large number of (over 500 copies) the new AMERICAN FOLK-HYMN SETTINGS book which we published last year.

I'd like to make another suggestion, and that is for us to publish a collection of six or seven well-known Christmas carols set by you in your very special style. I feel strongly that this would have wide acceptance and use. I suggest sticking with the ones that are best known to both the Americans and the French.

I suggest the following: SILENT NIGHT; O COME, YE FAITHFUL; JOY TO THE WORLD; IN DULCI JUBILO; ANGELS, WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH; WE THREE KINGS; HARK ! THE HERALD ANGELS SING; O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM, to try get a nice mixture of soft and pretty together with triumphant and majestic. I'll be interested to hear from you if my idea strikes a responsive chord!

Sincerely

Fred Bock

Ps : Could you do this by March 1st ?²¹

¹⁹ Rosemary Porter, "Organ Recitals" in *The Musical Times*, January 1988.

²⁰ Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

²¹ Fred Bock letter to Jean Langlais, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

Of the eight proposed carols, Jean Langlais chose six, including five on melodies he already knew, like "Adeste Fideles" (O Come, All Ye Faithful), "Les anges dans nos campagnes" (Angels We Have Heard High), "Douce nuit, sainte nuit" (Silent Night, Holy Night), "In Dulci Jubilo," and "Il est né le divin enfant" (He is Born). In contrast, he did not know "Joy to the World," based on a tune by Handel and not sung in the French Catholic churches.

Once again, it was the publisher who chose the title of this new collection of six Christmas carols, *Christmas Carol Hymn Settings*, in the same spirit as the *American Folk Hymn Settings*, published previously.

And orders accumulated, in all kinds of forms: for two organists, two organs, piano and organ, harp and organ, choirs.

Obviously, he could not answer all these requests. So he had to make choices, dictated in the first place by the ease of composition, such as hymn accompaniments. He also let himself be guided by events: thus, the sudden death of his old friend Michel Villey inspired him to write an intensely emotional organ "Glas" (death knell), built on "the Alleluia of the Most Blessed Sacrament."

He followed this with a short paraphrase of the "Kyrie XVII" dedicated to Father Victor Savatte, vicar of Cancale, whom he had known since the 1950s.

The awarding in 1988 of the Grand Prix de Chartres to his devoted copyist Yves Castagnet then gave Jean Langlais the idea of writing, especially for him, a work of pure virtuosity, in which he multiplied the technical complications, with octaves, double and triple notes played by the hands at very fast tempos, and double and triple-note chords played on the pedals, justifying the title "Concert Piece" given these formidable pages.

Since these three pieces together were not sufficient to form a collection, he had the idea to add to them "Allegretto" from the *Homage to Rameau*, at present out of print. This heterogeneous collection is titled *Contrastes*.²²

Temporarily abandoning the organ, he was interested in the solo flute, for which he devised a suite of 36 sequences exploiting the various possibilities of the instrument. In the same way, he agreed to participate in the new educational series "Un, Deux... Plus," for cello unaccompanied created by les éditions Fuzeau, writing Studies 1, 2 and 4.

In April 1989 he participated in the 2nd International Organ Academy in Paris at the Schola Cantorum, which had 117 participants of all nationalities, including 11 Americans.

There, three days of classes, lectures and concerts were devoted to Charles Tournemire and to the French School of organ of the 1930s, with the special participation of Marie-Claire Alain, Marie-Madeleine Duruflé, André Fleury, Daniel-Lesur, Jean Langlais and Gaston Litaize.

A photograph taken on this occasion shows Marie-Claire Alain and Jean Langlais side-by-side:

²² The only appropriate title we found to give a sense of this new collection.



Marie-Claire Alain et Jean Langlais, Schola Cantorum, April 1989
Figure 60. (photograph by Maggy Doucet, collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

He finally composed in October and November 1987 at the request of "London Gabrieli Brass Ensemble," a four-movement work for solo brass, *Ceremony*. With its unusual instrumentation of 6 trumpets, 4 trombones and 2 tubas without accompaniment, this work surprises. Formally, *Ceremony* is divided into four movements (I-IV), of which three (I, II, IV) use the sextet (trumpets divided into three groups, two trombones and tubas together) and one (N° III), the trio, only uses the low brass (two groups of trombones and tubas). This third section of *Ceremony*, surely the most original of all for a brass ensemble, depends entirely on the plainchant, namely the Kyrie of the Mass IX "Cum Jubilo" dedicated to the Feast Days of the Blessed Virgin.

We knew Langlais was always ready to use Gregorian chant in his organ music, but this appearance of trombones and tubas is both surprising and felicitous. Here, as in the "Gloria" ("Orbis Factor" Mass XI) of the *Livre Oecuménique* for organ, the Gregorian theme shows itself to be the feeder cell of the work. Plainchant, presented as a whole in its original rhythm, [then] successively in bass and soprano (tubas for phrases sung in the lowest pitch range, and first trombones when the register of the plainchant rises) is systematically accompanied by other brass playing long notes, except for the last phrase of the "Kyrie," where the brass trio is in unison. Of course, the harmonies are linked in fourths and open fifths in the medieval spirit that already governed the Missa "Salve Regina" of 1954, which gives this section of *Ceremony* a medieval religious character which does not fail to surprise!

In contrast to 1989, the year 1990 would be entirely devoted to the organ, beginning with *Mort et Résurrection*, published by Leduc. This final grand work is, like *In Memoriam* in 1986, dedicated to Tournemire, and is a second tribute by Jean Langlais to the memory of Jehan Alain, 47 years after the famous "Chant Héroïque" from *Neuf Pièces*. In fact, 1990 marked the 50th anniversary of the tragic death of Jehan Alain in 1940, and Jean Langlais was

particularly eager to honor again the memory of his friend. Here is the report written by François Sabatier, editor of *L'Orgue* magazine:

This work conceived in two unequal and contrasting parts meditates upon the idea of death, whose violence and power the composer simultaneously evokes. Here it is not a question of a sudden death, but rather of a long struggle that seems to take place between the forces of life and those of destruction, which justifies the almost/quasi-metaphysical character of this music.

The first part, long and chaotic, thus opposes multiple sequences: eight-foot Foundations in parallel fourths where the clash of minor seconds causes a dramatic tension, frenetic episodes in full organ, snatches of toccatas with breathless rhythms, asymmetrical, calm sections with the *voix celeste*.

This initial component is completed in an impressive tumult, in spinning chromatic ostinatos, a brutal image of the furious assault of death.

Then come contemplation and order. Far from the triumphs and jublations of Easter, the serene balancing of fifths and sixths invites one to a haven of peace and candor, fruit of a beautiful inspiration which honors in poetry the memory of the dedicatee, Jehan Alain.²³

This beautiful inspiration is nothing other than the poetic figuration of the *Choral Dorien* by Jehan Alain. Alain's Litanies had inspired Langlais' "Chant Héroïque," while the *Choral Dorien* inspired *Death and Resurrection*. If "Resurrection," the second section of this new work, evokes the music of Alain, "Death," in contrast, has no equivalent in the work of Langlais, apart perhaps from some sequences of *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse* or abundant clusters and short repetitive sequences unrelated to one another. It is a strange work which gives a vision of death as aggressive, frightening and disjointed.

Was it a question of depicting the dramatic end of Jehan Alain or was the composer thinking of his own death? It is difficult to answer this question as Langlais himself seemed contradictory, displaying on the one hand a total serenity in the face of this end which he felt to be close, while affirming at the same time a taste for living, why not to 100, in keeping with his fighter's temperament.

At the time of writing a spiritual Scherzo (*Moonlight Scherzo*) on the famous popular theme "Au clair de la lune" as a witness to his affection for and as thanks to Colette Geneste who, at the head of Combre editions, always had supported and encouraged him, the composer found himself counting that which was dear to him in an ultimate *Suite in Simplicitate*, which recalled once again the simple, luminous and joyous faith of the artist. It is particularly moving to read "Cum Jubilo," the piece that closes the *Suite* in the simple key of C major. There, Jean Langlais treats again once more the Kyrie integral to the Mass "Cum Jubilo" (Messe IX, for the Blessed Virgin), one of his favorite Gregorian melodies. But once this theme is stated, there appears, for the last time in his work and in his life as a composer, the beloved theme of "Salve Regina," the unadorned, complete tune. How not to be troubled by this last reference to the Blessed Virgin, just some months before he died?

Beginning in January 1990, declining all new commissions, Jean Langlais little by little withdrew from the active world. Even though visitors who followed one another to his home

²³ François Sabatier, *L'Orgue* 217 (January-February-March 1991). 39.

in the early months of 1991 found in him as much vivacity and verve as they were accustomed to, those who were close to him worried about his increasing fatigue.

Epilogue, Wednesday, May 8, 1991

In March 1991, he attended at St. François-Xavier church the funeral of his doctor, Professor Jean-Louis Signoret, who had died suddenly of a heart attack. This ceremony struck him greatly: he had just lost both a friend and the one who had in a certain way given his life back to him after his stroke in 1984. He took a ten-day vacation in La Richardais in April. A picture taken there shows him enjoying the company of his faithful dog, Scherzo:



Jean Langlais and his dog Scherzo, La Richardais, April 1991

Figure 61. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

Back in Paris, he again attended the reception held on May 2 at the Schola Cantorum for the 4th International Organ Academy. Kathleen Thomerson, who was present at the Academy, relates the following:

At the end of April 1991, I arrived in Paris to attend a conference at the Schola Cantorum and stayed at the Langlais apartment on rue Duroc. I planned to play *Mort et Résurrection*, op.250, which he wrote as a memorial to Jehan Alain. Since I had recently been travelling, and not near a keyboard, I started practicing it on the house organ. Langlais came into the front door, interested to hear it again. I explained that this work was the work I wanted him to teach me this trip, but that I needed to work on it a little more. He said, "It doesn't matter. We could work on it now." I replied that I really needed to refresh my fingers and mind with the music first. It turned out to be a big mistake. He listened quietly to my rehearsing, first in the room, and then in another part of the apartment. I had no idea that my lesson would never take place.

The next day, he was tired. He did not want to see a doctor, but Marie-Louise called

one to come to the house that evening. The doctor wanted him to go to the hospital for observation, but Langlais refused forcefully.

The next morning, as I left for an appointment, I said, "Maître, I'll see you later." This was a wish that did not come true... When I returned later that day, Langlais had been taken to the hospital, and Marie-Louise asked if I would stay with Caroline so she could remain with her husband. So, I think that possibly the last organ work he heard was my practicing of his *Mort et Résurrection*...²⁴

On the evening of Wednesday, May 8, a pulmonary edema attack, the third in three days, began. As in the two previous crises, he still struggled fiercely and fully consciously, for a long while. And then, at 11:45 pm, his hand was shaken by a brief spasm and fell back inert. He was dead...

The next day was Ascension Day and the news of his death was communicated and announced. Tributes and testimonials from the entire world followed one another, summarized by the concise sentence of Bernard de Castelbajac, the father of one of Jean Langlais' last blind students: **"With Jean Langlais, Music loses a Lord."**

Funeral Oration

His private funeral was held on May 16 with great simplicity in the family intimacy of the small church of Escalquens. Jean Langlais rests there, according to his wish, in the adjoining cemetery alongside his first wife. Their grave is topped by a sculpture by his old friend Pierre Manoli, sculptor in La Richardais, commissioned after the death of Jeannette. Carved from a block of black granite of Brittany, this work represents a stylized bird taking flight towards the sky, symbol of the passage of the Christian soul "into the light." Now, hanging on the white cross of the grave of Jean and Jeannette Langlais, this black granite bird represents for Eternity their departure to heaven...



**Sculpture by Pierre Manoli on Jean and Jeannette Langlais' grave
in the cemetery of Escalquens**

Figure 62. (photograph and collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

²⁴ Kathleen Thomerson, *A tribute to Jean Langlais*, sent to Marie-Louise Langlais February 16, 2001. 7-8.

Much more formally, 15 days later on May 30, 1991, a Solemn Mass unfolded with official splendor in the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde before a huge audience which was silent and moved. Father Choné, curé of Sainte-Clotilde, and Canon Jehan Revert, choirmaster of the chapel of Notre Dame, gave the funeral orations, and various works by Jean Langlais were performed on the organ, in turn by the two new titular organists, Jacques Taddei and Pierre Cogen, with the participation of trumpeter Guy Touvron, the choir of Sainte-Marie d'Antony led by Father Patrick Giraud, and brass of the National Conservatory of Paris.

The musical program was composed of the following works:

Entrée : "Prière" by César Franck; Jacques Taddei, organ
Introït : Gregorian Requiem
Kyrie from *Missa Salve Regina* (Langlais)
Psalm : "Misere mei Deus" (*Deux Déplorations*, Langlais)
Easter Alleluia
Offertory: "Ardemment j'aspire à une fin heureuse" composed and played by P. Cogen, organ
Sanctus from *Messe Solennelle* (Langlais)
Agnus Dei from *Missa Salve Regina*
Choral "De Profundis" (from *Sept Chorals* for trumpet and organ, Langlais), Guy Touvron, trumpet, Jacques Taddei, organ.
"Libera me, Domine" (*Deux Déplorations*)
Salve Regina, solemn tone, sung
Sortie: "Mors et Resurrectio" (*Trois Paraphrases Grégoriennes*, Langlais), Pierre Cogen, organ.

Kathleen Thomerson, present at this Requiem Mass, has left a very comprehensive testimony:

Among those paying their respects were Jean Bonfils, Claire Boussac (to whom "Chant de paix" is dedicated), Yves Castagnet (his last manuscript copyist), Jacques Chailley, Dominique Chopy, Mr and Mrs Henri Chopy (descendants of César Franck), Mr and Mrs Daniel-Lesur, Marie-Bernadette Dufourcet-Hakim, Dr. Thomas and Mrs Gail Duggan (the American Church in Paris), Marie-Madeleine Duruflé, Jacqueline Englert-Marchal, Mrs Bernard Gavoty, Marie-Louise Girod-Parrot, Susan Landale, Olivier Latry, Gaston Litaize, Kurt Lueders, Bruno Mathieu, Raphael Tambyeff, and staff from the Association Valentin Haüy. Some of the former students of Langlais who were seated together at the service included Marjorie Bruce, Scotland; Jane Parker-Smith, England; Lynne Davis, Kathleen Thomerson, U.S.A.; Stefan Kagl, Germany; Michelle Leclerc, Pascale Mélis of France. Many more of Langlais' colleagues and friends in America wished they could be there, and thought of him on that memorial day! Those of us who attended the Solemn Requiem Mass at the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde join those who could not be there in saying farewell to Jean Langlais, who believed that resurrection follows death, and who lives yet with us as we hear his music.²⁵

And what greater tribute to Jean Langlais could there be than the moving funeral oration given by Mgr. Jehan Revert²⁶ during the solemn Mass, of which the following is the entire text:

²⁵ Kathleen Thomerson, "Messe Solennelle for Jean Langlais," in *AGO Magazine*, September 1991. 33.

²⁶ Jehan Revert (1920-2015), choirmaster at the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris, friend and former composition student of Jean Langlais; copy of this eulogy in collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

“What we have seen and heard, we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”

These words of the Apostle John, like those of the apostle Peter, are good for us to hear, while we are all still in the faith, prayer and thanksgiving of this Mass. Nothing is more real for us Christians than this communion of heart and spirit that connects us with Jean Langlais in the grace of God and by the grace of his music. He liked to recall, "I am a Breton musician of the Catholic faith." And in truth, he was a man of faith and a witness to the Catholic faith in his own music. His vocation is called perfect in faithfulness through his art itself. Blessed are thus the unity of their lives!

The young Breton boy who left his native cottage at the age of ten years to enter the Institute for the Young Blind in 1917 was already marked by his vocation. Eldest son of a stonemason and a seamstress, nothing nevertheless predisposed him to a musical career. But with courage, he started this new life, whose regime was not without harshness. He would keep throughout the course of his life this courage in the face of difficulties, which he always took as a stimulant of activity.

At sixteen, among all the possibilities of professions offered by the institution, he divinitively chose music and became the disciple of André Marchal, "the blind man with fingers of light," as Bernard Gavoty said. From Marchal, he learned the meaning of poetry and elegance in music. He completed this education in Marcel Dupré's Conservatory class in performance and improvisation, as well as in Noël Gallon's class in the subject of writing; these are the usual studies for organists. But his personal vocation became clearer especially with his meeting with Paul Dukas, to whom he would timidly present "Mors and Ressurrectio" and who would welcome him to his class in composition, saying: "*You are a born composer!*"

Confident in this assessment, Jean Langlais will henceforth know that there lies his personal call and he will no longer fail to honor it. At the same time, moreover, he found in Charles Tournemire a fascinating example of what a sacred liturgical organist might be when he expresses and comments on the great prayer inspired by Gregorian chant. Like this master, whom he will one day succeed, he too, needed to speak and sing the Christian faith through music. And how better to do that than to start with the Gospels, what could be simpler and more beautiful! And these are the three *Poèmes Evangéliques*: L'Annonciation, La Nativité, Les Rameaux.

It is significant in this regard that his first compositions (except *Six Préludes* for organ, which he preferred to forget) are already marked by the presence of Gregorian themes. The words that express the Christian faith are the words of the liturgy and their expression for him is spontaneously Gregorian. Some composers will approach it, will seek to translate the Christian mystery in a more impressionistic atmosphere, thinking that the intangible, the ungraspable cannot be expressed; one must only suggest it. It is certain: Saint John said, "*No one has ever seen God,*" but the Catholic faith has words for prayer, and words of prayer are the first expression of faith: *lex orandi-lex credendi* (*the law of prayer is the law of belief*)

So Jean Langlais uses the words of prayer, the words of God's people, of whom he himself is one, in all simplicity; and his personal style of saying them, as an organist, is to play them with the melodies that are their traditional support, while he creates around and for them the desired atmosphere, in order to enhance them (to create a setting for them, as one does for a jewel).

And this will be, from the moment of their creation, the reason for the success of *Trois Paraphrases Grégoriennes*. This is the era when he was organist of Notre-Dame de la

Croix de Ménilmontant. And already there appears in his compositions another characteristic of the Catholic heart that beat in him: a great faith in and great devotion to Our Lady. He himself later said: "*Of all my music, that which is intended for Our Lady is the best, that which I hold closest to my heart.*"

His *Ave Mundi gloria* dates from this period. And it uses one of the most characteristic forms of Catholic prayer: the litany. Those who have sung or heard this piece sung all know its delicate freshness and fervent spirit. It is the freshness and spirit of Jean Langlais in relation to Our Lady. Nothing of this will be lost in the following works. His appointment to the great organ of Sainte-Clotilde will only reinforce this Faith and this expression. To enter into the glory of César Franck and Charles Tournemire will be for him a grace and an extraordinary stimulus. It was just after the war of 1939-45 and after those black hours, whose agonizing and dramatic memory his *Première Symphonie* keeps alive.

After "Chant de peine" and "Chant héroïque" came "Chant de paix" and "Chant de joie." Jean Langlais therefore fits happily in this sequence of musicians who are servants of liturgical prayer. He will do it in his own particular way, with his language and style, but in a spirit of loyalty to the service that he has the honor and joy to render. I remember such a conversation in the corridors of the Petit Séminaire de Conflans, where he was often invited at that time, when he told me of the joy he had in this mission and in the confidence that had been placed in him.

These were soon to be the years of the full maturity of his talent: the three suites, whose review hailed "an imagination and a first-rate creative capacity," and many other works that followed regularly. This is not the place to detail them. I only mention them to say what a tireless composer he was all his life until last Christmas when he decided to stop. Jean Langlais was a man of courage and tenacity. The "Epilogue pour pédale solo" from *Hommage à Frescobaldi* with its three-voice fugue is the witness, when we know the technical difficulty of the work, and that he had written it to force himself, after an accident, to regain the use of his leg.

But I would like to underline how Jean Langlais kept through all his compositions a Catholic heart: happy in Sainte-Clotilde, he did not forget that there are other churches and smaller instruments and less favored organists. He also wrote for them. All his life he would remain in this way conscious of the poor, the less advantaged. His inspiration does not come just from the big and impressive and decorative liturgical themes, but also from the more humble ones, with a particular fondness for the theme songs of his Breton countryside. His fervent believer's heart took him first to the texts of the Mass. He composed 13 masses, of all genres, from the most gleaming and solemn, as we have heard, to the most humble (in Simplicitate) and as many in Latin as in French and English. The expression of his piety, too, followed so much the Christian mystery and the Creed. He sang the mystery of the Holy Trinity not in transcendental theological reflections, but quite simply by mixing the "Our Father," the "Word made flesh," evoked by Christmas and the Holy Spirit in the "Veni Creator," always this sense of a musical sign that is easy to understand and reveals the mystery, the sacramental meaning.

The mystery of redemption in the cross and resurrection lived through the liturgy inspired in him an amazing passage, Incantation for a Holy Day, "Lumen Christi," victory of light over darkness and this chanting of litanies that lead Christian people in the victory over death in the wake of Christ the Light, just as also appears throughout the "Acclamations Carolingiennes" a vision of Christ the King and Lord.

Yes! What powerful cries of joy is one hears there! Another similar cry is heard again in "Imploration pour la Croissance" but this time, it is a cry of suffering, of vehement protest

against that which could degrade the treasure of the Catholic Creed. He was happy to have been able to express that in music, affirming several times, as in Bach's *Mass in B*, the theme of the Creed, and finding for the finale this amazing harmony in which the twelve notes of the chromatic scale sound simultaneously. (I can still hear his laughter when he explained that). But after this kind of revolt, once again peace returns to him as he composes *Offrande à Marie*. Always, it is in turning to Our Lady that faith and serenity come back to him. Is there an impulse more typical of Catholic piety than that? He mixes there the freshness of the "Virgo Dei Genetrix," the litanies of Lorette, the Grand Salve (which inspired the Mass heard just now) with the theme of the bells of this *Missa Salve Regina* composed for Christmas 1954 at Notre-Dame.

Yes, it is a faithful soul who forgets nothing of what he has received and loved. And this devotion remains nourished by the best insights of faith, as it appears in the "3rd Esquisse Gothique," where the composer connects the Prose de la Dédicace with the Salve Regina, following the idea dear to Catholic theology, that Mary is the icon of the Church, as it is said in the book of *Revelation*. Jean Langlais said he was literally fascinated by this last book of the Bible (which he had read at least fifty times). He drew from it five musical meditations that were very impressive, some because of their evocative power but others by their solemnity, also by the meditation in which he contemplates "the One who was, who is and who comes."

The man, the believer, is there before the Christ omnipresent in human history, the fragile being who passes before the divine eternity. "Behold, I am the first and the last," said the Lord, "I am the living one. I was dead, but here I am alive forever" (Rev.1: 17, 18). The great hope of the Christian faced with the mystery of death, his only hope, is Christ. For the child of the land of Brittany, which he was, death with its legends must have very early entered into his thoughts: Christian death appears not as a shadowy end, but as a call to penetrate, to open oneself to a model of life, of light, of peace and of joy in Jesus Christ.

Already "Mors and Resurrectio" through the Gregorian motifs of the Mass for the Dead had brought in the theme of Saint Paul: "O death, where is thy victory?" Certainly Jean Langlais does not approach that with ease or with presumption. No! It is the humble fisherman of "De Profundis," this chorale whose chromaticism expresses supplication. But it is above all filled with trust and surrender (as he expresses it in *Offrande à une âme*, a work written in grief for his first wife). The themes of the Mass for the Dead, once again reprised, are assumed, longed for and transfigured in the paschal light of "Lumen Christi." Yes, hope is everywhere expressed by the "musician of the Catholic faith" (as he liked to say). It would be good for us to receive from Jean Langlais through these evocations the most beautiful and the most faithful witness of his faith.

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us... that your joy may be full" said St. John.

Dear friends, we learned of the death of Jean Langlais the morning of the Feast of the Ascension. He himself had written the commentary on this last call by the Lord to his musician in the simplicity of the final sentence of *Revelation*. Responding to the affirmation of the Lord: "Yes, I am coming soon," his music said with a kind of sigh or long breath:

"Oh! Yes, come Lord, Lord Jesus"

