CHAPTER 9

The Upheavals of the Sixties

Jean Langlais's mature years should have unfolded smoothly as his fame increased, but it was not to be. A major upheaval would rock the Roman Catholic Church, a budding ecumenical movement would gain momentum, and the world of French organists would split along fault lines between proponents of Baroque, Romantic, and contemporary music.

Jean Langlais suddenly found himself doing battle on multiple fronts, under attack from the liturgical consequences of Vatican II on the one hand, and confronting new ideas from younger colleagues on the other. In spite of the resulting tumult, he would continue to advance his career as a brilliant recitalist and teacher, attracting a growing number of foreign organ students along the way.

The Second Vatican Council: Jean Langlais confronts the evolution of the Roman Catholic liturgy

We arrive at what proved to be one of the saddest moments in the life of Jean Langlais. For some time he had been considered a specialist of the highest order in the domain of Roman Catholic sacred music, most notably since 1954-1955 and the success of his *Missa Salve Regina.* The Second Vatican Council, particularly as interpreted by certain French liturgists, now stood poised to completely disrupt the happy order of his life as a composer. His six choral masses in Latin, a *Passion*, and numerous motets and cantatas notwithstanding, Langlais initially reacted with enthusiasm to the Church's new directives concerning religious music, composing many simple works in French that were directly accessible to the faithful. These efforts were broadly appreciated during the 1950s.

Of a recording of his *Dieu nous avons vu ta gloire* made at Strasbourg Cathedral during the *Congrès de Pastorale Liturgique* in July 1957, Bernard B. wrote:[1]

> 3,000 conference attendees singing with all their hearts, two organs, silver trumpets, surely that is a grand demonstration of good will on the part of the people… Yet the star of this recording is not only the nave of Strasbourg Cathedral, but the anonymous presence of the *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique*, whose task these past ten years has been to raise the artistic and spiritual level of religious songs in the vernacular. This

[1]Bernard B., *Bible et Liturgie, vigile du 7ème Dimanche après la Pentecôte,* in *Disques*, February 1959.

> recording, made during a liturgical ceremony between July 25 and 28, is a step along the way… In addition to Père Gélineau and abbé Julien,[2] who have made a name for themselves in this genre, there is Jean Langlais. One can easily believe, not without regret, that he is perhaps the only serious composer addressing this particular problem. Popular song, so hackneyed and banal, should strive for nobility so that the people may "pray upon beauty."

Jean Langlais seemed poised at the time to become an important proponent of the movement to renew liturgical music that arose after Vatican II. Had he not written, among other songs, the luminous "Gloire à toi Marie" on a text by Louis Arragon and Bernard Geoffroy that remains in the repertory of parish choirs in France to this day?

At the beginning of the 1960s Langlais continued to demonstrate his willingness to adapt to writing in the vernacular. His easy-to-remember melodies, simply harmonized, on any text -- be it Latin, English, or French -- bore witness to a true desire to participate in liturgical reform. Well before the recommendations of Vatican II he put himself voluntarily at the musical level of ordinary parishioners. Let us examine the list of his sacred vocal works between 1960 and 1962, a period of intense activity:

> **1954-1960:** *Nouveaux Chants pour la messe en français* (in French, solo voice and organ): Kyrie – Gloria – Sanctus - Agnus Dei, sequel to *Chants pour la messe en français* for solo voice and organ composed in1954, united under the title *Messe brève* in 1960.
> **1960:** *Motet pour un temps de pénitence* (in Latin, SATB a cappella): Introit – Tract – Offertory - Communion for Ash Wednesday
> **1961:** *Ave Maris stella* (in Latin, 3 equal voices)
> **1961:** *O God, our Father* (in English, SATB and organ)
> **1961:** *Psaume 150, "Praise the Lord"* (in English, SATB and organ)
> **1962:** *Offertoire pour l'Office de Sainte Claire* (in Latin, 3 equal voices)
> **1962:** *Missa "Dona nobis pacem"* (in English, solo voice and organ)

At the appearance in 1961 of a recording entitled: *Jean Langlais, Cantiques et Messe Brève*, various commentators noted with enthusiasm the conscious simplicity of this style of composition:[3]

> If the Gregorian atmosphere is, in my humble opinion, the only one appropriate to the Catholic Church, I admit that it is preferable to sing the mass in French rather than to mumble it in Latin as is so often the case, unfortunately. Not every church can be Solesmes. One bows before the successful enterprise of Jean Langlais. His *Messe brève* in French, in unison, returns us to Ambrosian times, when the deacon sang a verset and the faithful responded. The simple lines of his melodies accord very well with the sense of the liturgy, their modal atmosphere enhancing the mystery of the Sacrifice. As for the sacred songs, they call upon carefully chosen poetic texts inspired by the Psalms or feast days in the liturgy.

And elsewhere:[4]

> I will allow myself to say that the *Messe brève* of Jean Langlais is disconcerting to certain admirers of sacred music. The more I hear it (and the anthology of songs that

[2] Joseph Gélineau (1920-2008) was a French Catholic Jesuit priest and composer of modern Christian liturgical music. Father David Julien (1914-2013) conducted the congregational part in the 1955 recording of Langlais's *Missa Salve Regina.* The *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique* was originally a private organization, only becoming official after the Vatican Council.
[3] Suzanne Demarquez, *Disques,* n° 120, 1960.
[4] Pierre Hiegel, *Discographie Française,* n° 87, 1960.

> accompanies it) the more striking it becomes, for the simplicity of its means. Obviously we are far from the grand polyphonic style here in what can only be an act of humble faith. What sincere fervor! What modesty in the melodic line! What true gravity as well!

And finally:[5]

> "In Simplicitate" could well serve as the motto of the composer while also describing the mood of the present *Messe*, which is not a true mass but rather a series of French prayers on the five movements of the mass. Jean Langlais has long been compelled by the discipline of Solesmes, but Gregorian chant depends upon Latin for its foundation. So directly, so clearly does this *Messe brève* derive from plainchant that it is not diminished by the French, and the French is so good that one imagines to know it already. This applies to all five sections, but especially to the first and last of them. The melody of the Kyrie is so natural, and the couplets of the Agnus Dei unite contrition with prayer.
> If I could exorcise for all time the bleating conventions that weigh so heavily upon the word "song" I would use these seven *Cantiques* by Jean Langlais to do so. Listen to his "Au Paradis," so subtly evocative of the Gregorian "In paradisum." One can easily imagine his "Gloire à toi Marie" being sung in some Breton procession as a sea breeze rustles its banners. Is this folklore? Not at all, but it could become so.

The composer frequently explained his taste for simple popular melodies, confiding in the journalist Albert Malary:[6]

> Songs are works that are particularly dear to my heart. It is not easy to write popular religious songs without sacrificing quality. The composer of sacred music has in effect to give the faithful a melody that is accessible yet worthy of the holy place for which it is destined and appropriate for its mission of prayer. I only wish to write for texts that deserve music, of an indisputable poetic quality and authentic religious sense.

It was over the exact nature of sacred song that serious differences began to arise between Jean Langlais and the officials responsible for French Catholic liturgy. In an interview in *L'Est Républicain* the composer did not disguise his opinion:[7]

> The Church, it is said, should not deny its traditions.
> The goal of those who are currently writing religious songs is good, but the quality of the music is mediocre.

In a long letter to Father Joseph Gélineau he expanded upon his beliefs with vehemence:[8]

> Paris, January 12, 1963
> Across the centuries of our history it should be obvious that the Church has elevated the arts to a very high level. For some years now, alas, the opposite has been occurring. The causes of these regrettable errors are numerous and obvious. The recent decision regarding what may be sung at marriages and funerals, unless it is improved, risks putting an end to sacred (musical) art. Pius X, one of the most artistic popes in history, was the author of the following admirable thought: "pray upon beauty."
> What has one made of this papal desire? Personally, and I take full responsibility for my opinions, I don't hesitate to incriminate a large number of clergy whose artistic formation is far from assured in the majority of seminaries. A man can be an excellent priest and not have a sense of Art.

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[5] José Bruyr, *Jean Langlais, Messe brève, Cantiques,* in *Disques,* n° 120, 1960
[6] Albert Malary, *Notre-Dame dans la musique, Jean Langlais,* in *La Médaille miraculeuse,* 1960. 9.
[7] Jean Langlais, *Interview,* in *L'Est Républicain,* Besançon, November 11, 1961.
[8] Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

> One too often forgets that artists who consecrate their lives to serve the liturgy – and thus the Church – undergo a very long period of study. For several years now these true composers of sacred music are being replaced by persons of good will who are the only ones to believe in their talent…The most surprising aspect of this sad evolution is that no one seems to take into account the fact that a church service addresses God before all else and above all else, for whom nothing is beautiful enough. Superb cathedrals have been built in his honor, his ministers are magnificently arrayed as they exercise their priestly duties, and prayer has been (I use the past tense advisedly) transcended by music. The Church was a place in which one was accustomed to enter with respect, with emotion, in order to reflect at will. The big word "communicator" is now the only one present-day clergy use when planning their religious activities, denying every Christian the freedom of his own mysticism.
> There is no denying a malaise among Christian people. Gregorian chant, "that eternal child of Art," has its enemies.
> A priest actually told me that he was unable to celebrate mass when there was plainchant because that required him to wait…
> May the day return when Sacred Art manifests itself freely in our churches, for the good of the faithful and for the glory of God.

This bitter letter is dated January 12, 1963. Vatican II was convened by Pope John XXIII on October 11, 1962. Interrupted by his death, it was completed by his successor, Paul VI, who approved its constitution, *De Sacra Liturgia,* on December 4, 1963. Here are the principal passages concerning music:

> Art. 25. The liturgical books are to be revised as soon as possible; experts are to be employed on the task, and bishops are to be consulted, from various parts of the world.
>
> Art. 36. 1. Particular law remaining in force, the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites.
>
> Art. 54. A suitable place may be allotted to the mother tongue. Nevertheless steps should be taken so that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them.[9]
>
> Art. 114. The treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care. Choirs must be diligently promoted.
>
> Art. 115. Great importance is to be attached to the teaching and practice of music in seminaries.
>
> Art. 116. The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as especially suited to the Roman liturgy: therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services. Other kinds of sacred music, especially polyphony, are by no means excluded from liturgical celebrations, so long as they accord with the spirit of the liturgical action.
>
> Art. 120. In the Latin Church the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, for it is the traditional musical instrument which adds a wonderful splendor to the Church's ceremonies and powerfully lifts up man's mind to God and to higher things. Other instruments also may be admitted for use in divine worship… on condition that the instruments are suitable, or can be made suitable, for sacred use, accord with the dignity of the temple, and truly contribute to the edification of the faithful.

All of this seemed quite eloquent and conformed exactly to the ideas of Jean Langlais.

[9] The subtle differences between "may be" and "should be" are commented upon later by Jacques Chailley in *La musique sacrée devant le schisme* in *Le Figaro*, July 15, 1988.

Unfortunately, as Jacques Chailley emphasized:[10]

> One can only be surprised at the strange confusion that has for so long promulgated a misunderstanding of Vatican II as faithfulness to its recommendations.

Those in charge of implementing Vatican II's decisions on sacred music behaved as if the opposite had been prescribed, making the rule the exception and vice-versa. The pairing of Gregorian chant in Latin with the organ, recognized by the Council as the natural and inalienable heritage of the Church, soon found itself in the following situation:

> 1) disappearance of Gregorian chant from the majority of masses, replaced (even in the Mass Ordinary) by songs in the vernacular, most often composed by amateur musicians, and 2) reduction of the role of the organ and the introduction of instruments such as flute and guitar, purveying popular music and spreading as quickly as a virus.

Nevertheless, as Jean Langlais was in agreement with the ideas set forth in *De Sacra Liturgia* itself, he accepted to serve on a committee of experts appointed on May 26, 1964 by the *Commission Episcopale Française de Liturgie*. The committee consisted of 22 members, of whom 10 were drawn from the laity: Marie-Madeleine Duruflé, Jean Bonfils, Jacques Chailley, Maurice Duruflé, Jean Langlais, Gaston Litaize, Auguste Le Guennant, Manuel Rosenthal, Edouard Souberbielle and Romuald Vandelle. The 12 clerics included Dom Jean Claire, Lucien Deiss, and Joseph Gelineau, all placed under the presidency of the bishop of Pamiers, Maurice-Mathieu Rigaud.

The following observations come from a voluminous file Jean Langais kept entitled "Comité d'experts – Liturgie:"

> The first meeting of the committee took place on November 24, 1964. Conflict began brewing as early as the following day. Without consulting the laity, the clergy of the Comité de Musique Sacrée formed a "sous-commission des récitatifs français" (sub-commission of French recitative). After only three hours of work they submitted a proposal for two forms of chant for the prayers (one for ordinary time, one for feast days) and a formula for the responses of the congregation. Following their approval by the *Commission Episcopale Française de Liturgie* they were submitted for the first time to the lay experts.

This method of conducting business, cavalier to say the least, greatly displeased the lay members, who expressed their feelings in a letter to Bishop Rigaud. A second meeting of the full committee of experts was called behind closed doors on March 29, 1965. On the agenda was a study of the means by which Gregorian chant could be maintained in the celebration of mass. On this occasion, Dom Jean Claire, a monk at the abbey of Solesmes (succeeding Dom Gajard as choirmaster there in 1971) expressed concern to Bishop Rigaud in a long letter from which we draw the most characteristic passages:[11]

> It seems to me, Monsignor, that the first and the most effective means of maintaining Gregorian chant in the mass would be to halt the campaigns against it and against the use of Latin that are being waged in the Catholic press… When I open a copy of *Etudes* for March 1965 I find the following on p. 421 under the signature of a certain Father Léonard: "We should suppress the Kyrie, a useless duplication of the prayers of the

[10] Ibid. Jacques Chailley (1910-1999), French musicologist, teacher and composer, founder and director of the Department of Music and Musicology at the Sorbonne in Paris. Director of the Schola Cantorum in Paris (1962-1981), he was the one who appointed Jean Langlais at the organ class after Jean-Jacques Grunenwald.
[11] Copy in collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

> faithful, the Gloria, a foreign body in the Mass, and lie in wait for the Credo, being content for the moment in wishing to transfer it to another place."

Annibale Bugnini, under-secretary of the *Congrégation des Rites* at the Vatican, summarized it perfectly in a memorandum of February 15, 1965[12]:

> Where are you going, o liturgy? Or rather, where are our liturgists and pastoral leaders dragging you?
> One must resist the temptation of experience with courage and non-conformity. This is certainly a temptation from the clever, not an inspiration from on high.

Reading these texts one comes away with a sense of just how profoundly troubled were these minds at the very heart of the Church, divided by circumstances into two camps of diametrically opposed ideas.

During the committee's meeting on March 29, 1965, Jean Langlais took part in the discussion and made a remark concerning the "visas" that the commission was requiring for the publication of new works in French, emphasizing that this somewhat tyrannical behavior demeaned professional musicians. In a directive of May 6, 1964, the commission had stipulated that it must approve all musical compositions on liturgical texts in advance. This would prove to be the last meeting of the committee, for relations between opposing sides were rapidly deteriorating. In a letter dated April 9, 1966, Jean Langlais wrote to abbé Jacques Cellier, director of the *Centre National de Pastorale Liturgique*:[13]

> Dear Monsieur l'Abbé,
> I have just been made aware of the documents you sent me.
> I would like to know who selected the texts for the preface and the Lord's Prayer. What does Monsignor Rigaud mean when he states, "we will permit the free creation of the Ordinary in French, strictly controlled at all times by the diocesan regional commissions for sacred music"?
> I don't see how strictly controlled freedom remains freedom.
> In order to show you how totally I disapprove of this politic that consigns sacred art to priests unsuited for it, and who in consequence show a supreme disregard for true composers, I will not offer you any commentary on the musical texts of which I have just become aware. I am a self-declared enemy of militaristic pettiness in the arts.
> I hereby disassociate myself from the present maneuvers of the Church to impose blind obedience as its base of operation.
> Three American publishers have recently commissioned English masses from me.[14] I was not aware they needed to be strictly controlled. As for me, I write freely, I publish my works freely, and I do not submit my work to the untalented censors upon whom you rely.

The composer grew even more exasperated when he submitted a French setting of the Lord's Prayer to the *Centre National de Pastorale Litugique,* one he hoped to see published under his name. Abbé Cellier responded:[15]

> The French episcopate has declared that all melodies sung by the ministers shall be anonymous. Thus, settings of the Lord's Prayer published under composers' names cannot subsequently be used in the liturgy.

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] *Missa Dona nobis pacem,* H.W. Gray, 1965; *Mass God have mercy,* McLaughlin, 1965; *Mass On earth peace*, Benziger, 1966.
[15] Letter in collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

Bishop Rigaud attempted to appease Jean Langlais in a letter of April 20, 1966, in which he explained:[16]

> Your difficulties with the CNPL stem from the fact that the *Commission Episcopale Française de Liturgie* considers the chant for the Lord's Prayer in French susceptible to the same rules that govern the singing of prayers, readings, and prefaces; that is to say, absolutely anonymous and subject to the exclusive control of the commission in consultation with experts. Once two or more melodies for the Lord's Prayer are approved, musicians can begin to publish freely and openly under their own names, but these melodies will never be approved for the liturgical canon. If you wish to publish the Lord's Prayer that you have composed you must wait for the publication of the official melodies, which will not be soon. Or you can go ahead and publish it, but your work, not being anonymous, cannot be retained by the commission. But (and why not?) perhaps it will be your melody, Monsieur Langlais, that will be chosen by the experts. Whatever the case, anonymous will be the rule, obviously.

The result of this polemic was that Jean Langlais tossed his French Lord's Prayer into a box from which it would never emerge. An irony of fate attending these protestations about anonymity would manifest itself later on, when the most popular Lord's Prayer in French Catholic churches proved to be a setting by Rimsky-Korsakov, commonly known as "Rimsky's Notre Père"!

Langlais was invited to a meeting of the *Commission Diocésaine de Musique Sacrée* to be presided over by his friend and former student Monsignor Jacques Delarue. He declined in a letter dated May 6, 1966:[17]

> If the ecclesiastical authorities deprive the faithful of the exalted joys derived from listening to the organ and sacred music,[18] feelings will run high, for the public as well as for the artists who will have difficulty maintaining their interest in playing any part (and what a part!) in Sunday services. It might be useful for you to know that after such profound discouragement a great number of organists and composers of sacred music are close to feeling definite hostility, not from the Church itself, but from the men of the Church. We are preparing a new collective letter to the bishop of Pamiers.

It did not take long for the conflict to spill over into the press. The following article appeared almost simultaneously in *Le Figaro, La Croix* and *Aspects de la France*:[19]

> **Church Musicians Make Their Point Before Meeting in Chicago**
> The undersigned French church musicians wish to express their opinion regarding the controversy that has arisen surrounding recent statements by R. P. Picard, secretary general of the *Union Fédérale de Musique Sacrée*.
> The celebrated composer Maurice Duruflé, professor at the Conservatoire and organist at Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, expresses "the stupefaction of church musicians" in response to these statements, particularly the following: "there exists today a very broad range of musical styles covering everything from rock 'n roll to *musique concrète.*
> The task of composers is to find a place within each of these styles for sacred music.
> If his inspiration were religious, all one would need for the composition of a proper preface would be Georges Brassens."[20]

[16] Letter in collection Marie-Louise Langlais.
[17] Ibid.
[18] The episcopate seemed preoccupied at the time with increasing the number of concerts given in churches.
[19] The 5th International Congress of Sacred Music took place in Chicago, IL from August 21 to 26, 1966. The article appeared between August 18 and September 1, 1966.
[20] Georges Brassens (1921-1981), a pop songwriter, poet and and singer very much appreciated in France.

> We are very far, noted Maurice Duruflé, from article 116 in the Vatican II constitution that recognized Gregorian chant as the appropriate music for the Roman Catholic liturgy. It ought to continue to occupy pride of place there.

Jean Langlais was naturally one of the 50 signatories drawn from both priests and laity. One month later he and three other members of the committee of experts (Duruflé, Rosenthal, and Souberbielle) resigned, making the following statement to the press:[21]

> Concerning the new music written for the Lord's Prayer, the undersigned musicians would like to inform the public that they were never invited to meetings and that their names cannot be associated with decisions made without their knowledge. They were only consulted by mail, without any right to vote, regarding only three versions sent to them from a total of 140 received by the *Commission de Pastorale Liturgique.*

Matters came to a head on January 3, 1967 under the headline "The Quarrel of Church Musicians: A Cacophony" in the *Républicain Lorrain*. *Le Monde* quickly followed on January 8 with "100 Church Musicians Worried About the Sacred Music Situation." These two widely circulated dailies summarized a document sent to the *Commission Episcopale Française de Liturgie*, the work of nine of the ten lay members of the committee. Signed by 100 musicians and a few priests, it demanded:

> --Strict adherence to the council's constitution, to permit maintaining at least a part of the Gregorian repertory.
> --International standards of prosody for the composition of new melodies in the vernacular.
> --Prohibition of secular (Jazz, Music-Hall) or avant-garde music.
> --Restoration of the role of the Scholae.
> --Reversing the decision not to allow the organ to be played during the Elevation.
> --Strengthening of musical education in the seminaries.

Jean Langlais signed this document, which received a very conciliatory response from Monsignor Rigaud. Unfortunately, scarcely three months later the composer ran afoul of the priest responsible for "Cantiques et Psaumes." In a letter dated March 22, 1967, Father Hum proposed that Langlais submit his songs to be harmonized by another musician, adding that if he preferred to harmonize them himself, they would be submitted to a committee of four priest musicians for review.

This was sufficient to unleash the full anger of Jean Langlais in an undated reply:[22]

> I refuse categorically to submit the accompaniments of my songs to your quartet of priest musicians. One of them happens to have been a student of mine, and the others are not capable of suggesting any changes.
> I feel confident in informing you that I am capable of realizing very simple accompaniments. Elsewhere I pass as a composer who knows how to write easy works. The "proposed norms" of the committee are of no use to me whatsoever. Please rest assured that I know how to avoid "contrapuntal chatter" (what a lovely expression!)
> What I find shocking in your letter is that you make no distinction between a professional composer and one who composes on the side. That would mean that if Olivier Messiaen composed some songs they would receive the same consideration as those written by any old amateur priest, who would do far better to attend to his priestly

[21] *France Soir* and *Presse-L'Intransigeant,* September 9, 1966.
[22] Letter in collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

> duties rather than attempt that for which he is ill-suited, not having had the proper formation.

The rift between Jean Langlais and the authorities responsible for Roman Catholic liturgy in France was thus complete. Having composed steadily for the Church since the 1930s, in Latin as well as in French, the composer turned his back once and for all on the reforms initiated by Vatican II.

Nonetheless, he continued to demonstrate loyalty and good will by writing several vocal works in French according to the recommendations of the Council. These included *Douze Cantiques Bibliques* (1962) for unison voices to a text of Father Hameline, *Cinq Chants pour la Pentecôte* (1964), *Chants pour les trois premiers dimanches de l'avent* (1964), and the *Mass 'Dieu prends pitié'*[23] (1965) for mixed or unison choir, congregation, and organ. Langlais took pains to specify that this was an experimental work intended for Low Mass, proof that he could participate fully in the attempts to renew liturgical music in France. A *Répons pour une messe de funérailles* (1967) for one or three voices and organ, commissioned by the diocesan commission for sacred music at Amiens, would mark the end of his collaboration with official liturgical authorities. There are two later psalm settings, *Psaume, des "Montées"* (1968) and *Le Prince de la paix* (1971), but these were offered in their respective years only as gestures of friendship to the choral conductor at Ste. Clotilde, François Tricot, on the occasion of Christmas services.

Even though Langlais had definitively turned the page on liturgical music in France he remained cooperative with American clergy, responding favorably to numerous commissions from their quarter. It was thus he came to compose, from 1962 to 1964, three large-scale *Psaumes Solennels* in Latin for mixed choir, congregation, organ, brass, and timpani. Each was written for an important American religious occasion. *Psaume Solennel n° 1,* "Laudate Dominum in sanctis ejus" (Psalm 150), complemented the Pontifical Mass celebrated during the eleventh annual church music workshop at Boys Town in 1963. *Psaume Solennel n° 2*, "Miserere mei" (Psalm 50), and *Psaume Solennel n° 3,* "Laudate Dominum de coelis," were featured in the centennial festivities for Asylum Hill Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut on March 7, 1965.

The musical forces utilized in these psalm settings (unison choir, mixed choir, organ, two trumpets, two trombones, and four timpani *ad libitum*) and their large scale (32 pages for the first (15 minutes), 36 pages for the second (23 minutes) and 22 for the third and shortest (9 minutes) attest to the importance the composer attached to them. When asked which of his works he preferred, he often cited them, regretting that they never enjoyed the popularity of his *Messe Solennelle* or his *Missa Salve Regina*

Taken as a group, the three *Psaumes Solennels* evoke a massive, abrupt style whose starting point was the *Missa Salve Regina* of 1954, with its dialogues among choir, congregation, organ, and brass. *Psaume Solennel n° 3*, the most grandiloquent of the three, contains a cosmic hymn addressed to the entire universe. Heaven and earth, animate and inanimate objects -- are all invited to praise God. "Alleluias" at the beginning and end frame the psalm

[23] Its Kyrie was plagiarized by a French priest and published in official songbooks.

text, which is set without repetition in an intentionally grandiose style. The climax of the work occurs at the conclusion of the "Gloria Patri" when Langlais abandons the prevailing syllabic style in favor of a fugue. Once again, the composer who scrupulously avoided fugal writing for the organ willingly imposes its intellectual rigor upon his vocal or symphonic writing.

Jean Langlais's full and enthusiastic participation in the American revival of Catholic liturgical music led to the following masses, psalms, and sacred songs:

> **1962**: *Mass Dona nobis pacem* in English, for voices in unison (or women alone or men alone) and organ (Kyrie - Gloria - Sanctus and Benedictus - Agnus Dei).
>
> **1964**: *Mass God have mercy*, in English, for unison voices (choir and congregation) and organ (Lord, have mercy - Glory to God - The Creed - Holy, holy, holy - Lamb of God) inscribed at the top "Official Text of National Conference of Bishops, USA, approved by the Diocesan Music Commission, Boston, Mass."
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> **1965***: Mass On earth peace* in English, for voice and organ (Kyrie - Gloria - Credo - Sanctus - Agnus Dei) with the indication "English translation from the *Roman Missal* published by the authority of the Bishops' Commission of the Liturgical Apostolate, approved by the Commission on Church Music, Archdiocese of New York."
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> **1965**: *The Canticle of the Sun*, in English, for women's chorus (SSA) and piano (or organ).
>
> **1969**: *Solemn Mass Orbis factor*, in English, for choir (SATB), organ, congregation, brass (2 trumpets, 2 trombones) ad libitum (Lord, have mercy – Glory to God – Holy – Lamb of God).
>
> **1969**: *Festival Alleluia*, for SATB and organ, on the single word "Alleluia."

Nearly all of these works follow the successful recipe of the *Missa Salve Regina*: mixed choir, congregation, organ, and brass. Written in English for American use, they remain practically unknown in Europe, especially in France. They bear witness, however, to the exceptional creative vitality of Jean Langlais, who wished to contribute to post-Vatican II church music as long as it had nothing to do with the official French liturgical movement, with which he remained in total disagreement from 1967 until his death in 1991.

Alongside these works his *Messe Solennelle, Missa Salve Regina, and Missa in simplicitate* – all in Latin – continued to hold pride of place.

Ecumenism

This term, which designates in particular the efforts of Christian churches to achieve unity, first appeared in the early 20th century in the wake of such initiatives as the founding of the World Council of Churches, the shared translation of sacred texts, and the setting aside of a week of communal prayer for unity. The Catholic Church was historically reticent about this movement. It was not even a member of the World Council of Churches, historically content with an observer's seat. Following Vatican II the Church began to embrace ecumenism in a more unified fashion, as affirmed by John Paul II in his 1995 encyclical *Ut unum sunt.*

For his part, Jean Langlais, a practicing Catholic, had always maintained a certain predisposition against Protestantism. From 1952 on, however, his trips to the United States

led him frequently to Protestant churches where, struck by the quality of the music he encountered there, he remarked after his concert tour of 1962:[24]

> In Protestant churches there is a prior understanding between pastor and organist.
> A service is preceded by an organ prelude. The organist communicates its duration to the pastor, who respects it scrupulously. Just imagine… It is not uncommon to find as many as five or even seven choirs in a Protestant church, and these choirs rehearse under the direction of the organist. The result is that church choirs give very high-level performances, even of difficult works. The organist works hard at his church but thanks to the compensation he receives he is able to live well.
> In American Catholic churches, music is often mistreated. As in France, some handyman frequently disguises himself as an organist.
> I heard masses in which the musical content was scandalous.

Very interested in the diversity of American Protestant faiths, Langlais elaborated in the same article:

> The majority of universities have religious affiliations (Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and occasionally Roman Catholic). They have their own radio stations which sometimes cover three states. In Minnesota I recall hearing an admirable sermon on "Jesus set out to go to Jerusalem" during a morning service (there is one each day). Finding myself seated next to a pastor at lunch, I complimented it warmly. "That sermon was preached by a former student of mine who is now a business traveler," he replied. Something to think about…
> I was also welcomed in non-denominational religious institutions of higher learning, which didn't prevent the director of one of them (Saint Olaf College) from asking to pronounce the blessing over a meal in a restaurant with a group of students.
> Before my recital the same director recited a prayer in the concert hall before I began.

If Jean Langlais observed with interest the diversity of Protestant churches in America, back home he was close to certain clergy in the Reformed Church of France, such as Pastor Marchal,[25] an eminent theologian at the forefront of liberal thought in France in addition to being an organist and improviser himself. Langlais also engaged in extensive theological discussions with Pastor Vallotton[26] who under the encouragement of Albert Schweitzer had constructed an organ in the church of Saint-Dié between 1965 and 1968.[27] From this intellectual rapport with Pastor Vallotton was born the idea to compose his *Livre Œcuménique* for organ.

Since 1964 Jean Langlais had not written a single note of organ music for the Church.[28] This would be his first constructive instrumental response to Vatican II. Conceived between January 28 and February 20, 1968, the new collection had a dual purpose laid out in its preface:[29]

> -- to write a work with a pedagogical purpose
> -- to offer Roman Catholic organists and their Protestant colleagues as well a group

[24] Jean Langlais, *Mon 7ème voyage artistique aux Etats-Unis,* in *Musique et Liturgie*, January-Feburary 1963. 12.
[25] Pastor Georges Marchal (1905-1982).
[26] Pastor Pierre Vallotton (1917-2015).
[27] Jean Langlais gave a recital on this organ on November 12, 1967. Accompanying him as guide for the first time I still recall their heated discussions on the subject of predestination.
[28] Between 1964 and 1967 the only organ works are secular: *Poem of life* (1965), *Poem of peace*, *Poem of happiness* (1966), and *Sonate en trio* (1967).
[29] Preface by Jean Langlais translated in French, German, and English to *Livre Œcuménique* (Bornemann, 1968).

> of short pieces of average difficulty which can be played during masses as during services. Six among these pieces have themes based on Gregorian melodies, the other six are built upon choral themes used by J-S. Bach.
> It goes without saying that Roman Catholic organists will have no scrupule in playing the commentaries on the chorals during the services or in recitals.
> May our brothers separate from us in religion but united with us in art, do the same for the pieces of Gregorian inspiration.

Langlais had previously employed chorale themes, notably in his *Neuf Pièces* of 1942, but they were exceptional in an output nourished principally by Gregorian chant. One should salute his initiative in 1968, reaching out to Protestants (among whom he counted so many friends and students both at home and abroad) without waiting for the Catholic Church to embrace ecumenism. His sympathy for Protestants did not extend universally to their music, however. He complained in particular about the rigidity of chorale tunes, especially their tonal straight jackets and the rhythmic poverty which he could not help comparing unfavorably to Gregorian chant.

For his *Livre Œcuménique* Langlais selected chorales that were popular during the Reformation, such as "Aus tiefer Not" (n°2), "Ein feste Burg" (n°4) and "Vater unser" (n°8). To embody his prefatory statement "brothers separate from us in religion but united with us in art," he chose "Gott Vater in Ewigkeit" (n°10), set by J. S. Bach in his *Clavierübung* as a Kyrie but whose origin lies in the Gregorian chant "Fons bonitatis."

> If there is parity between these two sources of melodic inspiration, the composer took great care to distinguish between their musical forms. The chorales inspired rather rigorous and contrapuntal writing "alla Bach." Three of the "Protestant" pieces (n° 2, 6, and 10) are trios. Gregorian chant lent itself naturally to paraphrase in the "Catholic" pieces, but something exceptional happens in no. 11. For the first time ever Langlais employs a plainchant theme as the driving force of an entire piece without introduction, commentary, or afterword. The long Gloria of the "Orbis factor" mass is presented intact, transposed up a minor third from its usual mode. Langlais remains completely faithful to its rhythm and melody, accompanied only by open fourth and fifths, shifting away from his *Poèmes évangeliques* (1932) and his *Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes* (1934) in which fragments of Gregorian chant were employed without regard to their inherent rhythm.

The Organ World and the Baroque Revival

Jean Langlais was still not done with situations rife with conflict in the 1960s. As a liturgical musician he came up against painful post-Vatican II problems. As an organist he was about to confront a hard and pure return to Baroque esthetics.

One evening in March 1955 the young French organist Michel Chapuis caused a scandal during a recital at Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs in Paris when he reconstructed certain "recipes" for the interpretation of early music that had been forgotten over the centuries.

Recalling that memorable evening Chapuis noted:[30]

[30] *Claude Duchesneau interroge Michel Chapuis,* collection "Les Interviews," *Centurion,* Paris: 1979. 98

> We began to talk about the new school of interpretation, of *notes inégales* and added ornamentation, which a number of official musicologists still did not believe in. My recital had attracted a number of curious listeners, some of whom were adamantly opposed to what I was doing. Others were enthusiastically in favor of it. These opposing views acted like the crack of a whip on me. I needed to carry out further research and to delve deeper. I considered all the objections that were being made, one by one, and thus developed a better understanding of the question.

This episode, so far removed from the music of Jean Langlais, had a lasting impact upon the organ world. It marked the beginning of a clean break between "the explorers of the Baroque" and those who continued to uphold the symphonic tradition. In the coming decades young amateurs of the organ would embrace a universe estranged from, if not downright hostile to, the esthetics of Widor, Vierne, Duruflé, and Langlais.

At the time only Messiaen and Alain seemed to be spared, due to their singularity. What was at the outset purely an esthetic question soon encountered a major obstacle: in order to perform early organ music one needed organs suited to it, yet the vast majority of French Classic instruments had vanished between the Revolution and the end of the 18th century or had been profoundly altered to meet the demands of 19th century repertory.

The new adherents of the Baroque revival advocated retracing the same path in reverse, returning French instruments to their earlier states. Gradually numerous organists came to embrace the concept of restoring early music to the instruments for which it was intended. Converts were particularly numerous among young organists freshly minted from the Paris Conservatoire, among them Xavier Darasse, Francis Chapelet, and André Isoir, following in the path of Michel Chapuis. Others, such as Marie-Claire Alain and Gaston Litaize, drew their own conclusions through personal research.

An esthetic revolution had been launched and nothing could stop it. What were Jean Langlais's thoughts on the subject at the time?

A questionnaire concerning organ building, esthetics, and organ music in France published in the journal *L'Orgue* in 1961 provides several insights. Here are some of Langlais's most revealing responses:

> Question 5: *Are you a partisan of mechanical action, pneumatic action, or direct electric action?*
> "It's all the same to me. A true organist ought to be able to play any organ. Pianists do it quite well."
>
> Question 6: *Are you in favor of electro-pneumatic or pallet-and-slider windchests?*
> "The most beautiful organ I've played is in Salt Lake City (198 stops). I suppose the chests there are electro-pneumatic. Everything about that organ is marvelous."
>
> Question 8: *Do you foresee an objective return to the principles of French Classic organ building of the 17th and 18th centuries, or to those of German Baroque organ building of the same period?*
> "The question you ask concerning a return to the Baroque style strikes me as coming down to this: 'Are you of the opinion that all organ music after Bach is useless?'
> The sad fact is that such a question could only come from a group of organists.
> Even more sad is that I'm sure the question could enjoy a certain number of positive responses. Certainly, I am among those who admire our old instruments. It is always with great emotion that I hear the organ in the cathedral at Poitiers, for example.

> On certain recent organs, however, so-called "classic" ones, not only does the shrill exaggeration of the mixtures seem unmusical to me, but I have to ask myself what Debussy's reaction would have been to sonorities that drill a hole in the ear…
> I favor poetry over theory, and I think the present reaction, while it contains interesting things, goes much too far…
> A true organist has the right to be a true musician, but I fear that if the evolution of the instrument continues along this path that I consider dangerous, soon there will be musicians and organists."

Such a viewpoint, totally against the prevailing winds whipping up the neo-Baroque wave at the time, originated in Langlais' concern for the symphonic repertoire conceived for the 19th century organ that could not easily be played on French Classic instruments.

This was the reason he continued to oppose the proliferation of new organs built exclusively along 17th and 18th century lines. The numerous responses generated by the *L'Orgue* questionnaire laid bare deep antagonism on both sides. Without going into great detail regarding them, the final word from one of the elder statesmen of the organ at the time, Edouard Commette (1883-1967), is chilling:

> The organ, in my opinion, is destined to disappear due to of the invasion of the liturgy in our churches. As a consequence, organists will disappear and the profession will no longer exist, or at least one will no longer make a living at it.

Without reaching the same conclusion, Jean Langlais never abandoned his esthetic convictions.

On the eve of Vatican II, in 1960, he reaffirmed his devotion to the music of the Catholic Church by recording at Sainte-Clotilde for Erato a selection of works based upon Gregorian chant: *Incantation pour un Jour Saint*, "Ave Maria, ave maris stella" and " Mors et resurrectio" (*Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes*), "Homo quidam" (*24 Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue*), Offertoire "Stelliferi conditor orbis" (*Deux Offertoires*) along with selections by Charles Tournemire (*Office de l'Epiphanie* and "Communion" from *l'Office de la Nativité de la Sainte-Vierge*).

The composer called upon his old friend René Malherbe, a fellow student in Marcel Dupré's class, to conduct a men's choir that introduced each plainchant before its paraphrase.

Olivier Alain, younger brother of Jehan Alain, contributed liner notes of high analytic quality:

> The mood evolves when we pass from Tournemire to Langlais, but the spirit changes hardly at all, even when the technical devices diversify and strengthen, and the language becomes spicier.

This austere program of great spiritual devotion was very favorably received by the press:[31]

> This is essential listening for understanding the organ music of today, full of poetic color, harmonic audacity, and improvisational liberty. The recording is of extraordinary sonic fidelity, exceptional in its concept and magnificent in its realization, an event that I wish to underline for its interest and importance.

And elsewhere:[32]

[31] *Disques: Tournemire, Langlais,* in *Télérama,* January 22, 1961.

> Let us salute the work of Erato that brings us this superb disk flowing with music. One side is devoted to Tournemire, the other to Langlais. The latter interprets both masterfully.

The Restoration of the Organ at Sainte-Clotilde in 1962

Early in the 1960s Jean Langlais decided to make certain modifications to the organ at Sainte-Clotilde, the most important of which concerned its mechanical stop action and Barker lever key action. Over the years the instrument had become extremely difficult to play. Charles Tournemire had complained of the heaviness of its touch even shortly after its restoration in 1933:[33]

> January 23, 1934 -- Visit to my organ by Marcel Dupré. Action found to be very heavy and hard, no less than 350 to 450 grams of resistance per key, it's ridiculous!

No further modifications had been made since 1933. Marie-Claire Alain, who recorded Langlais's *Suite médiévale* for Erato in 1955 along with works by her brother, recalled her difficult recording sessions there during a concert at the cathedral in Dol-de-Bretagne on May 4, 2007 in honor of the centennial of Langlais's birth. Jacques Barbéris, the organ builder who participated in the 1962 restoration, estimated that each key required 250 to 300 grams pressure uncoupled. Coupling nearly doubled the effort required. He explained:[34]

> The Barker lever that Cavaillé-Coll employed at Sainte-Clotilde in 1858 was not as highly developed as it became toward the end of the century. This explains why, 100 years later, the organ was so difficult to play.
> In order to preserve as much of the original material as possible, Maison Beuchet-Debierre installed an electro-pneumatic pulldown of its own invention, silent and rapid in repetition, thus retaining the windchests of Cavaillé-Coll.

By 1956 Maurice Duruflé had already caused an electric console to be installed at Saint-Etienne-du-Mont. During the 1960s certain colleagues followed suit and demanded combination actions: Cochereau at Notre-Dame and Messiaen at La Trinité. Only Dupré at Saint-Sulpice resisted this trend. For Langlais, electrification represented an imperative for playing his organ without a registration assistant. A new console appeared in 1965, the third since the organ was built, furnished with six general pistons and six divisional pistons in the American style he had found so attractive on tour.

The organ at Sainte-Clotilde was not classed as a national monument at the time, unlike those elsewhere. Jean Langlais was thus completely free to follow his own esthetic choices.

He added a Prestant 4' and Doublette 2' to the Pedal and changed Tournemire's Quinte 5 1/3' to a Bourdon 8'. In the Positif, he replaced the Gambe 8' with a Larigot 1 1/3'. The Gambe was re-used in the Récit as a replacement for the former Voix céleste.

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[32] V. Martin, *Récital Jean Langlais, orgue, oeuvres d'inspiration grégorienne,* in *Guide du concert et du disque,* January 20, 1961.
[33] Charles Tournemire, *Mémoires,* typescript: 99, published in Marie-Louise Langlais : *Eclats de Mémoire*, website ml-langlais.com. 82
[34] Conversation of the author with Jacques Barbéris, Paris, 1983.

Tournemire had had a Cornet installed on the Grand Orgue behind the reeds where it could not project. Langlais transferred it to a supplemental electric windchest.

Two new stops joined the Récit, an Italian Principal 4' on a free windway left unused by Tournemire in 1933, and a Clairon 2'. The latter was inspired by the Swell reed chorus at the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, an instrument Jean Langlais always cited as one of the most beautiful he had ever played. Finally, all the sub-couplers were removed, a decision Langlais came to regret for the performance of the works of César Franck.

For this reason, 20 years later, in 1983, he asked for the return of the Récit/GO 16' coupler. At the same time, he had the Clarinette 8' moved by Tournemire from the unenclosed Positif to the enclosed Récit returned to the Positif.

The work carried out by Maison Beuchet-Debierre of Nantes brought the instrument to 60 stops in 1962, up from the 56 that included Tournemire's 1933 additions to the original 46. At the time, the electrification of the organ at Sainte-Clotilde (undertaken by the same builder at the same time as Messiaen's instrument at La Trinité) did not raise eyebrows.

Such was the 1960s pre-occupation with neo-Baroque principles at the expense of Romantic organ-building. As interest in the organs of Cavaillé-Coll gradually increased, however, criticism poured in from many quarters. It was thus that the organ at Sainte-Clotilde came to appear later in the list of destroyed or altered Cavaillé-Coll organs listed in Jean Guillou's book, *L'Orgue, Souvenir et Avenir*.[35]

At the completion of the project there was no inaugural concert as there had been in 1933 under Tournemire, but rather a private recital for the Amis de l'Orgue on November 8, 1962 in honor of the centennial of the publication of César Franck's *Six Pièces,* thus described:[36]

> In November, the Amis de l'Orgue gathered to hear the organ at Sainte-Clotilde, newly electrified and renovated in a judicious restoration by Beuchet that returned Cavaillé-Coll's celebrated foundation stops and reeds to their original condition. Under Jean Langlais's fingers we listened with great emotion to the *Six Pièces* of Franck on the instrument for which they were conceived one hundred years ago.[37]

Though private, the recital was reported in the press by Bernard Gavoty, who used the occasion to place César Franck, largely forgotten by the younger generation, back upon his pedestal:

> This occasion offered not only historical interest but an opportunity for rehabilitation. For certain young musicians the name of Franck evokes a certain bemused pity.
> "The old Belgian angel," as Debussy called him, means nothing more to them than would a dusty statue in a museum. Jean Langlais demonstrated to those in attendance that the master of Sainte-Clotilde lives on, that the savior of the French organ school remains a glorious and indispensable link in the chain of tradition. Art progresses more surely through evolution than by revolution.

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[35] Jean Guillou, *L'Orgue, Souvenir et Avenir*, éditions Buchet/Chastel, Paris : 1978. 260.
[36] *Chroniques et mélanges: à Paris, l'activité des Amis de l'Orgue, saison 1962-1963* in *L'Orgue* n° 108, Oct-Dec 1963. 121.
[37] The choice of 1962 as the centennial was approximate, given that the holograph of the "Grande pièce symphonique" is dated September 16, 1863.

A moving photograph shows Jean Langlais in the company of Thérèse Chopy-Franck, the composer's granddaughter, aged 76, at the foot of the stairs leading to the organ loft at Sainte-Clotilde:

Thérèse Chopy-Franck and Jean Langlais, May 25, 1958, at Sainte-Clotilde
Figure 45 (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

Scarcely had the restoration concluded when Jean Langlais decided to record the organ works of Franck for the Gregorian Institute of America. Not only would he benefit from an organ returned to good condition, he would also reiterate his personal credo in the face of the prevailing Baroque revival, bringing the most important organ works of César Franck back into the foreground at the very place of their creation.

For always respectful of his predecessors, Jean Langlais never ceased to return to the works of Franck. This three-LP boxed set[38] was marketed in the United States, as *Revue et Son* recalled:[39]

> Before now the organ works of César Franck have never been recorded on his own instrument. This lacuna has been filled by the firm INTERSONOR (*Société international d'enregistrements sonores*) who have just recorded the complete organ works of Franck with master Jean Langlais at the *grandes orgues* of Sainte-Clotilde. The recording is destined for the Gregorian Institute of America, who will assure its distribution there. Let us hope that some French record company will show interest and make these recordings available to admirers of organ music in France, who remain quite numerous.

[38] *The complete organ works of César Franck by Jean Langlais on the organ of Sainte-Clotilde,* Gregorian Institute of America M-108-10, 1964, newly remastered as two CDs in 1996 (CD-272).
[39] C. Gendre, *Un enregistrement qui fera date dans l'histoire de l'orgue,* in *Revue et Son,* no. 127, November 1963. 497-499.

But no French firm was interested in this "premiere" on the organ of Sainte-Clotilde. Twelve years would elapse before the French Company Arion would record, in 1975, a new version of the *Douze Pièces* of Franck with Langlais at Sainte-Clotilde.[40] By contractual agreement this recording could not be released in the USA, in order to avoid competition with its predecessor. This was probably unfortunate, as Langlais substantially changed his tempi if not his style between the two recordings, the second running some 13 minutes longer than the first. Due to these circumstances the only critical reception of the first recording came from the United States. Seth Bingham declared Jean Langlais "an ideal interpreter for Franck."[41] For his part Charles Van Bronkhorst wrote:[42]

> What a priceless treasure Jean Langlais has given organists in this recording of the major Franck organ works, played on the organ for which they were conceived and with the composer's own registrations!... The results are not only thrilling but about as authentic reproductions of Franck's musical intentions as will ever be achieved…This album should belong in every organist's collection and in every music library throughout the country- for study and for some of the most exciting listening available on records.

Thus in 1962 Jean Langlais paid brilliant homage to his illustrious predecessor, recording his works for the first time on the restored, electrified organ at Sainte-Clotilde. A photograph taken in 1965 by his son shows the composer seated at his new console :

Jean Langlais at the new console (1962) of Sainte-Clotilde, 1965
Figure 46. (photograph by Claude Langlais, collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

[40] César Franck à Sainte-Clotilde, *Jean Langlais,* Arion, 1975, 33 rpm LPs remastered as three CDs in 2010 (ARN368813).
[41] Seth Bingham, *César Franck: complete organ works*, in *Caecilia* 91, n° 2 (Summer 1964). 80-82.
[42] Charles Van Bronkhorst, *New records,* in *The American Organist* 47, n° 7 (July 1964). 6. This review pointed out a technical fault in the sound engineering – slight changes in pitch – that greatly annoyed Jean Langlais and about which he never ceased complaining to the recording company. These imperfections were corrected only 33 years later during a second release of the CD in 1996, but this would prove too late for Jean Langlais.

Ardent champion of Tournemire and Franck through his recordings, Jean Langlais remained equally so in concert, both at home and abroad. While always performing his own works, he never failed to include those of his predecessors, whether they were in fashion or not. This occasionally resulted in a lukewarm critical reception, as after a recital in Québec City in 1969:[43]

> As for the "Pièce Héroique" of César Franck, that warhorse of organists, I shall leave the dissection of the merits of its performance to those who care for this sort of music.

Was it his obstinate tendency to swim against the prevailing currents of taste that caused Jean Langlais not to record between 1963 and 1975? Surely this must have been the case. It is interesting to note that his 12 years of discographic silence began just after the publication of the complete organ works of Franck in the United States. They ended with his recording the same 12 works anew at the organ of Sainte-Clotilde. In the meantime the music of "the old Belgian angel" had left its ghetto. Langlais' boxed set for the French firm Arion coincided with other complete recordings by André Isoir (Calliope) and Marie-Claire Alain (Erato).

Anyway, during this period of the Baroque revival, Jean Langlais never turned his back on early music. He continued to perform works by Couperin, Grigny, Pachelbel, Frescobaldi, and of course Bach, as he had since his first recitals in the 1930s. Far from being disinterested in the results of musical research, he altered his registrations, added ornamentation, and applied *notes inégales* as appropriate.[44]

At the same time that he was objecting to a plain and simple return to the past Langlais was equally involved in another fashion of 1960s organ music: an exploration of avant-garde techniques.

Avant-Garde Techniques in Music of the 1960s

> The evolution of organ music around 1960 seems not to have been made so much with the organ as against it. The instrument's mechanical capabilities, not inherently receptive to new ideas, suddenly found themselves utilized in unexpected ways: turning off the blower, depressing keys halfway or pulling stops only partially, and playing in clusters with the flat of the hand or the entire forearm.

These remarks by György Ligeti cited in a concert of his works given at Saint-Séverin, Paris, in November 1969, refer specifically to his *Volumina* of 1961, a work that revolutionized the organ world. The use of clusters was hardly new. Lefébure-Wély and his 19th century contemporaries had long employed them to embellish their storm pieces with impressive rolls of thunder. The other techniques described were truly innovative, however. All of them depended upon a mechanical action instrument for their successful execution.

Since the end of World War II the musical world had simmered with various discoveries and inventions that could not have left Jean Langlais entirely indifferent: limited modes of transposition and Hindu rhythms chez Messiaen, the post-serial music of Pierre Boulez, Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète*, electronic and electro-acoustic music. Would Langlais

[43] Marc Samson, *Le Soleil,* Québec, October 9, 1969.
[44] As an example listen to his recording of the "Grand Dialogue à quatre choeurs" from the *Second Livre d'orgue* of Jacques Boyvin, recorded on the Kern organ at Masevaux in the collection *Orgeln in Elsass* (Coronata 4001, 1983, 33 1/3 rpm).

incorporate any of them into his own work? We have seen that at the beginning of the 1950s he turned his back upon serialism. Less susceptible than Messiaen and Alain to North African and Far Eastern influences, Langlais was on the contrary quite drawn to electro-acoustic music. His blindness, unfortunately, prevented his initiation into the mysteries of these techniques. He would have required a qualified guide to the field, the absence of which he always regretted keenly.

Confronted with a changing musical world, what were Jean Langlais's reactions in the 1960s? As early as 1951, Messiaen demonstrated that he was not only open to new techniques but capable of applying them successfully to the organ. His *Livre d'orgue* marks the culmination of his research into rhythm. As for Langlais, he began the 1960s in a traditional manner, responding to a commission from Walter Blodgett at the Cleveland Museum of Art with a concerto for organ and strings for the 4th May Festival of Contemporary Music.[45] Completed in 1961, this would become the *Deuxième Concerto* for organ and orchestra. Langlais himself analyzed the work as follows:

> Conceived traditionally in three movements, this concerto is unusual in that its first movement is none other than the *Thème, variations et final* for strings, organ, three trumpets, and three trombones composed in 1937 for the Amis de l'Orgue competition. I have omitted the brass parts from the final. The term "final" disappears as well, the first movement being entitled "thème et variations." As this movement lasts 12 minutes, I had to compose a brief second movement for organ alone, an "interlude" that serves as a transition to the third movement, a finale for organ and strings almost on the same scale as the first movement.[46]

> The structure of the *Deuxième Concerto* is curious from the outset due to the disproportion between the solo interlude of just two minutes' duration and the outer movements. It was the price to pay for breathing new life into the *Thème, variations et final* of 1937, even if in so doing the composer left the new work unbalanced.
>
> The opening theme and variations unfold as a passacaglia over a long chromatic theme, a point of departure for seven variations of progressively rapid note values, as decreed by tradition. Solo organ alternates with strings alone or a combination of the two. It is interesting to note that Langlais provided the orchestra a form more often devoted to the organ across the ages. A magnificent closing fugue intertwines organ and strings in a bold apotheosis freely derived from the richly chromatic theme.
>
> The second movement is a brief Trio for the organ only, very short transition to the last movement, an orchestral grand Finale. Its fast-slow-fast form is practically an organ concerto in itself.
>
> Dropped into its midst is an Adagio derived from the "Plainte" of the *Suite brève* written some fifteen years earlier; its theme introduced by the strings with the first violins and violas in unison, in harmonies identical to those of the original solo organ version, is undoubtedly one of the most lyrical passages Langlais ever penned for orchestra.
>
> The appearance of such a traditional, if chromatic, melody seemed completely old-fashioned by the beginning of the 1960s. But Langlais himself was not troubled. At a culminating moment of tension this slow section gives way to a virtuoso cadenza in which hands and feet engage in

[45] Premiered May 11, 1962 a Saint Paul's Church, Cleveland Heights, OH, with members of the Cleveland Orchestra, Fenner Douglass, organ, conducted by Walter Blodgett. The work was paired with Honegger's *Le Roi David.*
[46] Conversation with the author.

> lively competition upon full organ.
> The orchestra reappears only to announce a conclusion drawn from the opening of the movement.

The unusual concept of the work, its odd proportions, mixture of styles, and rhythmic discontinuity, reveal much about a composer who did not acquiesce easily to the musical dictates of the day. Jean Langlais simply wrote the music he wished to write.

Contradicting himself right away, he undertook the composition of *Essai (Trial)* for the 1962 end-of-term organ class competition at the Conservatoire de Paris. This commission presented an important opportunity to consolidate several advances in his musical language. The layout of *Essai* recalls one elaborated by Olivier Messiaen for his *Verset pour La Fête de dédicace,* written for the same competition the previous year. Short episodic fragments contrast freely, their registrations and tempi as clearly delineated as possible. Langlais expanded Messiaen's nine sections to twelve as follows:

> (a) Over long values in the manuals an atonal melody unfolds on Flute 4' in the Pedal. All twelve pitches of the scale are represented although Langlais does not appear concerned with observing strict serialism.
> (b) Brief transition with a birdcall motif.
> (c) Short ritornello based upon an old Provençal noël, with antecedent and consequent phrases separated by virtuoso passages.
> (d) Transition leading to a slow motif of descending chromaticism.
> (e) Appearance of Gregorian psalmody in the fourth mode, its original intonation simply presented, followed immediately by an improvised fragment drawing upon its original motif.
> (f) Bridge of three bars on full organ, of improvisatory character.
> (g) Return of (a) with ornamentation of the Pedal theme.
> (h) Exact repetition of (b), the birdcall motif.
> (i) Return of the beginning of (d), interspersed with a short fragment of the ritornello presented in (c).
> (j) Return of the Gregorian psalmody of (e), transposed a semi-tone higher.
> (k) New fragment consisting of a brilliant toccata on the theme of (a) presented in long values in the Pedal while the hands play in double octave sixteenths.
> (l) Final fragment which takes up the slow, chromatic theme of (d), treated in canon at the octave most frequently one beat apart. Final "exotic" measure on the Nasard and Tierce of the Positif alone. A scale of five notes (E-flat, F, G#, A#, C) gradually form an augmented seventh chord.

Leonard Raver, an American champion of contemporary organ music, wrote of the work:[47]

> The *Essai* is indeed a "trial" or "test" of an organist willing to grapple with complex rhythmic structure and lightning-quick changes of registration.
> It's an atmospheric work with stark pauses which punctuate sharp jabs of sound contrasting with reflective passages of quiet beauty.
> The form is free although the opening 42 measures are "developed" or repeated literally whence a brilliant 34-measure toccata intrudes to be followed by a peaceful conclusion.
> This most provocative piece should find great favor in recital programs as indeed Marguerite Long to whom the work is dedicated has already proved.

This last remark delighted Langlais, who in the score's dedication had deliberately sewn

[47] Leonard Raver, *The American Organist*, vol. 41, no. 1 (January 1964).

confusion between his American organ student Marguerite Long and the great French pianist who died in 1966 at the age of 92. "You will see," he said with laughter, "after my death the musicologists will say that Marguerite Long was my student!"[48]

In *Essai* we discover a new mood in the composer, "trying out" (as the title suggests) atonalism, added rhythmic values, and brutal contrasts of sound and registration, all the while unable to prevent himself from superimposing two familiar themes from his own universe: Gregorian psalmody in the fourth mode and two measures of an old Provençal Noël.
As the proverb says in French, "Chassez le naturel, il revient au galop"[49].

Jean Langlais proved truly innovative in this mingling of structured language and improvised snippets, while avoiding symmetry in their arrangement. In the process he disconcerted his public even more than he had with the *American Suite.* Nonetheless he made clear that there were boundaries he would not cross, refusing to use the organ in unconventional ways or to embrace serialism. In retrospect, his investigations led him toward a reorganization of his sonic world, embracing contrasts in registrations, tempi, and note values while abandoning his past practice of monody and polyphony couched in tonal, modal, and chromatic harmonies.

However, he took one step forward and two in arrears, for the organ works that immediately follow *Essai* ignore these advances.

The *Trois Méditations sur la Sainte Trinité* revisit the triptych form of "La Nativité" from the *Poèmes Evangéliques* of 1932. The Father is symbolized by the Gregorian "Pater Noster," the Son by the same Provençal noël quoted in *Essai*, and the Holy Spirit by the Gregorian "Veni Creator." The three themes combine in a final bouquet that quotes the monumental Saint Anne fugue (BWV 552b) of Johann Sebastian Bach, a work that Jean Langlais played frequently in concert.

The organ scores from 1962 to 1966 are American in both inspiration and publication. Although commissioned by the *Ministre Français des Beaux-Arts André Malraux* to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the death of Jean-Philippe Rameau, the *Homage to Rameau* was published in Philadelphia by Elkan-Vogel. The English titles chosen for the six pieces in the collection form an acrostic:

Remembrance
Allegretto
Meditation
Evocation
As a fugue
United Themes

Apart from this artifice, nothing in *Homage to Rameau* recalls the composer of *Les Indes Galantes*, aside from an evocation of the Musette in "Allegretto." The most substantial and striking piece, "Evocation," forms a large triptych charged with ardent lyricism requiring unfailing virtuosity from the performer. At the opposite end of the spectrum lies "Meditation" with its sinuous chromatic melody reminiscent of the "Plainte" from *Suite brève.* The

[48] Personally recounted to the author.
[49] "A leopard cannot change its spots"

remaining pages do not strive for any particular unity, "As a fugue" following a three-part polyphonic path while "United Themes" closes the collection with a finale on a pair of themes.

In his next organ work Jean Langlais undertook a challenge as ambitious intellectually it was musically: to write a cycle of poems depicting the universal human themes of life, death, and joy. These would become the *Poem of Life, Poem of Peace,* and *Poem of Happiness* of 1965-66. The first is a diptyque of 20 minutes duration dedicated to Marie-Claire Alain,[50] who gave the first performance on October 3, 1967 at Grace Church in New York City. Contrary to his Christian faith, Langlais grants Death the final victory with a lugubrious three-note ostinato (B-C-B) evoking a funereal tolling of bells.[51] Seth Bingham wrote at its premiere:[52]

> Jean Langlais's *Poem of Life*, which we heard for the first time, is dedicated to Marie-Claire Alain, and described in the program notes as "a grand sonorous fresco retracing the joys and sorrows of mankind." Though cleanly and sympathetically performed, we believe further hearings would clarify certain phrases of this remarkable work.
> It presents an exciting experience for our renowned virtuoso!

Tranquility returns in the *Poem of Peace*, whose serene Gregorian messengers include "Regina Pacis," "Pax Domini," and "Da pacem Domine." The *Poem of Happiness* explodes with pagan joy, the composer rediscovering all his exuberance and optimism. Across these pages of demanding virtuosity one notes the extensive use of the added rhythmic values so dear to Messiaen. This lineage did not escape the notice of critics:[53]

> *Poem of Happiness* immediately brings to mind Messiaen's *Transports de Joie*, and as in that piece, a brilliant manual technique is required. As well as being given twenty-one bars solo, the pedal gave the unusual yet effective task of doubling the right hand at two or three octaves' interval… *Poem of Happiness* would make an excellent end to a recital.

Mystical joy is never far, however. The fiery toccata that drives the work is interrupted suddenly at the end by two meditative Gregorian themes that symbolize joy, "Gaudeamus" and "Gaudete." A union of pagan and Christian joy is thus achieved. Jean Langlais gave the first performance of the work on the occasion of the marriage of his son Claude to Monique Bourreau at Sainte-Clotilde on May 17, 1969.

Having expressed a clear desire for innovation in his *Essai* of 1961, Jean Langlais made another foray in a new direction with his *Sonate en trio*, the Conservatoire de Paris class competition commission for 1967. It is interesting to note that he always reserved his most innovative works for the institution where he himself had been formed by Dupré and Dukas. This *Sonate en trio*, while classic in its tripartite form (Allegro - Largo – Allegro) and tessitura (two upper voices above an 8' bass) nonetheless turns its back upon melodic invention, distancing itself from the usual harmonic framework. The short central Largo flirts

[50] It was upon Langlais' recommendation to Lilian Murtagh that Marie-Claire Alain began her distinguished American performing career in 1961, as, later, the Duruflés and Olivier Latry.
[51] The second part of this movement was arranged by the composer in 1966 for string quintet, flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, and bassoon. Entitled *Elégie*, it remains unpublished.
[52] Seth Bingham, *Marie-Claire Alain*, in *The American Organist*, vol. 50, no. 11, Nov. 1967. 10.
[53] Bernard Newman, *Organ Music, Poem of Happiness, Jean Langlais* in *Church Music,* December 1968.

with serialism, tentatively and without further attention from the composer. Jean Langlais expressed great pleasure at pouring a completely intellectualized music into the traditional mold of Bach. He kneaded out several part-writing feats, the most spectacular of which being a crab canon in the opening Allegro. But once again a modernist adventure would prove short-lived : The *Livre Œcuménique* that followed would signal a return to more traditional sources of inspiration. Toward the end of the 1950s Langlais's friends and students often heard him say, "I have written too much, my next work will be my last." Melvin West, one of the first to devote a doctoral dissertation to Langlais's organ music, confirmed in 1959:[54]

> Langlais claims that his compositional career is at an end with the exception of one more lyrical work and a symphony for string orchestra.[55] This, of course, is open to question as Langlais is still relatively young.

West had reason to be skeptical, for at age 52 Langlais had not yet reached even the halfway point in his compositional output. The composer found himself pulled in different directions. Should he follow the example of Paul Dukas and Maurice Duruflé and consciously limit his production? Or should he respond favorably to the ever-increasing demand for new works from publishers, organists, and other instrumentalists? Experience would show that Jean Langlais always chose the second route while remaining fully aware of the artistic harm he might do himself. As it was, the 1960s proved to be a period of prodigious creative output, passing from opus 113 (*Rhapsodie savoyarde* for organ, unpublished) to opus 163 *(Three Voluntaries* for organ), some 50 opus numbers in a single decade of abundance.

Concurrently with this intense compositional activity Langlais enjoyed still greater fame as a teacher and performer.

Jean Langlais the Teacher

- **The National Institute for The Young Blind**

We have already considered Langlais's earliest years teaching at the venerable institution of where he himself was a student for 13 years. Pierre Lucet, a blind former pupil of Langlais who became producer for organ music broadcasts at French Radio, details the period following World War II:[56]

> He taught 25 hours of courses per week, including three hours of chorus on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. In addition he had to prepare for concerts and church services, his attendance being required at Vespers on Saturdays at 6:20 pm and 7:15 pm, plus Mass on Sunday mornings from 8:15 am to 9:30 am, when he left to play his services at Sainte-Clotilde. Participation in the chorus was required of organ students at the Insitute, but other students came from the piano and theory divisions, and there were several auditors. The choir generally comprised some 50 skilled singers. Boys and girls were separated by the unusual distance of some 20 feet, tenors and basses to the left of the conductor and sopranos and altos to the right.

[54] Melvin West, *The Organ works of Jean Langlais,* D.M.A. dissertation, Boston University, 1959. 243.
[55] These works never saw light of day.
[56] *Entretien avec Pierre Lucet*, audiocassette, 1984, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

> The repertory comprised Janequin, Josquin des Prés, Goudimel, Vittoria, Palestrina (*Missa Papae Marcelli* in six parts), Lassus, as well as opera choruses of Gluck and Handel or cantatas of Bach. There were Renaissance songs (Costeley, Sermisy, Arcadelt) and also the *Mass in C* of Mozart, the *Mass* of Vierne, the *Messe Solennelle* of Langlais himself, and choruses by Franck, Fauré, and Debussy.
> We presented a concert at the Institute each trimester, but we also performed in the Salle Pleyel, at the Sorbonne, at Sainte-Clotilde, Notre-Dame, and on radio broadcasts of Sunday masses. Jean Langlais did not make us vocalize, working most often from the music desk, neglecting to work with them part by part. The fact that we were all blind obliged us to be very ingenious when it came to entrances and expressive devices. Conventions were established in rehearsal, certain tricks of the trade such as discreet out-loud counting and tapping of hands and feet, minimalized in concert.
> It was a great deal of work for Langlais, as he took particular care to explain the repertory and its style to us. He had a very personal sense of interpretation, with precise nuances and an intense musicality. Gregorian chant received his full attention, of course. The great years of the chorus were 1945 to 1955, after which the administration ceased to support it and it dwindled away bit by bit.

Still, Langlais's principal duty at the National Institute for The Young Blind was teaching organ and improvisation to girls. He took great pride when two of them took first prize in the organ class at the Conservatoire de Paris: Danielle Salvignol in 1966 and Francine Carrez in 1968,[57] the year in which he asked to retire. He left the Institute where he had spent 13 years as a student and 38 as a teacher without regret, sharing with his friend Gaston Litaize a bitterness toward the administration for its progressive disinterest in music. By 1989 the organ class was down to two students…

- **Private teaching at home**

Jean Langlais's Schwenkedel house organ, 1960
Figure 47. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

[57] Danielle Savignol would become professor of organ at the conservatory in Perpignan; Francine Carrez organist at the basilica of Saint-Quentin and professor of organ at the conservatory there.

Naturally, as at the outset of his career, Jean Langlais continued to give private lessons at his home, 26 rue Duroc, for which Schwenkedel of Strasbourg had constructed an organ of eight stops disposed over two manuals of 61 notes and a Pedal of 32 notes in October 1960. There he welcomed his French and foreign students, of whom many were American.

An incomplete list would include:

> Antoine de Castelbajac, Father Philippe Charru, Pierre Cogen, Bernadette Dufourcet-Hakim, Marie-Agnes Grall-Menet, Naji Hakim, Marie-Louise Jaquet, Odile Jutten, Daniel Maurer, Pascale Mélis (France), John O'Donnell (Australia), Martin Haselböck, Thomas Daniel Schlee (Austria), Sylvain Caron, Jan Overduin, John Vandertuin (Canada), Stefan Kagl (Germany), David Briggs, Christopher Brayne, Damian Howard, Jane Parker-Smith, Iain Simcock, Colin Walsh (Great Britain), Henk Klop, Margreeth de Jong, Petra Venswijk, Win van der Panne (The Netherlands), Kjell Johnsen (Norway), Susanne Kern, Markus Kuhnis, René Oberson, Wofgang Sieber (Switzerland), George C. Baker, Marvel Basile Jensen, David Bergeron, Wayne Bradford, James David Christie, Beatrice Collins, Peggy Cooley, Stanley Cox, James Dorroh, Alain Hobbs, Karen Hastings, Douglas Himes, David Lloyd, Robert Sutherland Lord, Linda Lyster Whalon, Rosalind Mohnsen, Laura Petrie, Father John Palmer, Darlene Pekala, Jeanne Rizzo Conner, Ronald Stalford, Marguerite Thal Long, Edward Harry Tibbs, Christoph Tietze, Timothy Tikker, Kathleen Armstrong Thomerson, Rodger Vine, Pierre Whalon (USA)

But without an official base such as a conservatory class, Jean Langlais lacked the means to make his teaching even better known. The possibility came to him in 1961, when Jacques Chailley, new director of the Schola Cantorum,[58] invited him to take up the organ class left vacant by Jean-Jacques Grunenwald. "I accepted," as he often explained to his students, "in order to remain faithful to the memory of Louis Vierne, who long occupied this position at the Schola."

- **The Schola Cantorum**

The philosopher Alain captured in a few words the spirit of the Schola when he wrote in *Minerve ou De la Sagesse*:[59] « The Conservatoire, where one becomes brilliant; the Schola, where one becomes modest. »

It was in 1896 that, in reaction to the official teaching at the Conservatoire de Paris, Charles Bordes, Vincent d'Indy, and Alexandre Guilmant founded the Schola Cantorum, a private school in which music was not a source of competition, but a musical formation of the personality. Eliminating age limits and entrance requirements it opened its doors to such musicians as Albert Roussel, Erik Satie, Edgar Varèse, and André Jolivet.

From the outset the organ was a major field of study under the leadership of Alexandre Guilmant, who had a three-manual organ of 31 stops by Mutin-Cavaillé-Coll installed in the concert hall in 1902:

[58] He succeeded French composer and organist Daniel-Lesur (1908-2002)
[59] Alain (Emile Chartier), French philosopher, wrote *Minerve ou de la sagesse* in 1939.

Concert hall of the Schola Cantorum, 1902 Mutin/Cavaillé-Coll organ
Figure 48. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

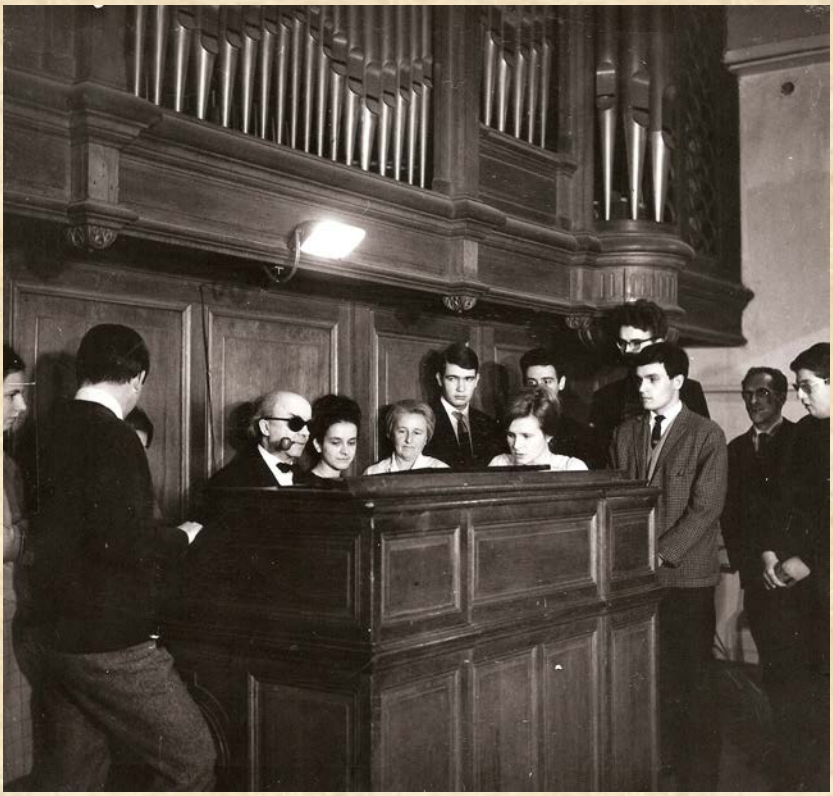
A succession of prestigious organist-composers followed Guilmant after 1911: Abel Decaux, Louis Vierne, Olivier Messiaen, Maurice and Madeleine Duruflé, Jean-Jacques Grunenwald, and, in 1961, Jean Langlais.

The success of Langlais's organ class was immediate. Consisting of eight students upon his arrival, at his departure in 1975 it comprised some 42 organists of all ages and nationalities. Here are a few of my personal recollections:

> When I entered the great hall of the Schola Cantorum for the first time in November 1966, I recall how intimidated I was at the thought of meeting the composer of *Hommage à Frescobaldi*, the collection from which I played the "Fantaisie." I envisioned Jean Langlais as an unapproachable master. Naturally I was wrong, finding myself face-to-face with a small, affable, smiling man smoking his pipe and chatting with his students.
> I played for him without apprehension. When I finished the *Dorian Toccata* of Bach he said, "But it's very good. You'll see, if you listen to me, we will go far together," a phrase that made me decide on the spot to abandon my law studies in order to pursue a career as an organist. His patience knew no bounds. He bestowed the same attention upon an amateur organist of modest accomplishment as upon a brilliant virtuoso. The mix of ages, levels, and nationalities enchanted him. His classes were true lessons in musical analysis. Langlais always took care to explain the pieces we were playing, while adding numerous anecdotes. Then, suddenly, he would take the organ bench to interpret some Franck and Tournemire, and the atmosphere turned magical. One of the very extraordinary qualities in this man deprived of eyesight was the exceptional finesse of his listening abilities. "Careful," he would say to one of us as we played, "you have a bad fingering in the left hand" or "use the toe rather than the heel in that passage." Nevertheless he rarely spoke of technique but frequently of style. His manner of treating everyone equally amazed us.
> One of his most essential pedagogical specificities concerned improvisation; at the end of the year each of us had to play a program including an improvisation consisting of a Gregorian paraphrase or a toccata. Even the most reluctant and least gifted of us managed to take this difficult step, sometimes even with honors. He was unfailingly supportive, always finding some interesting or promising detail to encourage our laborious efforts.

> And what a pleasure when he would sit down at the organ to demonstrate! All seemed effortless, and with what poetry!

A photograph from 1965 communicates the familial atmosphere of these classes:



Jean Langlais organ class at the Schola Cantorum, 1966
Figure 49. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

This pedagogy of encouragement yielded abundant fruit. It would be impossible to name all the students who participated in his class over 14 years, but it is easy to name those who went on to musical careers, among them:

> Father Philippe Charru, Pierre Cogen, Jean-Baptiste Courtois, Germain Desbonnet, Marie-Agnès Grall-Menet, Marie-Louise Jaquet, Yves Krier, Michelle Leclerc Barré, Bruno Mathieu, Louis Robilliard, Chantal de Zeeuw (France); the Americans George C. Baker, Janice Milburn Beck, Lynne Davis, Nathan Enseign, Susan Ferré, Thomas Kelly, Jessie Jewitt Le Moullac, Ann Labounsky, Patricia Phillips, William Pruitt, Jeanne Rizzo Conner, Kenton Stillwagen, Christopher Tietze; also Fleming Dreisig, Bo Grondbeck, Kirsten Kolling (Denmark), Dorothea Fleischmanova (Czechoslovakia), Folkert Grondsma, Ewald Kooiman, Kees Van Eersel, Ronald Stolk (Netherlands) Marjorie Bruce-Morgan (Great Britain), Norberto Guinaldo (Argentina), Father Marcello Ferreira (Brazil), Anita Rundans, Peter Togni (Canada) and Kjell Johnsen (Norway).

The attitude of these aspiring musicians toward Jean Langlais was universally admiring. As Thomas Kelly, one of his American students from 1964 to 1966 wrote:[60]

> Jean Langlais was a small man, with a clip-on bow tie, dark glasses, the little rosette of

[60] Thomas Forrest Kelly, Morton B. Knafel Professor of Music, Harvard University, letter to Marie-Louise Langlais, January 29, 2014

> the Legion of Honor in his buttonhole, an unbelievable concentration when he was improvising a fugue, a sincere love of God and of Gregorian chant, and amazingly inspiring to watch and to learn from.
> Like most of the major organists of Paris, he had a group of admirers at his organ of Sainte-Clotilde on Sundays morning, who gathered around the organ console high up on the back wall while he played, and then retired behind the organ case with him to smoke and talk during the sermon.
> He taught me a lot about music, and about the freedom needed to improvise: one of the tricks is to profit from your mistakes: if anything sounds really terrible, do it again, and it will be art. Maybe his life was that too: something terrible, his blindness, being reinforced, and being transformed into a wonderful art.
> He loved Gregorian chant, and a trip with him and my fellow-student Marie-Louise Jaquet to the monastery of Solesmes was a strong influence on my own decision to study the beauties of medieval music, and especially of Gregorian chant.
> He has been an important part of my life ever since, and I owe much of my inspiration to him.

From an entirely different artistic domain, Coline Serreau, director of the popular film *Three Men and a Cradle*, was Langlais's organ student at the Schola for two years from 1968 to 1969. She recalled:[61]

> I recall him as a very strong musician, whose blindness had sharpened his hearing to an incredible degree, who played everything from memory without mistakes and who heard everything. Beyond that, in life he was very easygoing and liked to laugh and to make jokes. In his teaching he placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of phrasing. His own phrasing was magnificent, sensitive and full of expression.
> He was Draconian when it came down to clarity and precision of playing, insisting that one should be able to follow every voice of counterpoint. It was a beautiful course in discipline. For me, he was the incarnation of clarity, light, intelligence, and sensitivity at the organ.

- **Boys Town Liturgical Music Workshops**

Jean Langlais's pedagogical activities in the 1960s were not limited to the Institute for The Young Blind and the Schola Cantorum. In addition to teaching numerous master classes, particularly in the US, he participated five times in the *Liturgical Music Workshop* given at Boys Town, Nebraska every two years (1959, 1961, 1963, 1965 and 1967) during the last two weeks of August. We have already described his first trip there in August 1959, accompanied by his son Claude.

It was a difficult experience, given the intensive work schedule and teaching in a chapel without air-conditioning as the heat reached 113 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade. Nonetheless, Jean Langlais accepted Monsignor Wegner's offer to head the organ program at future workshops.

A photograph shows Jean Langlais together with the Boys Town staff, his son Claude, and Kathleen Thomerson at the 1961 Liturgical Music Workshop:

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[61] Pascale Rouet, *Entretien avec Coline Serreau, réalisatrice…et organiste,* in *Dossier Jean Langlais,* in *Orgues Nouvelles,* Spring 2013, n° 20. 8.

Boys Town Liturgical Music Workshop, 1961
2nd row, left, Kathleen Thomerson-3rd row left, Claude Langlais
Figure 50. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

The Boys Town summer workshops witnessed the creation of the *Missa Misericordiae Domini* for three voices and organ in 1959 and *Sacerdos et Pontifex* for unison choir, organ, and two trumpets in 1961, the latter in honor of Archbishop Gerald Bergan, who conferred the medal of Ste. Cecilia upon the composer on the occasion. A photo appeared on the front page of the *Boys Town Times* with the following commentary:[62]

> Archbishop Gerald T. Bergan, president of the Board of Trustees of Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, presents the Medal of Ste. Cecilia to Jean Langlais, organist and composer at the Basilica of Ste. Clotilde in Paris, at the close of the 9th annual Boys Town liturgical music workshop. Mr. Langlais headed the organ program at the 1961 workshop. The Medal of Ste. Cecilia, an exclusive Boys Town award, is given in recognition of outstanding contributions to the field of liturgical music.

Archbishop Bergan presents Jean Langlais with the medal of Ste. Cecilia.
To the composer's left, Claude Langlais. Figure 51. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

[62] Dorothy Kincaid, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 28, 1967. 6.

Two years later the same location saw the premiere of *Psaume Solennel n°1* on August 30, 1963, with the Boys Town choir under the direction of Roger Wagner, accompanied at the organ by Claude Langlais. A journalist conveyed her impressions of Jean Langlais during a reception following the 1967 workshop, just before his return to France:[63]

> The recent workshop and master class at Boys Town brought organ students from all over the United States, Langlais said. It coincided with the 50th anniversary of the famous home for boys. "Oh la, we worked very hard," he said, puffing on his pipe.
> He was greeted affectionately by the Rev. and Mrs. John H. Baumgartner. The pastor of Capitol Drive Lutheran church pressed three packages of pipe tobacco into the organist's hands. "Crosby Square, is that right?" the clergyman asked, recalling a preference expressed by Langlais when he had played recitals at Capitol Drive church. An aura of tobacco smoke surrounded Langlais all evening as he puffed incessantly on his pipe.
> Speaking about Sainte-Clotilde, he said he is paid only a pittance for his work there. "The position is good, the salary is poor. That is why I am obliged to teach a lot." He said he teaches 90 students a week.

1967 proved to be the last year of Langlais's participation in the Boys Town workshops. Steeped as they were in the tradition of Gregorian chant, these workshops disappeared as liturgical music in the United States descended into the vernacular.

Concert Tours of the United States during the 1960s

We concluded the previous chapter with an account of Jean Langlais's fourth American concert tour of 1959. Let us now turn to the trans-Atlantic voyages of the 1960s, which took place in 1962, 1964, 1967, and 1969. On Friday, January 26, 1962, Jean Langlais boarded the SS United States for a tour of 39 recitals in 75 days, an average of one concert every two days through April 11, 1962. The immensity of the country meant some trips lasted up to 24 hours, a testament to the tour-de-force of such an undertaking.

In his journal the composer defended his anti-flying stance:[64]

> Santa Fe, March 20. There is no train station in Santa Fe, a town of 35,000 inhabitants at a elevation of 7,000 feet. Many Native Americans. It's truly very picturesque, one could easily imagine being in the countryside. Returning to the big cities will require a trip of at least thirty hours. I've learned that I have lost many concerts by refusing to take an airplane. Murtagh recently cited a specific example near Montreal, but I am holding firm. Three weeks ago a jet crashed and killed 92.

On the ground Jean Langlais had to contend with trains constantly running late and disrupting his schedule, as he recounts in his travel journal:

> Chambersburg, March 30. Saturday we left Chambersburg for Philadelphia.
> Length of trip: 1 hour and 50 minutes. Train delay: One hour and 40 minutes, and we're not done yet.
> Omaha, April 1. At the train station at 1:18 am, a pithy sign: "special information: train on time!"

[63] Ibid.
[64] Jean Langlais, *Relations de voyage, Etats-Unis, tournée 1962,* unpublished booklet of 33 pages bringing together his letters sent to his wife Jeannette written by his 1962 tour guide Marie Villey.

Plagued by fatigue and nights without sleep, there was also the food, in particular the sweet and salty combinations as unfamiliar to him as they were unappetizing.

Cold weather plagued him everywhere except Florida and the Carolinas. Through it all, Langlais maintained the high artistic level of his recitals. The improvisations that closed them were especially well-received. He gave master classes with increasing frequency, including one at Winthrop College reviewed by the *The Charlotte Observer*:[65]

> "I always say the truth. I have just one opinion." This was the blind organist from France, Jean Langlais, speaking. He was ready to teach a master class at Winthrop College the night before his 140th concert in the United States.
> Composer as well as performer and teacher, he is a small man, with a bald, bulging forehead and longish gray hair. His dark glasses add to, not hide, an air of deep concentration. He seems a little gay cricket of a man in a bright red vest.
> How long does it take to tell how someone plays? "About one minute." He paused, gave a slight dry chuckle and said, "If the technique is not good, one minute is too much." But each of the students in his master class played at least five minutes, while the blind man stood beside the complicated organ in Byrnes Hall, listening, his head down, his brows knotted a little. He reached out occasionally to pull one of the white knobs on the side panels, stoppd a student to make a comment, explain the phrasing or the feeling of a piece. He prompted the students in his master class, guided them:
> "Faster, faster…this is not a lullaby…use pedals, you have two feet…express these magnificent harmonies…listen to the echo…you are very young, practice…beautiful legato…my English is bad, my accent is bad" he apologized and then added, quietly, "But my ear is good." "Everything is too fast in the United States," he said. "For an artist, it is very important to be slow."

Here is a photograph taken at that masterclass:

Masterclass at Winthrop College, March 5, 1962
Figure 52. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

[65] Harriet Doar, *Blind organist says Practice…Practice,* in *The Charlotte Observer,* The Arts, March 18, 1962.

As before, Jean Langlais's recital programs consisted of a mix of French Classic and Romantic repertory, his own works from various stages in his career, and a final improvisation. Taking into account the renewed appreciation of French Classic composers, he included works by Louis Couperin, François Couperin, Nicolas de Grigny, Louis Marchand, Louis-Nicholas Clérambault, and Jean-François Dandrieu on the 1962 tour. César Franck and Louis Vierne continued to dominate his Romantic selections. For his own works he turned to excerpts from *Suite française* and *Neuf Pièces,* plus the "Te Deum." More recent compositions were represented by *Pièce en forme libre, Miniature,* and selections from *American Suite.* During this fifth transatlantic grand tour of 39 recitals, Jean Langlais felt on more familiar territory. Local customs and the American state of mind no longer surprised him. It was with much joy that he encountered some of his oldest and dearest friends: Charles Dodley Walker and Seth Bingham in New York, Theodore Marier and Lynwood Farnham in Boston, Robert Rayfield in Chicago, Harold Gleason and Catherine Crozier in Winter Park, in addition to Robert Lord, Kathleen Thomerson and many others.

Two years would pass before Langlais would make another musical pilgrimage to America. Just before setting out again in 1964 he received an award that meant a great deal to him. The "Prix François Dhuine" was bestowed upon an individual who had enhanced the cultural heritage of his native region in Bretagne, specifically, the area between the Rance and Couesnon rivers known as Dol-de-Bretagne. The prize was conferred "for the sum of his musical work." Jean Langlais was always deeply moved by this tribute from his compatriots.

The tour upon which Langlais embarked on September 30, 1964 would be the most extensive of his career. 44 concerts over 61 days awaited him between October 4 and December 7. He would be accompanied by his brilliant student from the Schola Cantorum, Ann Labounsky.[66] No doubt the intensity of the tour schedule caused Langlais to give up his usual habit of keeping a travel diary, but he did provide a summary upon his return for *Musique et Liturgie*, which we excerpt here:[67]

> In New York, at Saint Thomas Church, I played the "Prière" in C-sharp minor of Franck for the first time in concert. My great emotion as its interpreter was equaled only by that of an audience unaccustomed to hearing this masterpiece which, I must say, sounded almost as it does as Sainte-Clotilde. There was a big reception beforehand where I was able to meet the important organists of New York and its suburbs.
> After the recital there was a gathering at the home of the organist of Saint Thomas Church,[68] where I had a long and friendly conversation with a former president of the AGO. It was one o'clock in the morning yet this likeable man reminded me of the beneficial effects of French influence upon America and of the gratitude his continent feels for our country and our traditions.
> I was invited to teach a class at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, which totals some 30,000 students. The last student had prepared the "Final" from my *Première Symphonie.* Noting her hesitation to begin, I asked if she were ready. Her teacher Marilyn Mason responded, "Be patient, she is looking for the Great to Pedal coupler."

[66] Ann Labounsky was so impressed by Jean Langlais that she wrote her doctoral dissertation and published a book on Langlais, *Jean Langlais, The Man and His Music*. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 2000, 392 pages; in addition she created a DVD, *The Life and* Music *of Jean Langlais* (Mist Media, 2006) and has been the only to record his complete organ works in 13 volumes comprising 26 CDs (Voix du Vent, 2012).
[67] Jean Langlais, *Un organiste français aux Etats-Unis,* in *Musique et Liturgie,* no 103, July-August-September 1965.12
[68] William Self (1908-1996), organist of Saint Thomas in New-York City from 1954 to 1971.

> General laughter followed by a very beautiful performance of my work.
> After my concert in New Orleans the mayor reminded me that his city was an important cultural center. "The proof," said he, "is that you are with us this evening, and just recently it was the Beatles who were here!" This distinguished man immediately made me an honorary citizen and gave me a key to the city.
> I was also very happy to play the beautiful Holtkamp organ in at the Cleveland Museum of Art again. After the concert the organizer said that many people had to stand, due to lack of seats. "You should be very happy," I told him. "No, I had to stand, too." Shortly afterwards, in Pittsburgh, I was very moved to play a recital dedicated to the memory of President Kennedy. At this concert an excellent chorale performed excerpts from the *Requiem* of Fauré as well as my *Déploration.*
> Later, I gave a lecture-demonstration at Union Theological Seminary, a famous school in New York, on the subject, "French music is charming, but it is also much else." Two hundred students attended.
> 44 concerts in 61 days, the very real joy of seeing a great number of my students again, the honor of having striven in favor of French art: *voilà* the best result of my tour.
> I like this continent, I like the enthusiasm of its public, and I have not given up hope to one day appreciate its cuisine.

The director of Union Theological Seminary asked him to stay on to teach organ and improvisation. Tempted by this proposition and its favorable financial terms, the composer hesitated, nearly accepting, as he enjoyed life in New York.

Finally he would decline, but never had he been so close to expatriating to America as at that moment. His guide, Ann Labounsky, noted several details that struck her:[69]

> On November 3, 1964, Langlais flew from Buckhannon, West Virginia to Tallahassee, his first plane travel in the United States.[70] The flight was turbulent, and he panicked, wanting to know what was happening each second.

On the manner in which Jean Langlais accustomed himself to a new instrument she wrote:[71]

> He set as many of the piston changes as possible on general pistons, which he controlled with his feet, then arranged them in order of use according to their order in the program. It was no matter to him that they numbered eight or ten. Usually the entire recital was set on four to six general pistons, with the aid of the manual pistons for extra changes. He always set the manual pistons in the same manner, using a gradual crescendo. The Récit pistons were arranged in the following order: Flute 8; Voix céleste; Flutes 8, 2; Cornet; Principal chorus or reed; Reeds. The Positif was arranged successively: Flute 8; Flutes 8, 4 ; Flutes 8, 2; Principals 8, 4, 2; Principal chorus or full great (depending on the number of pistons).
> It usually took him less than an hour to register his program. As he quickly set the registrations, his reactions to new instruments seemed as intuitive and rapid as they were to new people.

The following tour of 1967 had to be cut short due to tendonitis in Langlais's right arm. Another of his American students, Susan Ferré, dedicatee of *Poem of peace*, was his guide. It enjoyed the success of his previous tours, as witnessed by the newspaper headlines that greeted his performances:

> **"OVATION FOR A PARIS ORGANIST"**
> Thomas Putnam, *Chicago Sun-Times,* January 25, 1967

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[69] Ann Labounsky, *Jean Langlais, the man and his music*, Amadeus Press, Portland, Oregon, 2000, 392 pages.
[70] That was to be noted!
[71] Ibid. 206

"BLIND ORGANIST'S RECITAL THRILLS TRINITY AUDIENCE"
Doris Reno, *Miami Herald*, February 1, 1967

"BLIND ORGANIST GIVES MASTERFUL PERFORMANCE"
Peter Heterlenny, *Oakland Tribune*, February 11, 1967

"JEAN LANGLAIS PROVES VIRTUOSITY"
Rocky Mountain News, Denver, Colorado, February 27, 1967

Susan Ferré gave her strong impression of the tour: [72]

> Monsieur Langlais has a fantastic memory. Sometimes drawing thousands of listeners to his concerts, he usually receives a standing ovation and sometimes listeners stand even before he has finished!

In his account for *Le Louis Braille*, a journal intended for the blind, Jean Langlais confirmed:[73]

> Before my concert in Denver the organist told me the cathedral had only been filled to capacity once, for Alexander Schreiner, organist of the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City. All the Mormons had come from far and wide. He added, "Naturally, we don't expect such a crowd this evening." At intermission he stopped by to explain that one hundred chairs had been added. In spite of that a large number of listeners still had to stand. "Were you aware of that?" he asked. "I am only aware that I am not a Mormon organist," I replied. "Since applause is not allowed in the cathedral would you do us the honor of concluding your program with the Marseillaise?" he continued.
> I agreed willingly and thus our national anthem was heard by more than 3,000 listeners, all standing.
> At Columbus, Ohio I experienced a day such as America reserves for its guests: 7 am, arrival at the train station; 8 am, invitation to breakfast; 9 am, television interview; 10 am, reception at the church; noon, invitation to lunch; 1 pm, practice at the church; 4 pm, masterclass followed by discussion with the participants; 7 pm, invitation to dinner; 8 pm, recital; 10 pm, reception; midnight, board the train for a 23-hour ride.

In spite of the memory of physical pain that interrupted the 1967 tour, two years later Jean Langlais did not hesitate to undertake another, his eighth and last. He set sail on the SS France in the autumn of 1969, greatly appreciating its legendary comfort. His guide was Colette Lequien, wife of his friend the poet Edmond Lequien. After several concerts, however, she found the task too exhausting and she left.

> It was thus, to my great surprise, that I received a cable to join him in Boston by the first available flight, even though I had never been to the United States.[74] I shall never forget my arrival there, the charming welcome from Theodore Marier and his wife, and the piano recital by Robert Casadesus we heard that evening in Symphony Hall. What a day!
> The high point of this final tour was undoubtedly the Pontifical Concelebrated Mass for Peace on November 10, 1969 at the largest Catholic church in the United States, the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. A congregation estimated at 7,000 included seven cardinals and 175 bishops in addition to domestic and foreign government officials. For this grand occasion Jean Langlais composed his *Solemn Mass "Orbis Factor"* for mixed choir, congregation, organ, trumpets, and trombones. The congregational part was taken by the combined choirs of the US military academies (West Point, US Naval Academy, US Air Force Academy) while the National Shrine Chorale formed the mixed choir in the organ gallery. All told, the performing forces numbered 500. Jean Langlais concluded this exceptional premiere with a monumental

[72] Susan Ferré, *The Skiff,* February 7, 1967.
[73] Jean Langlais, *Mon 7ème Voyage aux Etats-Unis,* in *Le Louis Braille*, October 1967.
[74] Personal remembrances of the present author.

improvisation on the *Hymne de Lourdes.*
A small personal anecdote: when the composer came downstairs after the final improvisation a charming older woman timidly took his arm and said, "I simply wanted to touch you once in my life." "But I am not the Christ!" was his response.

The *Solemn Mass "Orbis Factor"* was recorded live and the LP was already on sale just a few days later. Its duration (15 minutes) and musical forces recall the *Missa Salve Regina* of 1954, but in English rather than Latin. The new mass was also more austere in style, perhaps in view of the solemnity of the occasion and the vast dimensions of the basilica.

The choral parts, both congregational and mixed, are almost exclusively homophonic and monosyllabic, conveying an impression of stiffness that one is not accustomed to in Langlais's music. 1969 marked the end of the extended American concert tours that lasted two months or more. Henceforth Jean Langlais would return to the United States for ever briefer periods, two or three weeks at most.

At the end of the 1960s, Jean Langlais experienced one of the great joys of his professional life. Inducted into the Legion of Honor in 1965, he was decorated with the officer's rosette on October 20, 1968 by Olivier Messiaen in a ceremony organized by the Association Valentin Haüy. At his friend's request, Messiaen improvised extensively at the piano on the occasion. A photograph captures the moment when Messiaen decorates Langlais.

Messiaen decorates Jean Langlais for *Officier de la Legion d'Honneur*, October 20, 1968.
Figure 53. (photograph by Claude Langlais. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

Honored, celebrated, and performed, Jean Langlais appeared to have arrived at the summit of his career in spite of numerous obstacles. Certain trials awaited him in the decade to come, however, ones that would affect him deeply.