

CHAPTER 6

The First American Tour, 1952

Concert Management for organists in North America

The La Berge concert management was started in 1921 by Bernard R. La Berge, an impresario, organist, pianist, and critic from Quebec, and it rapidly became the leading North American management for concert organists, eventually based in New York City. La Berge managed some of the true celebrities in the organ world; they were from France: Joseph Bonnet (first American tour in 1916), Louis Vierne (1927), André Marchal (1930); Germany: Günther Ramin; Belgium: Flor Peeters; Italy: Fernando Germani; and the United States: Charles Courboin (of Belgian birth and training) and Carl Weinrich.

Marcel Dupré had come to the United States for the first time in 1921 at the invitation of one of Widor's former students, Alexander Russell, who was concert manager for the Wanamaker department stores in New York City and Philadelphia. Subsequently in 1929, Dupré joined the La Berge management, in 1929. But La Berge had already signed two French organists, Joseph Bonnet and Louis Vierne. After his first tour (February–April 1927), Vierne closed his published account of the tour with these words:

I pay homage here to my two impresarios, Dr. Alexander Russell and Mr. Bernard La Berge. Thanks to their intelligent and kind care, I was able (on the first attempt) to make a grand tour of the United States, Canada, and California, a formidable trip that involved meticulously prepared organization. It was absolutely first rate. An indelible memory of this trip will remain with me.¹

Apparently, in the late 1920s, the invitation to play in the United States comes first from Alexander Russell, who wanted to promote the organs in the Wanamaker stores in New York and Philadelphia, and then from La Berge, who booked concerts west of the Mississippi and in Canada. There is no question that to be engaged by this duo was by far the best way for a European organist to establish a North American reputation.

Oddly, La Berge never invited Charles Tournemire to join his management, even though the Sainte-Clotilde organist had American supporters, primarily in New York City, because of the publication of *L'Orgue Mystique* by Heugel, in Paris, as a periodical starting in 1928. One

¹ Louis Vierne. "La Musique en Amérique." *Le Courrier musical* (July 1, 1927). 379.

need only note the four New Yorkers who were dedicatees among Tournemire's 51 "Offices": William C. Carl, director of the Guilmant Organ School (n°4); Lynnwood Farnam, Church of the Holy Communion (n°21); Ernest Mitchell, Grace Church (n°30); and Carl Weinrich, Farnam's successor at the Church of the Holy Communion (n°36).

In 1935, Tournemire once again dedicated a work -- his *Précis d'exécution, de registration et d'improvisation à l'orgue*-- to William Carl (undoubtedly because of his important post as head of the Guilmant School).

At about the same time, Tournemire wrote in his memoirs, in January 1935:

Received a letter from Mr. Robert Mitchell, an excellent New York organist, very devoted to *L'Orgue Mystique*. He's going to work on the possibility of an edition of my *Sept Chorals-poèmes d'orgue pour les sept paroles du Christ* with Gray, a publisher in New York.²

The initiative failed, so Tournemire contacted Schirmer in New York in 1936 and noted the result in his memoirs:

The manuscript of my *Sept Chorals-poèmes pour les sept paroles du Christ*, sent to Schirmer in the United States, with the hope that this wealthy house would be tempted to publish this work, was returned after washing their hands with a glorious rejection.³

It is most likely that the very "Catholic" (i.e. liturgical) music by Tournemire did not suit American organists and music lovers who were largely Protestant and fans of modern French works that were secular and virtuosic, such as Louis Vierne's *Symphonies* or Marcel Dupré's *Preludes and Fugues*. This is the reason that Jean Langlais, in his first American tour of 1952, tried to undo what he saw as a great injustice. He regularly programmed pieces by Tournemire that were completely unknown there.

Jean Langlais first North American Tour (April 17-June 3, 1952)

At the beginning of the 1950s it became apparent to Bernard La Berge that his list of French organists had seriously diminished: Louis Vierne had died in 1937, Joseph Bonnet in 1944, and André Marchal came to the United States without benefit of management; only Marcel Dupré remained. Thus he needed new blood and, for that, he consulted Dupré.

Jean Langlais remembered what happened next:

One Sunday in June of 1951, the 17th to more precisely, during the high Mass I received a surprise visit in the organ loft of Sainte-Clotilde. It was the impresario Bernard R. La Berge, who had been sent to me by Marcel Dupré. Laberge was his manager for Canada and the United States.

I played the *Premier Choral* by César Franck for him and immediately after—in the American tradition of being fast and efficient—I was invited to join his management and go across the Atlantic in the spring of 1952. Of course I accepted, and for me that was the beginning of an exhausting but marvelous life.⁴

² Edited by Marie-Louise Langlais in 2014 on Internet, *Eclats de Mémoire*, website ml-langlais.com. 112

³ Ibid. 122.

⁴ Langlais, "Souvenirs."

La Berge's decision was indeed fast, as the contract between him and Langlais was signed in Paris on Wednesday, June 20, 1951, witnessed by Lilian Murtagh, the executive secretary of the management—just three days after the first meeting at Sainte-Clotilde. The contract was for a tour originally planned to be from April 17-June 14, 1952. But Langlais shortened it slightly, returning on June 5th because he wanted to be back in Paris in time for the centennial of the death of Louis Braille, the brilliant inventor of the alphabet that bears his name, used by the blind all over the world. During the celebrations, expected to last for an entire week, Langlais was to direct his choir of blind boys and girls from the Institute for Young Blind in Paris.

Although Langlais was engaged by Bernard La Berge himself in June of 1951, Laberge died in December of the same year, before Langlais had even set foot on American soil, and the management was purchased by the American impresario Henry Colbert. However, Laberge's secretary, Lilian Murtagh, continued to administer the organ division, and at the death of Colbert in 1962, she acquired it, becoming the most important manager for organists in North America. Thus for the management of his American career, Langlais really had only one real representative, Lilian Murtagh, with whom he always got along admirably, especially since she spoke fluent French, the language of their written correspondence as well.

From the end of the 1930s, the name Jean Langlais was not unknown to Americans. André Marchal, in his long American tour in 1938, regularly programmed "La Nativité" from *Poèmes évangéliques* which was well received by organists and audiences. Similarly, during his 1947 tour, he played the "Te Deum" (*Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes*) and "Chant de paix" (*Neuf Pièces*) several times, not to mention the "Acclamations Carolingiennes" from the *Suite médiévale* which is dedicated to Marchal.

A little later, a number of prominent American organists began to program music by Langlais: "Chant de paix" by Catharine Crozier in Springfield, Illinois (February 25, 1949), the complete *Suite médiévale* by Charles Dodsley Walker in Worcester, Massachusetts (February 26, 1951), not to mention the American premiere of the *Messe Solennelle* on March 5, 1951 at Central Presbyterian Church in New York City, under the direction of the church's organist-choirmaster, Hugh Giles; or the *Suite française*, played in its entirety by Richard Ross at Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church in Baltimore (November 4, 1951). In addition, as soon as Langlais was appointed official organist at Sainte-Clotilde in 1945, he came to the attention of foreign musicians, as seen in an interview conducted by Clarence H. Barber, who recounts his impressions after having seen and heard Langlais play his two Sunday masses during his first year at Sainte-Clotilde:

After the high mass, we were invited to see the inside of the organ, and Langlais climbed around the dusty framework with an agility which put the two of us with normal vision completely to shame... Our host bade us farewell with a warm handshake, and something of a meditateness and religious atmosphere of César Franck seemed to linger in our minds as we left the church after a beautiful performance by M. Langlais of the Belgian master's "Prière."⁵

⁵ Clarence Barber, "Jean Langlais and the Ste Clotilde Organ Visited by American," *The Diapason* 37:9 (August, 1946). 8.

One can also find the names of many North American visitors in the guest book that sat on the organ's console from 1949 onwards,⁶ some noting their appreciation. These comments are all testimony to the fact that the organ loft at Sainte-Clotilde was very open and that visitors were completely welcome:

Maurice John Forshaw and **Hugh Giles**, New York City ("thank you for the magnificent music," October 9, 1949)

Norman Proulx, Boston ("Thank you so very much for the music, especially the "De Profundis," November 20, 1949)

Raymond Daveluy of St Jean Baptiste in Montreal ("As a memory of my visit to Sainte-Clotilde, with my most respectful compliments to the master, Jean Langlais," February 12, 1950)

Clarence Dickinson, Union Theological Seminary New York City (July 9, 1950)

Robert Lodine, Chicago (July 4, 1951)

Charles Dodsley Walker, Church of the Heavenly Rest, New York City ("With a thousand thanks for inviting me to play this magnificent organ") and his wife, Janet Hayes ("It's always a great pleasure to see you as well as Mrs. Langlais and the children. Thank you for everything. With much affection," July 8, 1951)

With a view towards the first American tour by Langlais, and to prepare for his arrival, La Berge submitted a photograph to the magazine *Choir Guide*,⁷ which published it as a full-page image of Langlais at the console of the Sainte-Clotilde organ in 1945, just after he was named official organist. It was captioned "Choir Guide Hall of Fame for Outstanding Achievement."

Immediately following the picture in *Choir Guide*, there was an analysis of the *Suite médiévale* by Claire Coci (1912–1978). A strong personality who made her mark on the history of American organ-playing in the twentieth century, she was a student of Charles Courboin in New York and of Marcel Dupré in Paris. After marrying Bernard La Berge in 1937, she became an influential figure in the La Berge management, beginning an international career in 1939 that took her throughout the United States, to Canada, South America, and Japan.

Here is what she wrote about Langlais's *Suite médiévale* in 1951:

JEAN LANGLAIS has again contributed a tonal monument to the organ repertory. A composition of depth, line, solid structure and force; when contrasted to its moments of tranquility and harmonic beauty, these qualities become even more predominant.

The *Suite médiévale* should not be passed over lightly and regarded as "Just another modern French output"! With sufficient thought and consideration it will prove of limitless value, both to the Church and Recital Organist.

It is customary for the "chief at the console" to play during the sections of the Low Mass; hence we have many compositions written "en Forme de Messe Basse," the various movements being in accordance with the sections of the Mass. These movements, therefore, are a valuable means of expression to all Church Services, yet their value for recital purposes is not forfeited by too much "incense." The Suite is written on Gregorian themes of the Middle Ages. It is interesting to note the

⁶ There were two guest books (*Livres d'Or*), bound in brown leather: the first covers October 7, 1949 to September 23, 1967, the second July 5, 1968 to March 1984. Both contain the signatures and thanks of organists from all around the world (collection Marie-Louise Langlais).

⁷ *Choir Guide* 4. 8 (November, 1951). 40-41.

composer's treatment of the selected themes, especially his employment of "parallel motion." Mr. Langlais endeavors to renew the early tradition of masters who wrote harmonically. Power, force and strength can also be revealed in simplicity, and Mr. Langlais proves this by the beauty of the "Elevation." The theme, reserved to the Blessed Sacrament, rests on two notes expressed in the pedals. This symbolizes the eternity of the "Word." If one is seeking musical excitement, it will certainly be found in the "Acclamations," the fifth and final movement of the Suite, in which full vent and force is given to the idea of a composition recalling the faith of the Middle Ages.

The Acclamations, attributed to Charlemagne, requires a most enthusiastic execution to interpret a full conception of the theme "Christ Conquers." The strength and force of this theme is increased by the composer's treatment. Throughout this work Langlais endeavors never to alter its rhythmic pattern.

Having drawn attention to Jean Langlais the composer, La Berge proceeded to announce his first North American tour in the next issue of the same magazine: "Bernard La Berge presents... JEAN LANGLAIS." The same photograph of Langlais at the Sainte-Clotilde console, taken in 1945, was used with this headline, with the following comment:

It is with distinct pride that I am presenting to America and Canada the distinguished virtuoso and composer, successor to the late Charles Tournemire on the bench of Sainte Clotilde, a Church made illustrious by the great César Franck. Although this will be Mr. Langlais' first concert tour of our country, his name is already widely known through his many compositions. —Bernard R. La Berge

TRANSCONTINENTAL TOUR OF U.S.A AND CANADA

April–May, 1952

Exclusive Management: Bernard R. La Berge, Inc.⁸

One can see that La Berge is using two main elements in promoting Langlais: his position as successor to César Franck and Charles Tournemire at Sainte-Clotilde, and his high standing as a composer, since his works were already known and played in the United States. On the other hand, the impresario makes no mention of the artist's blindness. The publicity establishes the tour as lasting two months, April and May of 1952; in fact, following Langlais's wishes, he stayed in North America exactly 48 days, giving 22 concerts and travelling 8,000 miles by train. Having arrived in New York on April 17th by ship, he left for France the same way on June 3rd. *The Diapason* announced his arrival and the schedule of his tour⁹:

Plainfield, New Jersey, April 20	Peoria, Illinois, May 11
New York City, April 22	Lincoln, Nebraska, May 13
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 23	Denton, Texas, May 16
Baltimore, Maryland, April 27	Austin, Texas, May 17
Richmond, Virginia, April 28	Chicago, Illinois, May 22
Chapel Hill, North Carolina, April 30	Rochester, New York, May 24
St. Louis, Missouri, May 1	Boston, Mass., May 26
Syracuse, New York, May 3	Washington, May 28
Berea, Ohio, May 5	Pittsburgh, Penn., May 29
Columbus, Ohio, May 7	Buffalo, New York, June 1
Cleveland, Ohio, May 9	Toronto, Canada, June 2

As one can see, this was a very full itinerary and of course very tiring, especially considering the fact that the composer travelled exclusively by train, never by plane; his

⁸ *Choir Guide*, 4. 9 (December 1951). 61

⁹ "Jean Langlais to Arrive April 17 for Six Weeks Tour." *The Diapason* 43.5 (April 1952). 1.

dread of planes was the result of a tragic airplane accident on October 28, 1949 off the Azores which killed the great French violinist Ginette Neveu returning from a triumphant tour of the United States; the French boxer Marcel Cerdan was on the same flight. This tragedy had an enormous and long-lasting impact on the French public. Langlais decided, therefore, never to take an airplane, a stance he maintained for a long time.

The composer kept a diary during this first North American tour, some excerpts of which appeared in the French journal, *Musique et liturgie*. Here is his explanation for the choice of three different programs that he offered to the organizers of his recitals:

I was asked to provide three different programs that could be appropriate for three culturally different audiences. The first, restricted to contemporary French music (except for Franck and Bingham), was comprised of works by Dupré, Tournemire, Messiaen, and me, and was requested 15 times. The second, more moderate, had works by Mendelssohn, Franck, Falcinelli, Litaize, Satie, and me; it was only played once. The third, based on Bach, Couperin, Grigny, Demessieux, Vierne, and Langlais had six performances. Each recital ended with an improvisation of a symphony in four or five movements, which netted me eight, ten, and even eleven proposed themes.¹⁰

The three programs were as follows :

Program 1

Franck: *Choral* No. 3

Dupré: *Stations of the Cross*: “Jésus console les filles d’Israël”

Messiaen: *La Nativité* : “Les Anges”

Tournemire: *L’Orgue Mystique* : Communion (for Epiphany)

Bingham: *Toccata on “Leoni”*

Langlais:

Suite médiévale: Prélude, Tiento

Suite française: Arabesque sur les flûtes, Récit de Nazard

Première Symphonie: Finale

Improvisation

Program 2

Mendelssohn: Sonata N° 6

Franck: Pastorale

Satie: *Messe des pauvres*: “Prière des orgues”

Falcinelli: *Prière*

Litaize: Toccata on “Veni Creator”

Langlais: *Hommage à Frescobaldi*:

Prélude, Fantaisie, Thème et variations, Epilogue for Pedal solo

Improvisation

Program 3

Bach: Prelude in E-flat Major

Couperin: Benedictus

De Grigny: Dialogue

Vierne: Allegro vivace from *Première Symphonie*

Demessieux: Choral-Prelude “Domine Jesu”

Langlais: *Suite française*: Prélude sur les grands jeux

Neuf Pièces: “In Dulci Jubilo”

Hommage à Frescobaldi: Thème and Variations

Postlude N° 2

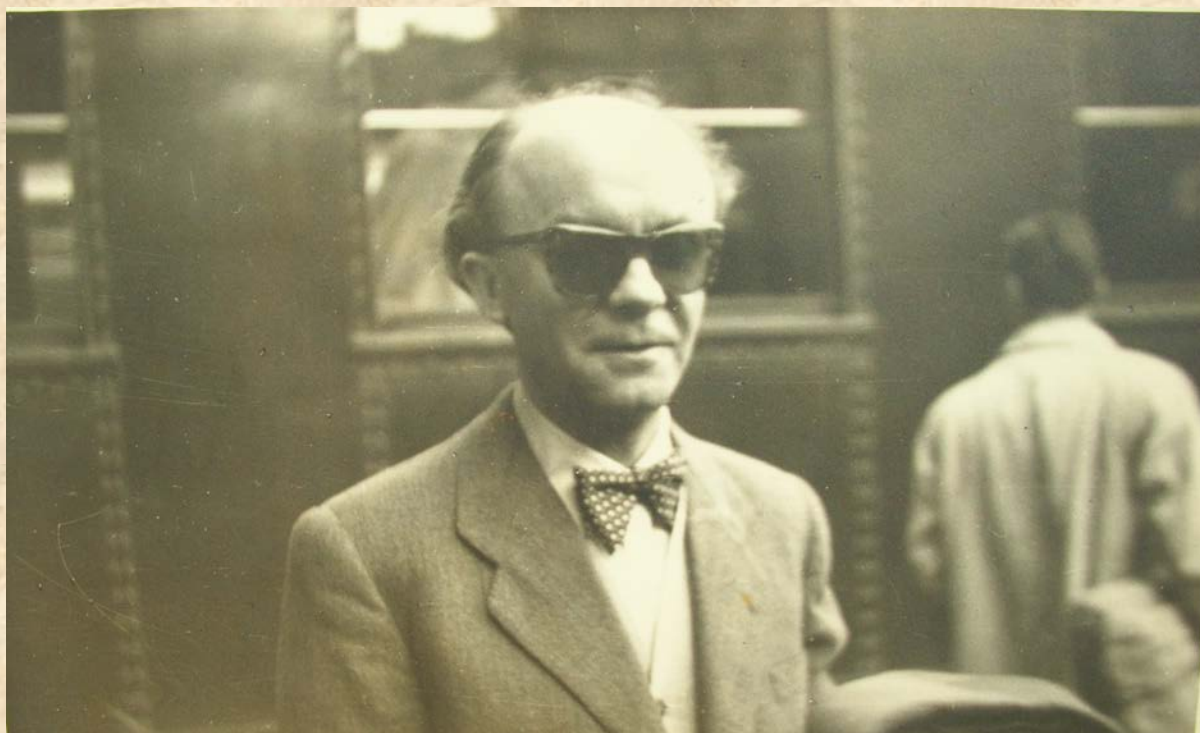
Improvisation

¹⁰ Jean Langlais, “Mon Voyage aux Etats-Unis.” *Musique et Liturgie* (Nov-Dec. 1952): 10-11.

These three programs have some elements in common: all three end with an improvisation in the form of a symphony in four or five movements, a true *tour-de-force* in terms of both form and duration (20–25 minutes).

But before improvising, Langlais always programmed an overview of his own works, lasting about 20 minutes. For this first tour, however, he did not program the works that were already known and played in the United States, such as the *Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes* or “La Nativité” (from the *Poèmes évangéliques*); he preferred to introduce newer movements, less known, taken from the *Suite française*, the *Suite médiévale*, and (last, but not least) the *Hommage à Frescobaldi*.

In fact, throughout his career as a concert artist, he always had the desire to present his new works while at the same time playing French works from all eras, to show that he was a true ambassador of French music, from Couperin to Franck, Satie, Vierne, Tournemire, and Dupré, to the most modern: Olivier Messiaen, Gaston Litaize, Jeanne Demessieux, and Rolande Falcinelli. And finally, he made it his badge of honor to play at least one modern American composer, in this case Seth Bingham in the first program proposed



Jean Langlais leaves Paris by train for Le Havre, April 11, 1952

Figure 34. (Collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

Jean and Jeannette left France for America on Good Friday, April 11, 1952, on the liner “Liberté,” scheduled to arrive in New York on the following Thursday, the 17th.

They, of course, had heavy hearts because they had to leave behind their children: Janine, 16 years old, and Claude, just 8. Throughout the crossing and for the first days after their arrival, Jeannette wrote a diary intended for their children, describing all the details of the crossing, the liner, the luxury of the cabins, the various decks, the details of the meals, and the

unfolding of the days. At the same time, her husband dictated to her his own impressions, in a sort of “diary for four hands,” very interesting and very different from hers.

This diary begins at the moment when they boarded the train at the Saint-Lazare station in Paris headed for Le Havre, the port at which they would board the liner for America.

Jeannette writes:

Left St Lazare with good weather. Comfortable trip without note other than the usual formalities with customs, police, passports, and checking train and liner tickets. Arrived at Le Havre, non-stop, at the Maritime Station. Between the construction sites, the boathouses, we caught a glimpse of the monumental silhouette of the Liberté, crowned with red chimneys; unfortunately we didn't get a view of the whole thing.... Majestic and enormous, but of striking beauty. Stairways, rooms, everything gilded, sumptuous, hallways to get lost in (it took me a long time to figure out where I was), then they took us to our cabin, number 620. Three lights, one above a pull-down table from the wall, another in the middle, the other above the washbowl. The whole thing was simple and a luxurious mix of natural wood and green—walls painted green, above the green bed. Two bunk beds but decorated with wood, with individual lights ... There were towels, soap, two bathroom glasses, a carafe. Undoubtedly, I haven't found all of the marvelous things.¹¹

These few comments make one realize that right after the war what might today be considered minimal amenities seemed like supreme luxury to the French middle class. As for Jean, he adds, in an entirely different mood:

A sad day, without mystical relief, with thoughts elsewhere. Sorry to leave. Artistic preoccupations: none. An impression of loneliness in the midst of the crowd.

But the next day, April 12, the tone changed as the liner became more and more distant from land:

Lots of sun on deck, a little less darkness in my heart. But we are already so far and we go farther so quickly that it's hard to imagine our beloved ones at home. Life on board a little more like life on land, an hour of piano practice. One has the feeling, very unaccustomed, to “have time.” But I definitely still prefer not to have time.

The 13th is Easter Sunday, and Jean writes:

Got up early. We went to the 8 am mass, said by the chaplain to the Prince of Monaco, who pronounced Latin with an American accent. He gave a very moving short sermon in French and English. In this little chapel, with this nice little American and its harmonium, there was really an incredible ambiance. Played the D Minor Toccata on the four-octave harmonium, improvised on the prose “La Fontenelle,” the “Regina Caeli,” and, for the recessional, on Handel's Theme and Variations in G Minor. The 10 o'clock mass, celebrated in the coffee lounge, the “Café de l'Atlantique,” made up for what it lacked in general atmosphere by providing a chance to hear a recording of bells. Bells in the middle of the ocean made quite an effect on those who wanted to celebrate Easter. But for me, Easter on the ocean didn't have the charm of Easter on land, the Easters with family. This time I improvised at the piano on the prose and “O Filii” combined.

Monday, April 14, Jeannette tells of a particularly hair-raising moment in the voyage:

¹¹ “Liberté-Voyage - 11 Avril 1952,” diary written by Jeannette Langlais on simple sheets, with paragraphs dictated by Jean Langlais insert; 17 pages MS, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

About 5:00 pm, the rolling and pitching increased so much that the waves broke over the deck in spite of its height. The depth was almost 20,000 feet as we are approaching the New World; it seems that the boat rises about 20 feet at times. At 9 o'clock the very violent motion calmed down, and the feeling of being shaken in a pot disappeared. There were not many people in the dining room... 3 of the 6 at our table.

And Jean, who seems not to have been bothered by this, adds:

Acclimatation in progress; two and a half hours of serious study in the "Café de l'Atlantique," preliminary harmonic sketch of an "In Paradisum" [from the Requiem Mass] that I would like to finish tomorrow. We dare nothing less than to evoke the memory of the departed. In ten weeks, at the same hour we will approach the English coast on the return route. This idea comforts me.

He continues on Wednesday, April 16:

Brought the brief "In Paradisum"¹² to the cabin last night. An uneventful day. The Martini [vermouth] drunk with the steward was wonderful. I want to note here what a great feeling the piano practice in the "Café de l'Atlantique" created. Too bad that the pitching and rolling complicate the problems. Music afloat on a quite lovely Gaveau [piano] will leave me with a great memory.

On Thursday, April 17, the liner finally arrived in New York. Jeannette describes the excitement surrounding this event with colorful imagery that reflects her artistic sensibilities:

We went back on deck. Some sky-scrapers took shape in the light mist, a vision that was both other-worldly and very beautiful. On the left, in the distance, the Statue of Liberty appeared, which—although huge—seemed small, pale green bronze, in this immense estuary. We encountered more and more ships. Many heavy and almost round tourist ferries that go from one shore to the other, joyfully greeting the transatlantic ship which responds with three even blasts in her impressive bass. At exactly 8 o'clock we arrived at the dock for the French Line after having passed numerous industrial buildings; but it took two tugboats and an hour of work to turn the huge hulk of a ship, with the high sea and the ensuing currents. Thanks to the steward, we went through the police check with the first-class passengers and disembarked with them. Miss Murtagh was there to welcome us. Taxi, then Hotel Winslow.

Jean Langlais also relates the events of this arrival:

New York arrival: splendid outwardly, but very dark internally because of the purely materialistic worries (tips, customs, taxis, etc.). First impression essentially favorable. Reunited with the Walkers, Charles and Janet, with a spontaneity so touching. I had hardly left the ship when I was informed that I was supposed to give an interview for the New York Herald Tribune [at the organ of Central Presbyterian Church]. This first test had an epilogue with the following significant interchange:

"Do you know what you are sitting on?" the journalist asked me, utterly lacking in musical culture.

"On a bench, it seems."

"Do you know what bench?" Faced with my negative response, my interlocutor continued:

"You are sitting on César Franck's very own bench, which came directly from Sainte-Clotilde."

This precious souvenir is now in fact at Central Presbyterian Church in New York.¹³

¹² This "In Paradisum" remained a sketch and was never to be committed to paper.

¹³ We could not find any confirmation for that.

Langlais wondered nervously what the actual content of the article by Thomas V. Beckley would be, the first one ever written about him in the United States in a daily as important as the *New York Herald Tribune*. It appeared on Saturday, April 19 with somewhat provocative title : “Blind, but He’s an Organ recitalist.”

The interview was illustrated with a large photograph showing Langlais seated at the four-manual console, his wife Jeannette guiding his hand to the couplers. This pose must have exasperated the organist, used to managing consoles completely alone; once again he realized that his blindness and his means of working around it were the main things that interested his interviewers.



Jean and Jeanette Langlais at the console of Central Presbyterian Church, New York, 1952

Figure 35. (photograph by Morris Warman, *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 April 1952. 22)

Under the photograph is the subhead, “Blind Paris Organist Explores Keys for Debut Here Tuesday,” and Beckley explains the composer’s childhood, his current life, and the role of his wife, who “acts as his eyes, mapping each organ beforehand. When he composes, he said, he dictates and she takes it down like a musical stenographer in musical script.”

Beckley also recounts an anecdote which seems to have made a particular impression on him:

... he takes his exercise bicycling about the country roads near Paris. He explained that he makes his way by following the sound of the wheels of a bicycle ridden ahead of him by his wife. He admitted he would not like to attempt this on Fifth Avenue, but he indicated the measure of his self-confidence when he confided that he had often taken his children along on such jaunts, riding on the handle-bars.

Beckley finally focuses on the music, giving the program of the recital (Program n°1) and adds:

Mr. Langlais was taking measure of the new and therefore elaborate musical mechanism with which he will make his New York debut Tuesday evening, preliminary to a recital tour of eleven states and Canada, his first tour of the country...

A slight man, wearing his hair flowing backward in a cut reminiscent of the composers of the eighteenth century, Mr. Langlais said after exploring the organ that it was “very poetic” and “très joli.” He added, “It is very complicated but logical.” He also said, “I shall be happy that you write that I come to America for three reasons, for playing the organ, as a French composer and for improvisation.”

Improvisation is a long point with Mr. Langlais, who will demonstrate his ability in this field Tuesday night when he will take as a theme four measures submitted by the American composer, Seth Bingham, and which he will not have heard beforehand, and expand it into a 35 minute symphony on the organ.

At the same time, we can read the last comments that Langlais dictated to his wife in his diary of the voyage:

Friday, April 18 [1952]

Great day. Easy work at the good organ for my first concert in New York. Lunch with Bingham, a charming and distinguished man who prefers my Quintette [later titled *Piece in Free Form*] to my “Nativité” (finally!).

Tuesday, April 22 [1952]

The day of the recital, dreaded as much as the pedal board, completely different from ours, which forced me to go back to practicing scales. Seth Bingham, a great American musician, himself came to the organ to play the themes that I was supposed to explore for an enthusiastic and knowledgeable audience.

The recital took place, but Langlais didn’t comment on it; however, we do have a review by the organist William A. Goldsworthy in the professional magazine *The American Organist*. It was the first review that Langlais received in the United States, and so it was obviously important:

This was the sixth and last of the current season to paid-admission audiences in Central, and it was an interesting experience hearing a young Frenchman play a modern American organ under the added handicap of total blindness.

Program:

Franck, Chorale 3

Dupré, Chemin de croix: Jesus consoles

Messiaen, Nativity: Les Anges

Tournemire, Communion for Epiphany

Bingham, Toccata on Leoni

Langlais, Suite médiévale: Prelude; Tiento

Suite française: Arabesque; Récit de Nazard

Symphony 1: Finale

There need be no mental reservation because of Mr. Langlais’ blindness; he handled the organ with more familiarity and freedom than some other recitalists who have no such limitation. He had the combons set with basic registrations and also with individual colors; as this organ has many duplicate pedal studs, it gave him the advantage of being able to make changes with his feet, which he did most artfully. Just once did he slip, and that was when a cancellation had not been made at the end of the previous number. The rapidity and aplomb with which he made the change would have shamed many. Being a wise recitalist, he had utilized several days to familiarize himself with the instrument. It was evident also he had set down in Braille his registration—we could see his fingers going over a paper to refresh his memory. The console was in the middle of the sanctuary, where he could be observed from every quarter; he was escorted to

and from the console, but as soon as his hand touched the bench he was on his own, no coaching at all, not even from the third-base line.¹⁴

These observations are a marvelous summary of the first impressions Americans had of Langlais, with its emphasis on his blindness and his remarkable ability to work around it. In fact, blindness was never a real hindrance in the career of Jean Langlais, as strange as that might seem. It was total, with no glimmer penetrating his night from earliest childhood (unlike Louis Vierne who saw a little), and he considered it “normal” and learned to live with it, like the organists André Marchal or Gaston Litaize. His extraordinary natural ingenuity meant that he knew how to put it in the background, always hating to get special attention, whether in everyday life or at the organ.

We now come to the purely musical evaluation of this debut recital, so important for the musical future of Langlais in the United States. Curiously, at least to us, it is the opposite of what most musicians would think later, when Goldsworthy writes:

Franck was technically correct, emotionally cold. The lovely middle movement, which to our younger organists furnishes opportunity for color and warmth, was given in a dry hard manner. Only in the last section was there any suggestion of warmth.

The Dupré was a playing of notes and Messiaen was offered in about the same manner—the angels were of large proportion, not too shapely. We may be a little critical of this number, having heard it played with delightful charm and nuance just recently.

The Tournemire gave us our first real color, and while the work is not too impressive, Mr. Langlais’ interpretation was.

Mr. Bingham’s *Toccata* was one of the best spots of the evening; we have rarely heard it as well performed, very spontaneous and free playing. Up to this point, the only solo stops used were hard reeds and fairly large flutes, neither of which are highly emotional.¹⁵

Now, more than six decades after this recital, this evaluation seems strange, given that Langlais’s performance and teaching career was always centered on stylistic liberty, particularly in the interpretation of the works of César Franck; all those close to the composer bore witness to this. Similarly, the comment on “Les Anges” by Messiaen is bizarre, Langlais having played the premiere of the work at La Trinité in Paris (Messiaen’s church) on February 27, 1936 after meticulous work with Messiaen himself.

Finally, the comment about Tournemire (“the work is not too impressive”) is not surprising; this composer was little known at the time, and *L’Orgue Mystique*—a work dedicated to paraphrasing Gregorian chant—undoubtedly was incomprehensible to contemporary American ears. Further, in judging the performer to be cold on that evening, Goldsworthy criticizes his almost exclusive use of the powerful reeds and wide flutes, and this is about a musician famous for the extreme refinement of his registrations. The second part of the recital, dedicated to the works of Langlais and his improvisation, seems to have been much more convincing to Goldsworthy:

¹⁴ William A. Goldsworthy, “Jean Langlais Recital, Central Presbyterian: New York, April 22, 1952,” *The American Organist* 35: 4 (April, 1952). 123–124.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The second half of the program was Mr. Langlais' own work, and here he was very much in vein, playing as freely as though improvising. "Prelude" was a bit noisy and meaningless; "Tiento" was characteristic and good, a fine idea well worked out. *Suite française* gave us a chance to hear the lovely smaller flutes and other voices in the Arabesque and showed us a lighter side of this performer than we have heard before. We felt like applauding the delightful effect.

Finale is reminiscent of all his predecessors from Widor down. We are not fond of the rapidly repeated snare-drum effect of both hands on the upper registers, with the pedals booming on a short array of notes supposed to be the basic theme. He played the number superbly, in typical French fashion, and dazzled the audience (which, as usual, was not composed of organists; again we ask, what music do organists listen to, for it is not the organ recital they frequent?).

Incidentally it was a large audience.

Extremely interesting comments coming from a professional organist who doesn't hesitate to assert his convictions and judgments. The remark about the audience ("as usual, not composed of organists") is amusing; the brief comment tagged on ("incidentally it was a large audience") gives one pause, because for Jean Langlais there is no doubt that this ancillary "detail" was of critical import! We'll allow Mr. Goldsworthy to conclude:

Mr. Langlais' use of the swell pedal was better than of most Europeans; but primarily his playing is that of the head, not too much of the emotions. It was in his improvisation he proved himself, for here was one of the best we have heard. He worked out the theme in a remarkable manner with real ideas and registrations, using little of the so-called Conservatoire Padding; he made an improvisation of dignified length but not too wordy (as most are). Mr. Bingham, who submitted the theme, must have been pleased.

The most humorous remark in this review comes in the last concluding pronouncement:

This was a very fine recital for any man to give. Yet we are not convinced that the development of great organ music will come through the modern French style.

One can see what a long road Jean Langlais had to travel in the United States to conquer audiences and organ specialists. This wasn't accomplished in April of 1952, even if one knows that in New York, critics have always had the reputation of being harsher than elsewhere. Nevertheless, it did not take the composer long to measure the enormous impact of improvisation *à la française* on American audiences, and in his journal he noted:

This type of artistic creation is of great interest to the American public, who like to be taken very seriously, and even demand it. Showboating and flashiness don't pay off across the Atlantic; also, the artist who accepts only conduct which is natural to him receives encouragement from his listeners, which is rather indispensable to maintaining the hectic and exciting life of a recitalist.

After New York, we turn to the continuation of this first North American tour. Several reviews were later sent to Langlais, and he carefully preserved them in his personal collection.

Here are the titles and extracts of the most typical ones:

"French Organist Brings Old Shoes for Recitals"

As is fitting and proper for an organist's comfort and ease regardless of the high place he fills, Jean Langlais, distinguished blind musician, known wherever organ music is

played, brought to Syracuse from his native France his “old shoes” to play a recital last night in Crouse College auditorium, Syracuse University.¹⁶

The next example deserves virtually full quotation, for it shows the raw state and immediacy of the impressions:

“Langlais’ Improvisation Stuns Audience at Columbus Debut”

Jean Langlais, organist at Ste Clotilde in Paris, is a small man—almost insignificant in appearance. He speaks French softly and economically, only occasionally repeating a word for emphasis.¹⁷ His eyes cannot be seen behind their dark glasses, nor can they see. For Jean Langlais has been blind since birth.

Once again one sees that blindness was the first thing that struck those who met Langlais. And the critic stresses it:

It would have been a masterful, musicianly feat for a person with sight to play the organ—most complicated of instruments—with such assurance, warmth and inspiration. No one would have suspected Langlais’ physical handicap, if he hadn’t been told, or suspected it from the dark glasses.¹⁸ Four of his own works on the program testified to his skill as a composer, in the contemporary French idiom, of course. But for most of the audience, the concluding improvisation was the memorable accomplishment of the evening.

Not even detailing with the first part of the program, the critic goes immediately to the works by Langlais, which, he emphasizes, testify to his gift for composition “in the contemporary French idiom.” But the improvisation was the hit of the concert:

Only five minutes before Langlais was to start his improvisation, he was dictated three themes, submitted by the audience, and completely new to him. He then developed these into a full organ symphony of four movements.

This feat represented the ultimate in musical imagination. It presented a complex structural development of these themes, an imaginative voicing of all three, plus development, ornamentation, harmonization, an integration of them into a single symphonic whole. A musical accomplishment of that magnitude must be heard to be believed.¹⁹

At Lincoln, Nebraska, the editor chose the following simple title:

“Blind Organist Will Play Here”

A small, unpretentious man will seat himself before the organ at First Congregational Church, Tuesday night, but he will not see its many keys and knobs and buttons.

He will not be looking at music while he gives his concert.

And when he has finished playing, he will not see the admiring, awesome looks upon the faces of his audience, who will have just heard the world-famous Jean Langlais, blind French organist and composer. He is in Lincoln for his twelfth in a series of 22 recitals which takes him to 11 states and Canada during his American debut.²⁰

¹⁶ *Syracuse Herald American*, May 4, 1952.

¹⁷ At this stage he spoke a very halting English, but—wanting to learn to speak it—he had brought a French-English dictionary in Braille with him, which he used at night on the trains both as a pillow, because it was so huge, and as textbook for his accelerated apprenticeship in the language.

¹⁸ The total darkness of his world was illustrated in daily life at home: after working in his organ studio he would often ask, when leaving the room, if the light was on or not.

¹⁹ *The Columbus Citizen*, May 8, 1952; the recital was dedicated to the memory of Bernard La Berge.

²⁰ Beth Randel Jussel, *Lincoln Star*, May 13, 1952.

With the same reference to blindness in Denton, Texas (at North Texas State College, May 19, 1952), Mary Ann Jennings wrote under the title, **“MUSIC IS SAME: French Organist Finds Blindness No Obstacle.”**

The appearance of Langlais in Washington, DC, May 28, 1952, was covered by three dailies, including the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Times-Herald*, and in the American capital the artist’s blindness was largely passed over in silence; above all else, the press tried to discern his musical personality as he played Program 1 (but replacing Franck’s Troisième Choral with Bach’s Prelude in E-flat Major, undoubtedly at the request of the organist of the cathedral).

These articles concur in using terms like “individualist,” “impressionist,” and “master of acoustic subtleties” to describe Langlais:

“Organ Recital Here Reveals Langlais as Individualist”

The fame of Jean Langlais as a composer preceded him as a recitalist. Before he played a note, a glance on the program here in Washington Cathedral was sufficient to introduce him as an individualist. He did not follow a standardized pattern.... Next came a composition by his colleague, Messiaen, “The Angels,” taken from “La Nativité du Seigneur.” Suggesting numberless fluttering wings of angelic hosts joyfully proclaiming the event, the piece showed the organist’s remarkable clarity of execution and fluency of delivery. Tournemire, one of M. Langlais predecessors at Ste. Clotilde and a disciple of César Franck, was represented by “Communion for the Feast of the Epiphany.” Its thoughtful nature brought out the best points of the artist’s playing.²¹

“Jean Langlais charming in organ recital”

... His playing was entirely French in spirit. But it was modern. The bravura of an elder generation was omitted. ... Langlais, both as a composer and as a performer, is an impressionist. The organ lends itself to this typically Gallic idiom. It can produce the softest sonorities and can invest them with a sense of mystery. The capacities of the instrument for this type of expression surpass those of the orchestra. Langlais is a master of these acoustic subtleties. He creates illusion with clouds and veils of sound that can stimulate the listener’s imagination to a fascinating degree.²²

“French Organist Gives Brilliant Recital at Cathedral”

A single grand gesture to the art of Bach opened the program with the towering *E Flat Prelude* of the *Clavierübung*. It was a reading of absolute precision, superb drive, and the finest musicianship. Such a performance of this one piece is enough to establish the reputation of an organist, both as executant and artist ...

From then on, it was music by Langlais. It is music directly descended in spirit as in fact from his great forerunner, Franck, through the sweetness of Pierné, the mystic harmonies of Tournemire, to the extension of modern French dissonances that are by now familiar in our ears.²³

And finally, the announcement of the last recital played by Jean Langlais, at Kenmore Presbyterian Church outside Buffalo, New York, May 31, 1952:

« Improvised Symphony on Program, Blind French Organist Will Play Here”

... Just before his recital, a local organist will give him four themes entirely new to him. On these themes, Langlais will improvise a 35-minute symphony. ...

²¹ Elena de Sayn, *The Evening Star*, May 29 1952.

²² *Washington Times-Herald*, May 29, 1952.

²³ Paul Hume, *The Washington Post*, May 29, 1952.

Langlais' hearing is remarkable, not only for music, but for all that he detects in this country, new to him. Walking with his wife on Park Avenue in New York City, this musician was aware, from the sound of traffic, of the spaciousness of that thoroughfare. In Omaha, Neb., he delighted in the restful quiet of the city.

In Texas, his ear caught the Spanish influence of the speech. Such is the accuracy of his ear that in France he rides a bicycle, guided only by turning wheels of his wife's bicycle ahead of him. He is delighted with the sincere cordiality he hears in the voices of the Americans who have welcomed him.

The blind organist has only a slight knowledge of spoken English and his wife speaks only French. Buffalo's Good Listener interviewed the couple in French at the Hotel Buffalo.

"American women are chic, but theirs is a different sort of chic from Parisians," the organist's wife said.²⁴

Thus, a varied American press, both regional (Ohio, Texas, Nebraska) and national (Washington and New York), paints a portrait of this blind French organist, composer, and improviser: he is surprising when he conquers his blindness, stunning when he improvises, and well anchored in impressionism and French modernity.

If one considers the distance between the first, somewhat mixed, review, in *The American Organist* of April 1952, and the analytical and enthusiastic ones of May 29 in the *Times-Herald* and *The Washington Post* (by no less a critic than Paul Hume, himself trained as an organist), one can conclude that Jean Langlais—in just a few weeks—succeeded in communicating his style, individuality, and personality in his first transatlantic tour. The door was opened for a second tour. Here, as published in his *Journal*, are the conclusions that he drew from this first American experience:

The French artist who plays the organ in the United States has to submit to many obligations beyond his recitals: along the way he has to give private lessons, teach classes in the universities, speak on the radio, and especially accept numerous invitations because American hospitality is touching. Here's one example among many others: The day before embarking for my return to France, there was a performance of my Quintet for string quartet and organ, at the New York Museum of Arts and Letters (in the process of being published by Gray [under the title *Piece in Free Form*]). "We're counting on your presence," said the organizer of the evening. "Impossible," I responded, "I play the day before in Toronto, and my train won't arrive in time for the concert." "Well, take a plane with your wife as our guests. A more than generous invitation, which I refused!"²⁵

Aside from this anecdotal style, Langlais gives more technical impressions in the same magazine:

American organs are, in general, very different from ours. Always supplied with adjustable combination actions, they allow the artist—who is expected to be alone on the bench during recitals—to register his whole program in advance, and at the same time they allow one to play with a minimum of motion other than those required by organ technique itself; I'm sure that the huge Wanamaker organ in Philadelphia, with its 451 ranks, is easier to manage than that at Sainte-Clotilde. It is difficult to compare the organs in the United States—the majority of which have four keyboards at least, with 61 notes, pedal boards of 32 notes, often more than 100 ranks—with our French instruments. Although some of them, such as that in the Washington Cathedral (126

²⁴ H. Katherine Smith, *Buffalo Courier Express*, May 31, 1952.

²⁵ Jean Langlais. "Mon Voyage aux Etats-Unis." *Musique et Liturgie* (Nov-Dec. 1952): 11.

ranks) are reminiscent of huge Cavaillé-Colls, others—such as that at Duke University (115 ranks) or the University of Texas at Austin (102 ranks)—reflect a very modern aesthetic and include sonorities of intense poetry while also being furnished with an incredible variety of technical possibilities.

The German school has some adherents over there; it is possible to find instruments abundant in mixtures, fairly impoverished in foundations, and with reeds so idiosyncratic that it is difficult to mix them in ensembles. These instruments don't lack in refinement in their voicing, but limit the choices for the performer; it is very difficult to play anything other than old music on them.

It is interesting here to read the analysis, at the beginning of the 1950s, of an organist certainly trained in the French symphonic school by Marcel Dupré, but equally open to wider horizons because of his teachers André Marchal and Charles Tournemire. Although admiring the technical aids offered by large American instruments, like large adjustable combination actions—particularly useful for a blind recitalist—he seems nevertheless not insensitive to the refinement of “old” instruments, while adding that they call for a specific repertory. In this connection he adds:

It is fair to assert that French influence is intense in the United States and that modern music is much more admired and played there than on its original soil. American publishers know it and no longer hesitate in directly contacting the representatives of our contemporary school. I had little sense over there of the tendency towards “the old no matter what,” whether in organ building or in musical literature. I don't have the impression that the Americans will allow themselves to be easily subjugated to these Baroque-style organs on which it is becoming difficult to play even the works of Bach. On the contrary, they have understood that the future can never be resolved by a pure and simple return to the ideas of the past. They have many major organ builders who know very well how to keep calm and construct synthetic instruments on which Grigny, Bach, Franck, and Messiaen—along with Tournemire and Dupré—keep their full value and the characteristics of their individual genius.²⁶

With this clear-cut position, Langlais pronounces himself in favor of an organ which he calls “synthetic” and calls for a large instrument on the American model; he wants electric action to be able to benefit from all the conveniences possible, and which could unite in one instrument many foundations in the Cavaillé-Coll style, both small soloistic reeds and powerful ones, mixtures, and mutations.

But isn't this in fact the large instruments that organ builders— after so many fruitless arguments— are building more and more at the beginning of the 21th century?

According to Langlais in 1952, the ideal is neither the “neo-Baroque” nor “neo-Classic,” but a melding of the French symphonic organ (Cavaillé-Coll) with all the elements of the French Classic organs and the German Baroque ones.

In effect, to summarize, a Clicquot/Silbermann/Cavaillé-Coll organ. This is in contrast to the France of the 1950s, when organ building was satisfied with setting up an opposition— usually angrily, faction against faction—between the Baroque and the Symphonic.

We should also note in this conclusion, the homage to American music publishers. Langlais well understood that their dynamism was a help to young composers, and starting

²⁶ Ibid.

with the post-war period he responded positively to all their requests. Thus in 1949, he had already signed a contract with the H.W.Gray firm in New York for a work that he had composed in 1946, titled in French *Fête*, a celebration of peace after the Second World War.

A brilliant and technically demanding work in rondo form, *Fête* incorporates jazzy rhythms that, for Langlais, symbolized his overwhelming joy in finally seeing Paris liberated from the yoke of the Nazis, and his gratitude to the American people for having come to the rescue of Europe. He was never to forget that. However, this “jazzy” style is completely surprising coming from a composer who avowed for his whole life, as did his friend Messiaen, an incomprehension of—and even a certain hostility towards—jazz.

This resolutely secular work appeared in 1949 in the “Saint Cecilia Series” of organ compositions, in which Gray also published the music of Dupré, Sowerby, Bingham and Peeters, among many others. Very popular in the United States and Great Britain, *Fête* remained almost ignored in France. H.W.Gray was not the only American publisher of Langlais’s music, however : far from it, and it is important to underline the important role played by someone who would become one of his most faithful friends and supporters, Theodore Marier.

Here is the recollection by this fine musician, a committed Catholic immersed in liturgy:

I met Jean Langlais for the first time, with his wife Jeannette, in 1952 in the United States. But I had already exchanged letters with him without knowing him personally. Thus it was that I wrote to him on February 7, 1950:²⁷

My Dear M. Langlais:

In June of this year, the American Guild of Organists is planning to hold a National Convention here in Boston. I have been invited to play a short organ program at one of the meetings and selected among other things your composition called “Incantation pour un Jour Saint” which appeared in the Easter issue of *Musique et Liturgie* in France. It is customary in our programs to list the year of birth of the composers so that our listeners will be aware of the era in which the particular composer wrote or, in your case, is writing. We have been unable to find this information about you in the dictionaries which are available here. Would you supply us with this information? The Director of the Music Department of the Boston Public Library asked me to request that you give us the name of a French dictionary of music and musicians wherein your name is listed. He would like to purchase this book, if one such exists, for the reference shelf of the Library. Any information that you can give us in these matters will be greatly appreciated.

With cordial good wishes, Sincerely yours
Theodore Marier

Nearly 40 years later, this text still makes me smile...

At the time, I was working as editor for McLaughlin & Reilly, publishers of church and school music, and I was charged with searching out new sacred works, whether choral or organ works, by Catholic composers. Thus in 1950 I had written to Marcel Dupré and to Jean Langlais to ask if they wished to compose organ works for the mass. Shortly, Dupré responded that he didn’t have the time, and he proposed giving this commission to Jeanne Demessieux, who wrote *Twelve Chorale Preludes on Gregorian*

²⁷ Letter in collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

Themes. Then, changing his mind, Dupré soon sent me the manuscript for *Eight Short Preludes on Gregorian Themes*.

All of these pieces were immediately published by McLaughlin & Reilly. As for Jean Langlais, he agreed to my request right away and composed, between May 10 and September 3, 1950, *Four Postludes for Organ*, each of them dedicated to an American organist whom he had known before coming to the United States: Walter Blodgett, curator of the Cleveland Museum of Art; Hugh Giles, organist of Central Presbyterian in New York, the site of Langlais's American debut in 1952; Charles Dodsley Walker, a long-time friend he met after the Second World War when he was organist at the American Cathedral in Paris; and lastly "for my dear friend Maurice John Forshaw." The contract for the edition was signed on November 21, 1951.

At that time I had still not met him; that didn't happen until his first tour in 1952. Being then Dean of the Boston chapter of the American Guild of Organists (AGO), I had invited him to play a concert at the Church of the Advent in Boston, and I accompanied him and his wife, Jeannette, to the hotel, to the church, and to a restaurant. We all got along famously. It's true that being originally French-Canadian, I spoke fluent French, and that was a real comfort for the Langlais couple, who didn't know our language.

Since Jean had agreed to write *Four Postludes* for us, I asked him, when he came to play in Boston, to compose this time for liturgical choir, and following his departure from the United States after his last concert, he wrote—in four days (June 5-8, 1952)—while crossing on the liner "Ile-de-France," his *Mass in Ancient Style* for four mixed voices and organ *ad libitum*, in Latin, which he was so kind as to dedicate to me "to Theodore Marier" in the first edition, and then "to my friend, Theodore Marier" in the reprinting of the score by the French publisher Combre in 1985 after the work was out-of-print at McLaughlin & Reilly, which had gone out of business.

The Cecilia Society of Boston gave, under my direction, its first performance in 1952 at Saint Paul's Roman Catholic Church in Boston where I was the director of music.

Later, in February 1957, we recorded it in Gasson Hall, Boston College, on the Cambridge Records label (CRS-1407X), with a smaller choral ensemble of men and boys, and, to heighten the effect which the composer wished to create and to follow a common practice of the sixteenth century, the choral lines were doubled on string instruments for the recording.

Of course this mass, which didn't include a Credo, was immediately published by McLaughlin & Reilly in 1952.²⁸

In fact, according to Jean Langlais himself, the dates indicated here for the composition of the work, from the 5th to the 8th of June 1952, correspond more to the polishing of it rather than to the composition itself, which had been latent for several months.

In any case, after his first large-scale mass, the *Messe Solennelle*, Langlais wanted to renew his style, as he always did during his compositional career, following the enigmatic principle of his teacher Paul Dukas: "A composer must belie his reputation," that is, never stop renewing.

Taking the opposite approach than his *Messe Solennelle*, in which two organs are needed for a grand stereophonic effect, he conceived his *Mass in Ancient Style* as a purified work in which the organ only doubled the voices; hence his sub-title, "For Four Mixed Voices and Organ *ad libitum*," with the assumption that an experienced choir could do without the organ. Further, in contrast to the modal and chromatic splendors of the *Messe Solennelle*, the *Mass*

²⁸ Remembrances recorded on May 31, 1987, in the composer's Parisian apartment, rue Duroc. The *Mass in Ancient Style* was numbered 1874 in the original McLaughlin & Reilly edition, and it received the imprimatur of Richard J. Cushing, D.D., then Archbishop of Boston (later Cardinal).

in Ancient Style has an austere refinement, a diatonic modality, and a strict counterpoint which was very clearly seen by the composer Seth Bingham in his analysis of the work. Detailing the four masses by Langlais that he wanted to discuss (*Messe Solennelle*, *Missa in simplicitate*, *Mass in Ancient Style*, and *Missa "Salve Regina"*), this musician put forth a comparison:

Each Mass is so different from the others that one might be tempted to ascribe them to four separate composers, were it not for the fact that Langlais, like Bach, Mozart and Vaughan Williams—to name but three illustrious examples—had the rare faculty of synthesizing certain characteristics of other composers or epochs in a musical idiom undeniably his own.²⁹

Then, focusing more specifically on the *Mass in Ancient Style*, whose title specifically evokes an historical orientation, Bingham writes:

To the publisher's request for a Mass that might readily fall within the technical grasp of parish choirs, in a more diatonic style than *Messe Solennelle*, Langlais has responded with a work fully meeting these requirements. BUT—and it is a large one—unlike the “short and easy” futilities that clutter advertising space and sales counters, *Mass in Ancient Style* is fresh, original, and communicative... Our music publications, workshops, lectures, forums and panels abound in discussions of what constitutes a proper aesthetic in church music for this or that sect or organization. Well, Jean Langlais does not discuss or define it. He creates it.

In the introductory notes on the composer and the music in the edition printed by McLaughlin & Reilly, Theodore Marier provides the following details:

THE COMPOSER

... Ste. Clotilde Church in Paris, where Langlais is organist, was made famous by such of his predecessors as César Franck, Gabriel Pierné and Charles Tournemire. It was the wish of the latter that Langlais succeed him to this important position in Paris. In addition to his duties at Ste. Clotilde, he is on the faculty of the Institut des Jeunes Aveugles, where he teaches his fellow blind.

In 1952 therefore, Langlais didn't hesitate to affirm loud and clear to the United States, through the publication of one of his works, that he was *the* direct successor to Tournemire, according to the wishes of the latter, thus publicly denying any validity to the tenure of Joseph-Ermend Bonnal at Ste. Clotilde between 1942 and 1944.

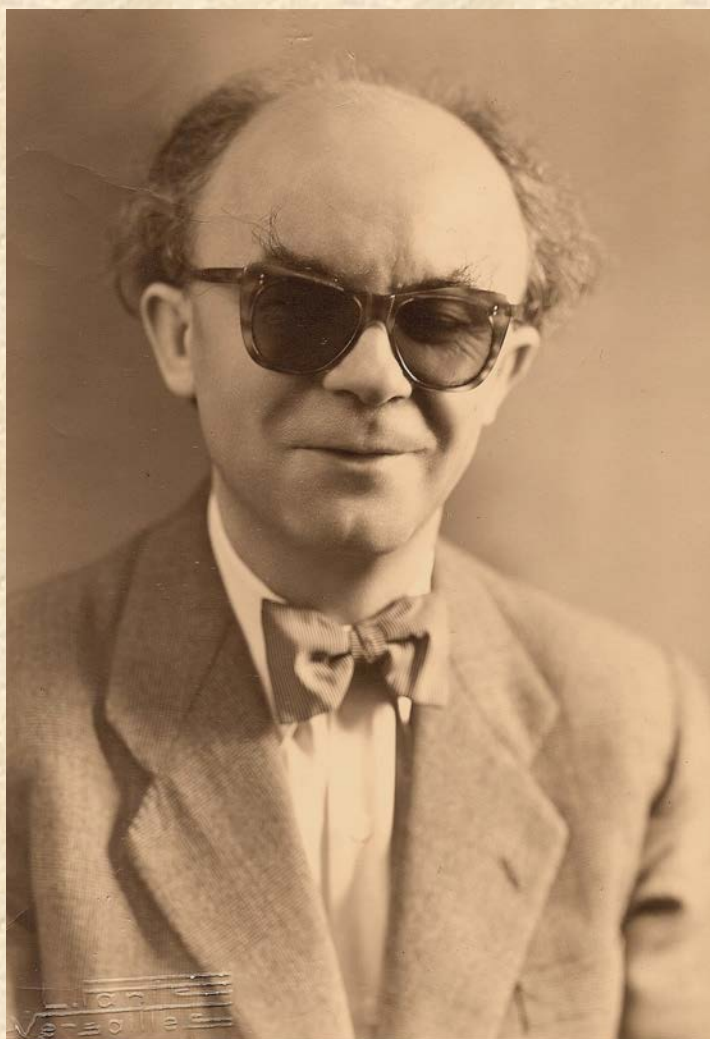
Turning to the *Mass in Ancient Style* itself, Marier, a specialist in Gregorian chant, continues:

THE MUSIC OF THE MASS

The *Mass in Ancient Syle* draws consciously on the compositional ideals of the Renaissance. In the fabric of the music are brief chant quotations, as for example in the alto line of the Kyrie. There are constantly changing voice groups, canons between various voices, and a vocabulary of rhythmic formations whose narrow range can be encompassed between the whole note and the eighth note. Modal diatonic scale lines abound in all voices. In short Langlais has spun a polyphonic web that might have come from the loom of a Lassus or a Palestrina. The similarity is only superficial, however, for there is much of the 20th century also to be found in this music. One might say that Langlais in this composition has captured the spirit of Renaissance polyphony as heard through the inner ear of a composer of our day.

²⁹ Seth Bingham. “The Choral Masses of Jean Langlais.” *Caecilia* 86.2 (Summer 1959). 76–77.

With this *Mass in Ancient Style*—the third in a series of vocal masses, following the *Messe d'Escalquens* (1935) and the *Messe Solennelle* (1949)—Jean Langlais drew his first American concert tour to a close. Alternately recitalist, improviser, and proponent of his own works, he showed that musical creation was his foremost priority no matter where he found himself, even in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.



Jean Langlais, first American tour, 1952
Figure 36. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

