

A black and white photograph of Charles Tournemire, an elderly man with white hair, wearing a dark suit and tie. He is seated on a bench, playing a large organ. His hands are on the keyboard, and his feet are on the pedals. The organ has multiple manuals and a music stand with sheet music. The background shows the interior of a church or concert hall with wooden paneling and a doorway.

**Charles TOURNEMIRE**

**MEMOIRS**

*Edited by*  
**Marie-Louise Langlais**

# CHARLES TOURNEMIRE

## MEMOIRS

Edited by **Marie- Louise Langlais**

**MEMOIRS** translated by **Susan Landale**

“Introduction and Epilogue” translated by **Shirley Parry**

Footnotes and additional Letters translated by **Rebecca Oualid**

Translations harmonized by **Shirley Parry**



**Charles Tournemire in his forties**  
(Odile Weber collection)

# Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to the translators of this book whose role has been indispensable. It has been a difficult and delicate task, knowing that Charles Tournemire's language was often complex; he sometimes even invented French words which, for a translator, can be a nightmare!

In 2014, I edited the French long version of Tournemire's *Memoirs*, but I then had the idea that an English translation of this text, limited to material relating to music and the world of the organ and organists, would be useful and welcomed. This is that work.

To translate the *Memoirs*, **Susan Landale** came immediately to mind as an authority on Tournemire and also as someone perfectly bilingual. Born in Scotland, she came to France at the end of the 1950s to study with André Marchal, the famous French blind organist. Winner of the first International Organ Competition at the St Albans Festival, England, she has firmly established a worldwide reputation as a brilliant concert organist and a renowned teacher, in frequent demand for master classes, seminars, and as a juror for leading international organ competitions. She taught for a long time at the National Conservatoire in Rueil-Malmaison (France). She is currently Visiting Professor of organ at the Royal Academy of Music in London and organist at the Cathedral Saint-Louis des Invalides, Paris. Renowned for her recordings of Olivier Messiaen and Peter Eben, she also developed an affinity for the music of Charles Tournemire which she has recorded and often plays. She translated the present selected parts of Charles Tournemire's *Memoirs* with a tireless energy and a commitment to rendering the composer's thoughts as accurately as possible.

**Shirley C. Parry**, Ph.D., Professor of English Emerita at Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland, and a lover of both organ music and French, is an experienced translator and editor. In charge of the translation of my own "Introduction," notes and "Epilogue," she also had the responsibility of harmonizing the translation of the whole book, a delicate work for which I am very grateful. Shirley translated part of and also harmonized the full English translation of my "Jean Langlais Remembered," an Internet book published by the AGO in 2016.

**Rebecca Oualid** translated the footnotes and some selected letters that are part of the text of the *Memoirs*. Passionate about the English language, having obtained in France a degree in English, she currently studies the organ.

**Alice Bénévise** was in charge of the layout for the whole document. Organist titulaire of the Cathedral St. Cyr and Ste. Julitte in Nevers, France, she organizes, with her husband Matthieu Germain, the renowned Organ Festival “Nevers les Orgues” and teaches organ at the Conservatoires of Imphy and Cosne-sur-Loire.

I am grateful to Christian Lesur, Richard Isée-Knowles and the late Odile Weber, who died on February 8, 2018, all of whom were very supportive of this English version of the *Memoirs*.

Many thanks to French musicologist Joël-Marie Fauquet, whose help and friendship have been important for me. In 1979, he created the first catalogue of Tournemire’s works. In addition, in 2006, he gave the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris a collection of 985 manuscript letters which had been sent to Tournemire from all over the world, and which Alice Tournemire had entrusted to him. Some of these letters, which illuminate facts that Tournemire includes in his *Journal* and which provide information about Tournemire’s life and personality, are included in the text of the *Memoirs*.

John Walker, a close friend since the 1970s, has always been closely involved in this project. His help in arranging the publication of these *Memoirs* by the AGO has been invaluable. I thank him with all my heart.

Marie-Louise Langlais  
Paris, June 2020

# *Introduction*

by Marie-Louise Langlais

For a long time, there were rumors that Charles Tournemire had written his *Memoirs*, but in the absence of any publication, their content appeared both hypothetical and mysterious.

The current president of the Baudelaire Society,<sup>1</sup> Richard Isée Knowles, who read the complete manuscript, testified:

In 1972, I was 22 years old. A graduate of the Paris Conservatory in the class of Norbert Dufourcq, I was just about to devote myself to philosophical and literary studies at Oxford when Alice Tournemire,<sup>2</sup> Tournemire's second wife and widow, who was then 73 years old, invited me to assist in editing the manuscript of the *Memoirs*. She had known my sister Pamina and me from the time that we were small children, having formed an abiding friendship with our mother, the violinist Lucia Artopoulos, winner of the first prize at the Paris Conservatory and a student of Thibaud and Enesco.

Here is the scene: we were coming for tea. Alice leaves the table and brings back a cardboard box from which she removes scattered fragments of the *Memoirs* handwritten by the composer. The yellowed sheets with fragile borders were often torn. At times numbered, certain pages were hastily drafted, even written on the back of a concert program.

Hardly had I finished my first reading of this nearly 300-page manuscript when, brusquely, Alice handed me a pair of scissors. Imperiously, she exhorted me to eliminate all those passages that contravened a logical sequence of thoughts or events, but also those that deviated from "delicate feelings" (said Alice). Since, censorship has always inspired in me a moral and intellectual disgust, I immediately declined the honor of being the co-editor of Tournemire's *Memoirs*; the editing of this manuscript was henceforth now her sole responsibility.

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<sup>1</sup> A French learned society to which gravitated the most eminent artists and writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tournemire presided over it for a while.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Espir, awarded first prize for violin in Lefort's class at the Paris Conservatory in 1921, was Tournemire's student in his music ensemble class at the Conservatory beginning in 1919, the first year of Tournemire's appointment. Her marriage to Charles Tournemire was celebrated 15 years later, on Saturday, July 21, 1934, in Paris. She was 32 years old; he was 64.

The categorical refusal of Richard Isée Knowles to collaborate in the editing of the Memoirs should have put an end to Alice's project and the definitively lost text. Such was not the case, however. The widow of Charles Tournemire was stubborn; she wanted her "great man" to receive the homage he deserved. The Memoirs were going to appear, she had decided; it was her sacred mission.

Having failed in 1974 to co-edit the Memoirs with Richard Isée Knowles, twenty years later Alice Tournemire resumed her initial project and decided to bring them back to life in a version that was edited "as Tournemire himself would have done."

She had no children, and when her niece Odile and nephew Denis asked her in 1991 what she wanted as a 90th birthday present, she replied, to their stupefaction, "a document shredder." What did Alice want to make disappear? Old papers of no value, old bills? More likely the original manuscript of her husband's Memoirs, after she had reduced it in size by two-thirds. Therefore, she searched for a secretary with one idea in mind: that once these Memoirs were dictated into a machine, in a version edited in her own way to the glory of Tournemire, she would make the pages of the original manuscript disappear into the shredder.

At the end of 1992 at the age of 91, she engaged Sylvie Schwartz, a young teacher and translator, who for six months came to Alice's house on rue Notre Dame des Champs in Paris twice a week for two-hour sessions and typed the text which was dictated to her. From time to time, "not very often" the secretary remembered, Alice interrupted her reading with the commentary "We can't include what follows. There are survivors, and that could hurt them."

Alice Tournemire thus unwaveringly carried out her project right to its end, but what happened to it after her death on September 14, 1996? The question that immediately arose to her only heirs, her niece Odile Weber and her nephew Denis Freppel, was: What to do with the typed manuscript which no publisher wanted?

Odile Weber initially authorized certain musicologists, namely Stephen Schloesser, S. J.<sup>3</sup> and Pascal Ianco,<sup>4</sup> to make photocopies of the typed manuscript, and the Memoirs served both as a central resource for their research and publications. Later, in 2012, she agreed to an almost complete manuscript being published on the Internet by the present author (Marie-Louise Langlais, *Eclats de Mémoire*, 172 pages, in French).

“Enough years have passed since the death of Charles Tournemire in 1939,” she told the present author, “and most of the people from that time who might have been hurt by the composer’s words, have today disappeared. Therefore, there is no longer any obstacle to its publication.”

These Memoirs are reproduced here selectively; that is, they include only the parts that deal with the organ and the organ world. Certain episodes, like his meeting with César Franck in 1888, are invaluable, while others are more anecdotal. The stances Tournemire took, always excessive, today sometimes sound strangely accurate, and they paint a faithful portrait of an innovative Catholic artist who, rightly or wrongly, considered himself to be misunderstood.

The typescript falls into three distinct sections:

In the first part, Tournemire evokes his childhood memories of Bordeaux, his arrival in Paris in 1886, and his years of study at the Paris Conservatory. His commentary, full of verve, testifies to his lively curiosity. Then he evokes the beginnings of his professional life, his appointment as organist titulaire at Sainte-Clotilde in 1898, his lean years, his 1900 meeting of his future wife, Alice Georgina Taylor and their subsequent marriage in 1903. Alice, an exceptional woman of English origin, wealthy and cultivated,

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Schloesser, S.J., Professor of History at Loyola University of Chicago, author with Jennifer Donelson of *Mystic Modern: The Music, Thought and Legacy of Charles Tournemire*, Richmond, Virginia, Church Music Association of America, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Pascal Ianco, *Charles Tournemire*, Geneva, éditions Papillon, 2001.

opened to him the riches of literature while allowing him, thanks to her fortune, to devote himself exclusively to composition. Guided by the French writers with whom she was obsessed, Joséphin Péladan, her brother-in-law, but also Ernest Hello and Léon Bloy, she introduced him to a number of books dealing with history and religion. In this way Alice would provide for her husband a true literary, historical and religious culture that became a starting point for his personal and musical reflections.

In the second part, Tournemire “scientifically” creates an annotated catalogue of his works, accompanied by a list of the performances that were devoted to each. He recalls his successes, his concerts, some comments he made about certain students, his appointment to the music ensemble class at the Paris Conservatory, and then in November 1919, his painful grieving for his wife, who died in 1920.

The third part, which begins with 1933, is the most important because of its length and historical value.<sup>5</sup> It is a true “Journal,” written day by day, recounting the highlights of his life, such as the 1933 restoration of “his” organ at Sainte-Clotilde, and his second marriage with Alice Espir in 1934.

In this “Journal,” he provides numerous details about the musical life of his time, hurriedly citing newspaper articles and critics, carefully copying the most important letters to him from correspondents from all over the world.

Then, as time passes, apart from the huge worldwide success of his *L’Orgue Mystique*, Tournemire has a growing sense of frustration, a certainty that he is neither understood nor truly appreciated. This negative feeling increases, leading him to withdraw into himself, especially since his financial situation, which became critical following his second marriage in 1934, burdens and worries him.

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<sup>5</sup> This section, “Journal,” comprises about two-thirds of the entire *Memoirs*.



At the end of the 1930s, he has no more illusions. His health and money problems accumulate. Foreseeing the imminent arrival of the dreaded war with Germany, during the summer of 1939 he and his wife take refuge with his sister Berthe in Arcachon until the fateful day when a fisherman would find him lifeless in the bottom of a pinasse<sup>6</sup> in an oyster park in the Arcachon basin on November 4, 1939, feast day of St. Charles.<sup>7</sup>

Thus ended the life of one of the seminal figures and one of the most original organist-composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who had during his life entered into a kind of purgatory if one considers the enormity of his catalogue: 76 works, including 7 symphonies for full orchestra, oratorios, chamber music, pieces for solo piano, and an immense body of work for organ, of which L'Orgue Mystique forms the luminous center.

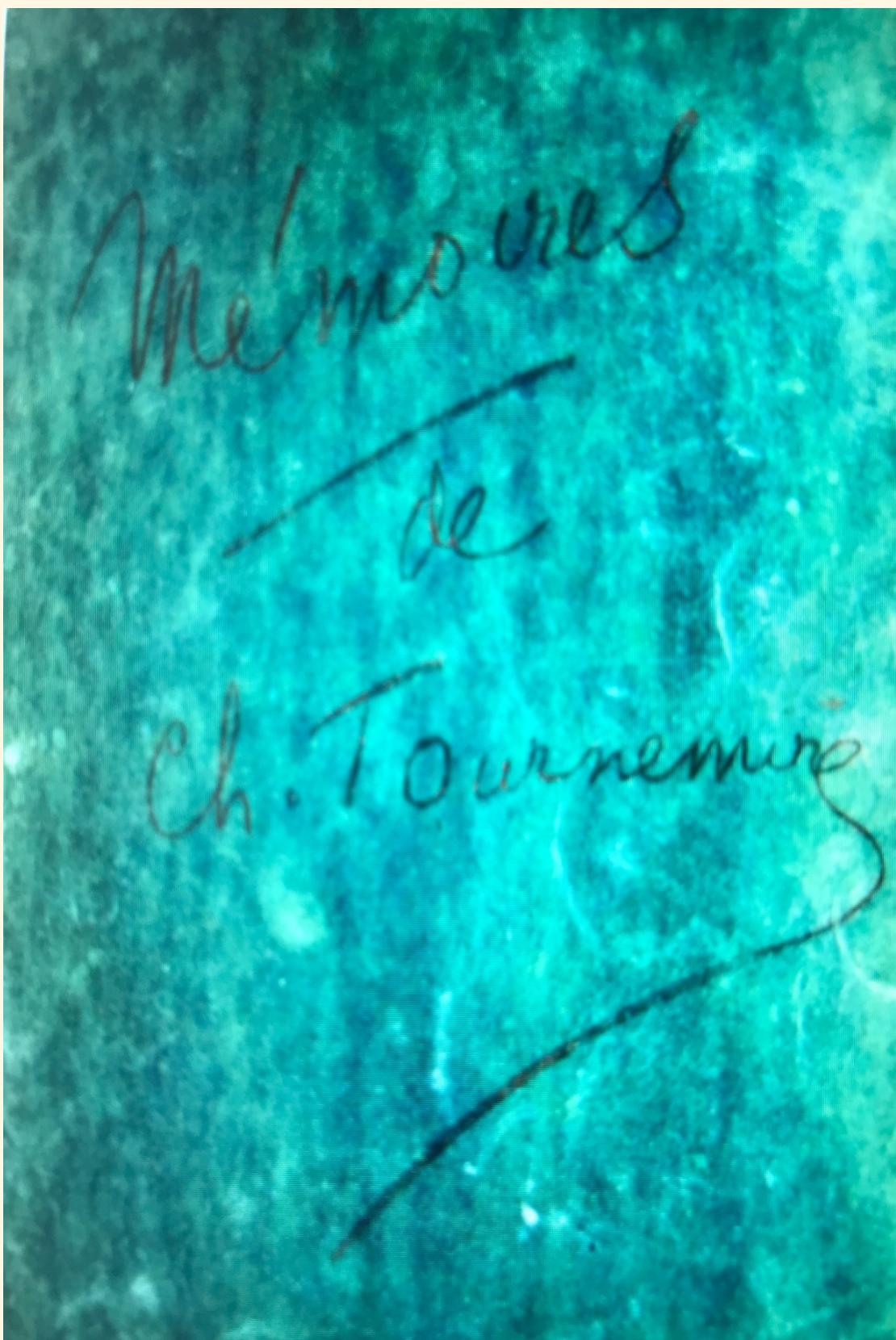
Believing himself to be the equal of Bach or Beethoven as a pre-eminent “generalist” composer, he never wanted to be considered as anything but the greatest organist and liturgical improviser of his time, the consecrated organist of the Sainte-Clotilde organ and the best-selling composer of L'Orgue Mystique.

May these Memoirs, here shortened in their English translation to bring out the essence of his life and works, clarify his journey a bit more and give his due to one of the most fascinating and original French composers of his time,” whose somewhat extreme credo (“All music from which God is absent is USELESS”) distanced him a bit more from his contemporaries...

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<sup>6</sup> A traditional boat used to carry the oysters in the Arcachon basin.

<sup>7</sup> According to the report from the Arcachon police, dated November 4, 1939, the finding was of “an accidental death by drowning.”



**The original workbook cover of Tournemire's *Memoirs***  
(Baudelaire Society archives)

## Charles Tournemire - *MEMOIRS*

So-and-so is writing his memoirs! Or: someone has written the memoirs or an homage to So-and so! Something which can at times be sensational like, notably, the Memorial of Sainte-Helena.<sup>8</sup> An event of world-class importance if in honor of a great but little known person, or of a justly famous name; but diminishing in interest depending on the subject, whether it is a question of fraudulent fame and so on until one reaches a standstill.

Writing about good or bad digestion, favorite working hours, certain material habits of everyday life, more or less indiscreet weaknesses, what do these things matter? Only one thing is important: the moral and philosophical scope based on the knowledge of life. This can only be usefully undertaken at, or near, the end of the third cycle of human life; so, I am going to give it a try!

The first sixteen years of my life seem to be of very meagre interest! From my first wailing (Bordeaux, January 22, 1870) until my arrival in Paris, 1886, I won't retain much: a turbulent childhood, education in a somewhat mediocre day school, a prize awarded at age eleven at the Bordeaux conservatoire; at the same age, titular of the choir organ in Saint-Pierre's church; at fourteen, choir organist of the Saint-Seurin Basilica, a distinguished monument, final shelter for the countless pilgrims who each year in the Middle Ages walked across a large part of France, bearing witness to their faith in ardent prayers and religious practices inside the huge churches all along their way (among the most famous being Notre-Dame la Grande in Poitiers, Saint-Eutrope in Saintes, and lastly Saint-Seurin mentioned above).<sup>9</sup>

1886! Farewell to a mother who was all tenderness, high and heartfelt intelligence Then... Paris!!

Dazzling, incomprehensible, bewildering!

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<sup>8</sup> *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, story about the last years of Napoleon Bonaparte during his stay on the island of Saint-Helena, gathered by Emmanuel Las. Cases.

<sup>9</sup> Pilgrimage of Santiago de Compostela.

First contact with the Conservatoire National de Musique. Admission into two classes: harmony and advanced piano. Augustin Taudou was the professor of harmony: his teaching was “clean” but excessively timid: it was only a matter of hunting down consecutive fifths, of imitations which above all one must not miss under threat of immediate excommunication; and, in the realization of a chant or a figured bass, of harmonies which should be as close as possible to those of the author.

Augustin Taudou simply couldn't stomach me. How many times, in reading my exercises – full of fifths which I liked for their lovely sonority – did I hear him say: “You are not a musician! You will never be one!!!” Twenty-five years later, this poor elderly man, came with emotion to congratulate me on a psalm for choir and orchestra of my composition, performed at the Society of Concerts of the Paris Conservatoire under the deplorable direction of André Messager.

My piano professor, Charles de Bériot,<sup>10</sup> La Malibran's son, was intelligent but limited. He abused the “tempo rubato” which brought to his style something abrupt and grimacing. There was nothing calm in his teaching. He found the music of César Franck odious. “This music,” he often said, “laments in a continuous stream.” But to be just, I must add that Charles de Bériot composed, not without talent, picturesque piano music. The corporation of pianists has forgotten this musician. I also had as a piano teacher, outside the Conservatoire, the renowned Henri Fissot,<sup>11</sup> admirable technician and composer of refined taste.

In between times, remembering that I had “shaken the rafters” (played the organ and how!) at Saint-Pierre and Saint-Seurin in Bordeaux, I wanted to find out, shored up by the Bordeaux pride and stupidity – something special – if the sorts of organists one spoke of throughout the world really had “what it took.” I listened to Guilmant at La Trinité, Gigout at Saint-Augustin, Sir Charles-Marie

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Wilfrid de Bériot (1833-1914), pianist, composer and piano teacher, appointed at the Paris Conservatoire in 1887. He was also Maurice Ravel's, Ricardo Vines' and Ermend-Bonnal's piano teacher, the latter being one of Charles Tournemire's future disciples and successor at Sainte-Clotilde.

<sup>11</sup> Henri Fissot, born in 1843, pianist, composer, titular organist of Saint-Merry and Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, appointed piano teacher at the Paris Conservatoire in 1887.

Widor at Saint-Sulpice. The pretentious little idiot from Bordeaux that I was, declared himself satisfied!

There was just one I had forgotten: César Franck, who, later on became my master and whom I was to follow at the Sainte-Clotilde Basilica.<sup>12</sup> This forgetfulness came from the relative obscurity in which this great musician lived. But God watched over me and guided me mysteriously to Sainte-Clotilde one Sunday in November. I entered the Basilica during the office of Vespers. I didn't know either the name of the church or that of the organist.



**The Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde**  
(Lithography by Ph. Benoist, Marie-Louise Langlais collection)

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<sup>12</sup> The church of Sainte-Clotilde was erected as a Basilica in 1897 by the will of Pope Leo XIII.

God in heaven! When I heard the improvised verses of the Magnificat, I thought I was seeing the firmament open and let fall to earth a long procession of blue and rose angels.

Such emotion was just what I needed to distance myself from my teachers; however, for the sake of decency, I remained with them for one more year. At the piano, I felt strong enough to obtain the first prize; but due to excessive work, eight to nine hours per day, the “pianist’s cramp” got hold of me a month before the exam, and it became impossible to continue to “pound the ivories” for quite a long time. I told Charles de Bériot about my accident. Reply: “Coward!” Clearly he was a man with a heart.

My other teacher, Augustin Taudou, the pitiless hunter of parallel fifths, and still obstinately convinced that I was not gifted for music, had nevertheless counted on me to obtain a respectable award in the harmony exam at the end of the year. An imitation omitted in my realization of the figured bass (what a crime!) saw me relegated to the attic of modest “honorable mention.” One consolation – if I dare say so – awaited me there where the rats enjoy themselves: the presence of one as feebly rewarded as myself, Reynaldo Hahn, author of *Ciboulette*.

Disgusted with my two classes at the Conservatoire, I turned towards the great musician of Sainte-Clotilde, whom moreover, I had never ceased to frequent as a discreet listener in his church. I decided to present myself to the seraphic master. So, I went to knock on the door of his home, 95 boulevard Saint-Michel, a sort of barrack, then in a state of total decay ... and which was soon to disappear!

An elderly lady, with a lace bonnet, opened the door. It was Mme César Franck herself. The master was out. I came back the following day and was introduced to the “maître” for whom I had a secret admiration. With the particular loquacity of those stupid folk of Bordeaux, I told him of my enthusiasm for his “fine talent (!)” He opened his eyes wide; if I had been older, I would have understood straight away that Franck was one of the “Great” around whom his contemporaries had cruelly organized the terrible vacuum

which Cervantes, Leonardo da Vinci, Shakespeare and so many others experienced, especially at the end of their wonderful lives!

The trite compliment I gave him, out of the mouth of a young man, provoked a reaction surely due to his misfortunes: he embraced me, hugged me and said “So you like my improvisations?”

I leave it to the sensitive heart, to the intelligent mind, the task of meditating on this painfully tragic scene! The warmth of such a welcome awoke in me respect, admiration and confidence in this elderly man with his large forehead and extraordinarily mobile eyes. I went straight to the point. I told him of my disillusion at the Conservatoire. His face became a little severe, no doubt expressing his apparent disapproval of the opinion I expressed about my educators.

“So,” he said to me in a deep, slightly hollow voice, “you are not afraid to be dubbed a defector, if after hearing you I take you into my net?” I didn’t know what “a defector” meant. He explained it to me. My reply was “I would be so happy to work with you!”

- “Very well, sit down at the piano.”

I played him a few *Etudes* by Chopin. He was quite pleased. He even asked me to improvise on a free theme. I have absolutely no memory of what I did ... other than the following phrase falling from the lips of the greatest improviser of the time: “It’s childish, but there is nevertheless something there! I’ll take you into my organ class at the Conservatoire.”

Three months later I had become – I can say it without false pride – the best student of this class which has remained famous. At the examinations at the end of the academic year, I found myself with a “first accessit,” an award which did not satisfy my teacher. And while following the organ curriculum at the Conservatoire, I studied counterpoint and fugue with the “heir” of the ideas of the thirteenth century. Which is what prompted me to write in my little book *César Franck* the following phrase: “It is a miracle the XIIIth century’s perfume had not evaporated... It was smelled by the Frescobaldi, Wagner, Verlaine, César

Franck and some others... Why does the present generation turn away from those prophetic geniuses?"<sup>13</sup>

I had the infinitely precious advantage of working in the organ class, veritable center of the study of composition and on top of this, a weekly private lesson admirably completed my musical education. The "counterpoint exercise" had to be of complete purity. Invariably it was based on a plainchant theme in the manner of the early masters. The "lesson on fugue" was essentially classical, but broad. There was a reward: composition...

One never came out demoralized from lessons with the sublime musician; but certain remarks, expressed in a few words, generally soft and penetrating, striking and just, brought brightness to the soul and warmed the heart. The "influences" inescapably encountered, made him smile. How often, on our side, did we hear him say "Seek yourselves"; "You'll need years!"... The kindness of César Franck was immeasurable. If he lived for a transcendent art, he knew nevertheless how to focus on the lives of those who came to him. He possessed to a high degree the intelligence of the heart.

The art of improvisation was taken to a high degree of intensity. Teaching by example was the norm. As soon as a fugue subject was proposed, our *maître* sat down at the keyboard and found almost spontaneously several counter-subjects. So, we had the choice...but for us this luxury of "examples" was the source of great torment! In our turn we sat at the enchanted keyboard...and, alas, got completely lost in the wilderness.

Impossible to extricate oneself! Franck became impatient: "But since I just showed you..."

His voice was severe, paternal, slightly husky; I have already said hollow. The free theme, for those with imagination, was the exquisite "moment"... We based our improvisations on sonata form, which enabled us to create the second idea and to combine it with the "mother theme" as would be necessary. "Quite amusing" was the invariable remark, "amusing" as we completed, not without difficulty, the first section, and then the inevitable "something else!"

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<sup>13</sup> Charles Tournemire, *César Franck*, Delagrave, Paris, 1931, pp. 9-10.



These two words of our *maître* pulled us out of a relative torpor. Then - inevitably- we banged down the swell pedal through incapacity! Then, full sail ahead, we navigated as we could! When danger loomed, help was always there... The return of the theme was something sought after. As we like to remember the advice of “Papa,” subtlety, the unexpected. And when we succeeded, a sonorous “I like that!” gave us a special joy. Thus, was our *maître*: a teacher full of fire, a wonderful heart!”

He died at the age of sixty-eight!

The funeral was simple, celebrated at Sainte-Clotilde. At the cemetery, we were only about thirty. A storm added to the sadness of that unforgettable day of November 10, 1890. The breaking of the storm seemed to blend with the anguish of our hearts and to reproach men for their injustice towards one of the most sheer geniuses that ever existed. The gusts of wind and rain allowed us nevertheless to perceive the words of Emmanuel Chabrier: “Adieu, Maître, and thank you! For you have done well! He whom we salute is one of the greatest artists of this century!” I lost not only an ideal master, but also a father!

The day after his death, a Sunday, I accomplished my task of being organist (my *maître* had found me a job at the church of Saint-Médard in Paris). What a service! My eyes were so flooded with tears I couldn’t read the texts of the day. Mournful improvisations poured out into the nave! It was certainly non-liturgical. The gentlemen of the clergy, almost always deprived of understanding, the choirmaster, according to the rules, as ignorant as one could wish, noticed nothing unusual. Thus, I could taste, if I may say so, the voluptuousness of the heart’s distress, as one can at the age of twenty.

Two months after this event, which was a catastrophe for me, Ambroise Thomas<sup>14</sup> - musician on the borderline of music - had the idea of choosing Sir Charles-Marie Widor over Alexandre Guilmant as successor to the “musician of angels.” I shall never forget the new professor’s arrival on tiptoe, like a ballerina in a tutu. His offhand air, his sloping forehead, his long neck, everything

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<sup>14</sup> Ambroise Thomas (1811-1896), Grand Prix de Rome, opera composer, composition professor, director of the Paris Conservatoire from 1871 until 1896.

resembling an “egg in an egg-cup,” a gaudy-colored jacket made by the first tailor on hand, waistcoat and trousers to match, immediately rendered the personage intolerable to me. I had just left the gravity of Franck’s attire and the second-rate cut of Widor’s well-worn clothes...The author of *Les Béatitudes* had inherited as his successor the author of *La Korrigane*, a ballet for the deprived subscribers at the Opera.

What particularly shocked me about this man was the unawareness and the superficiality with which he took possession of this illustrious chair! We shall see by what follows that my first glance had been mathematically exact. Through the administration of the Conservatoire he had collected information about each of us. Thus, he had learnt that I was at the head of the class and therefore was the “whiz-kid” who could bring honor to him at the final exams at the end of the year.

The first contact between the new professor and myself was a disaster! The words “watery music” after my first free improvisation, sounded outrageous to my ears. I remember, as if it was yesterday, my retort: “Watery music? Do you realize that what you have just heard is the reflection of the wonderful teaching of César Franck, my *maître*?”...

There followed a frigidity, which, as one will see in what follows, degenerated on the side of Charles-Marie von Widor into a deep and absurdly long-lasting hatred toward me. For the next six months, incessant conflicts, always on the subject of Franck: intolerable criticism notably of the *Trois Chorals*: “The writing of these organ works is mediocre: the pedal part is nonexistent.”

All that I must retain of the six months spent close to the organist of Saint-Sulpice was his formidable technique. We knew he was the most brilliant pupil of Lemmens. With his ability to teach, he rapidly restored the standard of the class uniquely from the point of view of execution. It would be bad grace and essentially unjust not to recognize it.

Here are some of the principles which I valuably retained and which are included in my preface to the *Chorales* of Buxtehude (ed. Schola Cantorum).

- At the organ, repeated notes must be played with particular care. We are not playing the piano!

- The staccato, at the organ, has nothing to do with that of the piano – I ought to say with “those,” for at the piano there are two: the staccato of the wrist and that of the finger, in one articulation. On the contrary, at the organ, we have only one, a doubled articulation.

- Accents: we have only one way of expressing them: insisting on the notes which must be accentuated. This is very important, but must be applied with the greatest tact. Exaggeration will fatally end in ridicule.

We should note, that for the overall performance at the organ, the hands should be held in a slightly low position, the body fairly distant from the manuals (according to the physique of each player), leaning slightly forward like a cyclist on his machine, knees together, and the feet also, insofar as is possible.

-Never hit the organ. (A word to the wise...!)

The attack from a height doesn't mean anything; it must be extremely close to the keys and with great precision. The finger therefore has the role of a little hammer, which on striking, makes the note speak. For legato suppleness is specially recommended. And, obviously, for the ensemble of the above principles, suppleness is the achievement of all technique. By extension, we find it in an infinite number of cases. Johann Sebastian Bach played very close to the keyboard,<sup>15</sup> one didn't see his fingers moving. One last remark (the fruit of more than forty years of personal experience), the legato, scrupulously based on the “linking” of sounds, consists of only passing from one note to the next after leaving the “overlapping” note as if with regret, in order to fill that little gap which otherwise exists if this important rule is not observed. There would be a thousand things to add to the principles of organ technique which I have mentioned, but that would leave the subject and character of “Memoirs.”

In the present case, it's not a question of writing an organ method. Thus, I must hurry back to the story of my life! The hour of the end of my - purely musical - moral suffering came in July 1891, when I was delivered from the organ class with a first prize in organ and improvisation, awarded by ten voices

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<sup>15</sup> Tournemire refers to a print by Edouard-Jean-Conrad Hamman (1819-1888) who, in his series of engravings representing life scenes of famous characters, evoked J.S. Bach playing the organ.

out of eleven. The missing voice was the expression of personal vengeance on the part of a candidate who had been disqualified in his search to be professor of the organ class; his vengeance was directed against Widor, the fortunate competitor elected to the succession of Franck. This very ugly gesture made Ambroise Thomas furious and he protested energetically calling it an injustice... (Widor himself told me this).

A year of military service in Bordeaux pulled me out of my artistic dreams. As dreams, they were not very consistent. Between 1880 and 1891, apart from improvisations, I had written pieces for piano and for organ: *The Deliverance of Israel* (oratorio), melodies, an allegro for a trio of piano and strings; *Hernani* (opera), *Didon* (cantata) *La Paix* (cantata), two masses; a comic opera, a prelude and fugue for piano. All these attempts were voluntarily destroyed.

Back in Paris, after the year spent in the barracks, I had to think about earning my living. An opportunity presented itself: the post of organist and professor of piano at the Jesuit college, rue de Madrid. Five hundred gold-francs per month. It was a fortune!

The work was somewhat arduous: every morning at half past seven, accompaniment of abominable hymns during the mass; piano lessons from eleven in the morning until one thirty in the afternoon; thus, it was impossible to sustain oneself at normal hours. However, that could be coped with and it was nothing compared to the moral suffering I endured in the Jesuit community. Dictatorial, contemptuous towards those who depended on them, passive and accommodating towards those on whom they depended, these gentlemen really hurt me, and I confess having found a secret pleasure in reading *Les Provinciales* by Pascal...I found there a kind of healing. What was the last straw in my disgust at these lamentable disciples of Loyola was meeting a father recently arrived at the holy house, rue de Madrid.

He was a one-time secretary in the Senate, exaggeratedly smoking a pipe, spitting loudly. An imaginary researcher (!) of musical ideas, he used me. Believing he was inspired, scorning the honest work necessary to develop a technique acquired day by day, he sank into the lowest possible amateurism. Three or four bars of an impossible theme had no sooner left his clouded brain

than I immediately had the task not only to continue and develop them, but also to harmonize, construct and orchestrate. It consisted of no less than creating overtures and dramas for the use of Jesuit colleges throughout the world.

To this effect I wrote hundreds of pages. And I must add, to this great labor, an innumerable quantity of hymns and anthems. All this went to a Parisian publisher by the name of Pérégally. The author pocketed thousands of francs a year. Needless to say, I never saw the color of the reverend father's gains! This enslavement to a pseudo-composer (inescapable in order to avoid a surprise dismissal – always possible in a milieu where the Christian spirit was an empty word) was truthfully odious. During these six years of torture, my own work was hardly intensive, however, I began the first period of my musical production.

A *Sonata* for piano and violin (op.1) 1892-1893

Two pieces for grand orgue, *Andantino* and *Sortie* (op.2 and 3)

Three pieces for oboe and piano (op.4) 1894

A *Sonata* for cello and piano (op.5) 1895

A *Romance* for horn and piano (op.6)

Three *melodies* for voice and piano (op.7)

*Pater Noster* and *Salutation angélique* for voice, violin and organ (op.8)

*Serenade* for piano (op.9)

*Offertoire* for harmonium (op.10) 1897

*Suite* for viola and piano (op.11) 1898

Three arrangements of early sonatas for violin and piano (op.12,13,14) 1899

*Quartet* for piano and strings (op.15)

*Pièce symphonique* for grand orgue (op.16)

A *Sonata* for piano (op.17) 1900

*First Symphony* “*Romantic*” for orchestra (op.18) 1900

An important event took place in April 1898; I was appointed to the position of organist of the *Grand Orgue* of the Sainte-Clotilde Basilica. After the short and inconsistent tenure of Gabriel Pierné in this position, I became the veritable successor of my *maître* César Franck. Thirty others also competed, notably

Henri Libert,<sup>16</sup> Henri Büsser,<sup>17</sup> and numerous “First Prize” holders from the Conservatoire.<sup>18</sup>

Charles-Marie von Widor launched a fierce campaign against me: he always had on his mind my courageous attitude towards him, an attitude I described earlier about our relationship in the organ class at the Conservatoire.

He even went so far as to visit the priest of the Sainte-Clotilde Basilica, Monseigneur Gardey,<sup>19</sup> an eminent man whom I remember with emotion, and informed him that if he took me as his organist he would be in for a difficult time; I was bad tempered, and the relationship would therefore be intolerable.

Monseigneur Gardey found this conduct undignified and tendentious. He paid no attention to it and appointed me without hesitation to the coveted post. For fifteen years we lived in the most perfect harmony. The death of this priest of grand style – he was a disciple of Bossuet – caused me deep sorrow.

It would be unjust not to mention Samuel Rousseau,<sup>20</sup> choirmaster of Sainte-Clotilde at the time. I owe him deep gratitude for his support and his touching fraternity. I had thus become, officially, “someone.” What was tragic, the day after my nomination, was that I was forced to leave my position at the Jesuits. From the five hundred francs a month which these “surprising” disciples of Christ paid me, I descended to a fixed salary of one hundred and fifty francs including the extra services. Sainte-Clotilde certainly didn’t feed its organist. In desperation I looked for pupils. Two fell to me the day after this financial “catastrophe” ... the sum was meagre: 70 francs per month. Total earnings 150+70=220. I had to accept this sum, which thanks to the generosity of my

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<sup>16</sup> Henri Libert (1869-1937), First Prize in organ in Widor’s class at the Conservatoire at the same time as Louis Vierne; appointed organist of the Basilica of Saint-Denis in 1896, where he remained until his death in 1937, the same year as the deaths of Vierne and Widor.

<sup>17</sup> Henri Büsser (1872-1973) studied with César Franck at the Conservatoire, and then with Charles-Marie Widor. Gounod’s successor at the organ of Saint-Cloud. He died aged 101...

<sup>18</sup> Particularly Louis Vierne (1870-1937), appointed 2 years later, in 1900, organist of Notre-Dame Cathedral until his death in 1937, and Henri Mulet (1878-1967).

<sup>19</sup> Mgr. Jean-Osmin Gardey (1836-1914), Vicar of Saint Clotilde from 1883 until his death in 1914.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Rousseau (1853-1904), composer, First Prize in organ in Franck’s class in 1877, Grand Prix de Rome in 1878, choirmaster at Sainte-Clotilde from 1882 until his death in 1904. His name was given to the square facing Sainte-Clotilde.

mother, reached 300 francs. For two years, as one can see, the organist of the Sainte-Clotilde Basilica was not rolling in money!

In the course of the year 1900, I met an extremely superior lady who became my organ pupil. Through her, I acquired several novice musicians. So, I replaced fairly easily my famous five hundred gold francs! But what was even much better than that, and really providential, was the increasing sympathy between my “benefactress” and myself. Sympathy which expanded into a great love on each side, a development that was to be blessed by God on November 3, 1903. Later on, I’ll have the chance to pay tribute to the qualities of my ideal supporter for 17 years...my flame!

The significant work of this period: *Le Sang de la Sirène* (The Blood of the Siren) op. 27 (1903), may be considered as the greatest effort produced so far by my young brain... This fresco for orchestra, choirs and recitatives, inspired by a legend of Anatole Le Braz<sup>21</sup> on the fantastic island of Ouessant, obtained the Grand Prix of the City of Paris music competition: 10,000 gold-francs for the author, 20,000 for the expenses of performance. It was almost royal.

I shall have the occasion to come back – and at length – on my literary and moral culture, from 1903 till around 1920; a period which exercised a definitive influence on the direction of my thoughts, springing from my conception of Art in its totality. But for now, I must continue my memoirs. My title of organist of Sainte-Clotilde brought me inaugurations and organ recitals: thus, the important towns in France could hear me play, as a soloist or with the choir of Saint-Gervais, at that time conducted by the fiery Charles Bordes, of Gregorian memory, a man of illumination, highly remarkable judgement, and of an elevated soul.

In 1900, I gave an important concert on the splendid organ of the Trocadero; an interminable recital with a “motley” program such as one can conceive when lacking in discernment.... J.S. Bach, Franck, side by side with names I prefer

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<sup>21</sup> Anatole Le Braz (1859-1926), collector of fairy tales and Breton legends which he made famous through many literary publications.

not to mention, but which were – and still are - the shame of all music...may God forgive me!

Imperceptibly, and I must say this out loud, my intellectual orientation under the sane, essentially Christian, influence of my wife (my first wife)<sup>22</sup>, was preparing itself, in the galaxy of ideas to choose a new star. Books delicately placed before my eyes...I began, without realizing it, to read the Fathers of the Church, to feel myself steeped in an intense inner light; I ventured also into the formidable collection of Abbé Migne: *The History of Ancient Religions*.

Here, I perceived the harmony and the interconnectedness of “things spiritual” ; and finally, the crowning of the edifice (so imposing and, in appearance, so complete, of Confucianism, the laws of Manou, of Buddhism) by the coming of the prophet, of the prophets, of the Son of the Eternal, crucified for the love of Good, the purifying of the human race...a monument seeming so immeasurably towering, so perfectly the summit of all religions that my love, forever deepening, has never ceased to show itself greater towards Him whom God himself, to save us, consented to be born in the most miserable of conditions, to live on earth with inexpressible majesty and tranquility; to die tortured on a cross roughly hewed in the form of an “Y,” driven into a hole.

A love which endeavors, through these musical harmonies, to become less and less unworthy of glorifying you, O Christ! Alas! What am I? Poor frail creature.

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<sup>22</sup> Alice Georgina Taylor, Charles Tournemire’s first wife, from 1903 until her death in May 1920. She was the sister-in-law of the mystical French writer Joséphin Péladan (1859-1918); himself interested in esoterism and founder of a Catholic Rosicrucian order, all of which had a great intellectual influence on Tournemire.



## The principal works from 1907 onwards<sup>23</sup>

1907

Opus 30 - *Nitettis*



**Villa "Nitettis," Arcachon**  
(Marie-Louise Langlais 's photo and collection)

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<sup>23</sup> The organ works will be represented in red, those for instruments, orchestra or choruses with orchestra in black, in order to show the balance between these two categories. One will notice that most of Tournemire's works are ideally for large orchestral ensembles.

...My spirit demanded of me a large-scale work: for example, a lyrical drama...I had to get there one day! Every “composer,” out of self-respect, cannot imagine bypassing at least one theatrical subject during his career...and my attention focused on the work which seemed the best response to the purity and religiosity of my artistic desires. I named it: *Nitettis*. A theatrical work in 3 acts and 7 scenes for soloists, choir and orchestra after Metastasio, 1200 pages for orchestra ... A work of which numerous pages are faded, but in which, somewhere vaguely in my mind, there is a certain lyrical “truth.” I doubt whether it will ever be performed, which, after all, wouldn’t be a real pity. At least it will have served as the “name” of my sister Berthe Tournemire’s little house near Arcachon.<sup>24</sup>

“*Nitettis*” is like the end of my first “style” - 1907, and it is at this time that my head really expanded, that my brain and my heart developed in a continuous ascent, a mystical ideal encompassing some 30 years of production.

### **1908-1909      *Opus 36 - Second Symphony “Ouessant”***

This work was inspired by the fantastic island of Ouessant. It aims to glorify the Eternal. Three performances, in Paris, Bordeaux and The Hague (Holland).

### ***Opus 37 - Psalm LVII* for choir, large orchestra and organ**

This psalm was first performed at Leiden (Holland) by the Royal orchestra of The Hague and the choir of Leiden (1909). Immediately a second performance was demanded by the rapturous audience...I was conducting...The second and third performances took place at the Concert Society of the Conservatoire in Paris, on March 3 and 10, 1912 under the execrable direction of André Messager. A fourth performance took place in Leiden, Holland in 1916, myself

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Tournemire’s sister, Berthe, owned a house in Arcachon where Tournemire used to stay on vacation with his second wife before the war in 1939. He took refuge in this house with Berthe and Alice at the beginning of the Second World War. On the evening of October 31, 1939, he went out for a walk, but never came back. His body was found 4 days later at the bottom of a small boat on the edge of the Arcachon basin.

conducting. Other performances were in Belgium (Namur 1935) and at Radio Paris (1936).

**1909-1910      *Opus 38 - Poème pour orgue et orchestre***

A work conceived in Auvergne. This poem, of a rather mystical character, puts into conflict two essential themes, each symbolizing a principle: the one religious, the other pagan. The three parts of the work follow each other without a break. First performance at the Concerts Lamoureux, October 23, 1910, with myself at the organ. Conductor: Camille Chevillard.<sup>25</sup>

***Opus 41 - Triple Choral pour orgue***

A substantial work which singularly enlarges the framework of the chorale for organ. A work which marks a period in organ music (the art of the chorale). Object: The Holy Trinity. This *Triple Choral* is widely performed outside France.

**1910-1911      *Opus 42 - Les Dieux sont morts* (The Gods Are Dead)**

An ancient drama in two acts. Object: an ancient Sibyl predicts the coming of Christ, his life, his death, his resurrection. She opposes her beautiful vision to the imaginary power of Zeus.

This drama was premiered at the Paris Opera, on March 3, 1924. Standing ovation at the first performance.

**1913              *Opus 43 - Third Symphony "Moscow"***

Profiting from a journey to Moscow, I elaborated this work, struck as I was by the grandeur of the steppe covered with snow, and above all by the golden crosses which decorated, at the time, the domes of the Kremlin. Struck too by the strangeness of the many carillons of the holy city.

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<sup>25</sup> Camille Chevillard (1859-1923), composer and conductor; conducted the premiere of many famous orchestral works of the repertoire: *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Fauré (1901), *La Mer* by Debussy (1905) and *La Valse* by Ravel (1920).

Six performances (Amsterdam, two at the Concertgebouw in October and November 1913, conducted by Evert Cornelis - wonderful memories - Paris, Nantes, Toulouse, Dieppe, Brest, Bordeaux).

**1915-1918**      **Opus 48 - Sixth Symphony** for large orchestra, choirs, soloists, organ

The first of my wartime works.

A very big orchestra, choirs, recitatives, organ. One of the most extensive works ever written. It has the majesty of Beethoven's Ninth, it will perhaps never be performed!! The orchestration is tremendous, the effect must be overwhelming.

**1918-1919**      **Opus 49 - Seventh Symphony "Les Danses de la Vie"** (The Dances of Life)

The second wartime work.

A lengthy work which could be performed on the stage. Text and music by Charles Tournemire.

**1920-1924**      **Opus 51 - Eighth Symphony "La Symphonie du Triomphe de la Mort"** (Symphony of The Triumph of Death)

Dedicated « to my wife, forever in the Heights of Eternity»<sup>26</sup> (Mrs. Charles Tournemire, born Taylor).

**From 1921 to 1928**      Works for soloists, choirs and orchestra.

**Opus 52 - Trilogie: Faust – Don Quichotte – Saint François d'Assise**

**Opus 53 - La Légende de Tristan** (The Legend of Tristan)

This work is none other than the "story" of Tristan, according to the French version, our version.

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<sup>26</sup> Alice, his first wife, died in 1920 after 17 years of marriage.

**Opus 54 - La Queste du Saint Graal** (The Quest for the Holy Grail), fresco for girl choir and orchestra

**1927-1932      Opus 55-56-57 - L'Orgue Mystique**

*L'Orgue Mystique* is an immense composition representing 14 hours of organ music. That is to say, in terms of size, the largest amount of work since Bach. In length, it is more or less the equivalent of the complete organ works of the master of masters.

The interest in writing this work lay mainly in the great modal tradition of the masters preceding Bach. A tradition recaptured in *L'Orgue Mystique* after 250 years of oblivion. I made a point of continuing these masters while clothing them in a modern polytonality, but always respecting the lightness of the Gregorian lines, the fluidity of their aerial paraphrases. Did not Huysmans write: “The plainchant is the aerial paraphrase and moving of the immovable structure of the cathedrals!”

It is indeed just that.

Only I had forcibly to free myself from the rhythm of Solesmes and needed in many cases to modify it, making it bend to the imperious demands of the diverse and varied compositions which lurk in the corner of these 14 hours of music.

One must think of the numerous forms which figure in the 255 pieces which create the structure of the monument: variations on choral themes, choral alleluias, simple chorales, fantasies, toccatas, postludes, preludes and fugues, frescos, paraphrases, little poems from one to four pages - generally in a soft registration - commenting on the entire liturgical year.

The liturgical year begins on the third Sunday in Advent. *L'Orgue Mystique* is a full-length undertaking, that can, in consequence, musically enrich all the Sundays and Feast Days of the year.

The master of masters, J.S. Bach, did this – and how wonderfully – for the protestant liturgy. I felt it necessary to offer the catholic rite a work conceived in the same spirit, with this difference: the greatest of musicians, in the immense

part of his work, based his art on the protestant chorale and the tonal system. As for me, I used the Gregorian chant according to the modal system, which moreover did not exclude chromaticism. Frescobaldi (1587-1654), notably, gave us the example of a very bold chromaticism. There was therefore no reason not to follow him, and even to go beyond his audacity.

The great masters of the modal system: Frescobaldi in Italy, Buxtehude in Germany, de Grigny and Titelouze in France, are the grand pioneers of early modality. J.S. Bach - notwithstanding his transcendent genius - did what the French literature of the 17<sup>th</sup> century achieved, he killed the art of modality... exactly in the same way as Racine, Molière, Corneille destroyed the admirable and incomparable language of Rabelais....We can thus see the interest in returning to the source of “modality”, in order to develop an art which had not until then bloomed anew in complete freedom...It had to be reconstructed.

It goes without saying that the 255 movements of *L'Orgue Mystique* are, above all, intended for the Mass; but they may admirably take their place in concert, especially the offertories and the grand final pieces.

Divisions: *L'Orgue Mystique* is divided into three cycles:

**Cycle of Christmas** (from the third Sunday in Advent until the Purification)

**Cycle of Easter** (from Septuagesima until Pentecost included)

**Cycle after Pentecost** (from Holy Trinity until the 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost)

In total: 51 offices.

Each office is composed of a prelude at the introit, an offertory, an elevation, a communion and a grand recessional. It goes without saying that each piece is a commentary on the plainchant which belongs to it, and that the texts, often extraordinary in their profound emotionality have always guided the musician.

For the elevations, I used the Antiphony, and for the rest, the Gradual. Also, the admirable liturgical year of the famous monk Dom Guéranger, renovator of the monastery of Solesmes, aided the composer, in his innumerable quests for mystic poetry, through his wonderful setting of the liturgical year in three cycles.



**The Benedictine abbey of Saint-Pierre de Solesmes, France**  
(Image blogspot)

In this immense collection, many religious poems, whose aim is to glorify the Christ, are reunited. A few offices, in adoration of the Virgin, came like a sort of diversion...

The central cycle, Easter, contains elements which are to be found in the entire work. It is like the sun, which illuminates all around it a multitude of worlds of contemplation.....on little musical leaflets will be given examples of the Gregorian chant for the main feast days of the liturgical year, as well as the mechanism - if one can use the word - of the whole work.

The music which emerges is obviously singular for “modality” is always present, creating a constantly mystical ambience. All the symphonic, theatrical or other works I have previously composed have, in their very essence, prepared the birth of *L’Orgue Mystique*, for in them, the same ideal is to be found.

It took more than five years to elaborate *L’Orgue Mystique*. Its dissemination was swift in many foreign countries: Spain, Switzerland, Italy,

Belgium, Holland, USA, Canada, Sweden, England, Poland, Australia, Scotland, Czechoslovakia, Argentina, Ireland, etc. The studies and articles which appeared in the French and foreign press were abundant, and the letters innumerable.

**1932**                    **Opus 58 - 12 Préludes-Poèmes** pour piano

A fairly considerable work; new sonorities and the use of numerous Hindu modes give the ensemble a special character. Certainly, it is splendid piano.

**1932**                    **Opus 59 - Trois Poèmes** pour orgue

A work constructed in Auvergne. The poems were written in view of the inauguration of the new organ in Sainte-Clotilde.  
A work to which I attach great importance.

**1932**                    **Opus 60 - Sei Fioretti** pour orgue

Six little flowers for organ, six extracts from the *Fioretti* of St Francis of Assisi.

**1934**                    **Opus 64 - Fantaisie symphonique** pour orgue<sup>27</sup>

A smile for my “Isolde.”<sup>28</sup> Research of sonorities, a new use of reeds, protesting against the abuse of which they are so often the object!

**1933-1935**            **Opus 63 – Apocalypse of Saint John**

A grand work for choirs, soloists, orchestra and organ. I attach a very great importance to this vast composition which, in length, equals Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*. The poem, superhuman, surpasses the work of Dante.

**1934**                    **Opus 66 - Plan of the Petites Fleurs musicales** (Little musical flowers) (40 very easy pieces for organ without pedal or harmonium)  
Conceived in the summer of 1934.

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<sup>27</sup> Dedicated to “Marcel Dupré.” First performance by Tournemire at the organ of Sainte-Clotilde, on June 7, 1934.

<sup>28</sup> Tournemire gave the nickname of “Isolde” to Alice Espir, his second wife, whom he had married on July 20, 1934.



- 1) The Epiphany of Our Lord
- 2) Sunday of the Resurrection
- 3) Pentecost
- 4) The Feast of Corpus Christi
- 5) Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 6) Feast of All Saints
- 7) The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 8) Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Use of the Modes Ré, Mi, Fa, Sol (D, E, F, G)

Distribution for each office: 5 pieces.

- 1 – Prelude
- 2 – Invention
- 3 – Musical Minute
- 4 – Adagio
- 5 – Final Piece

Each final piece (piece n°5) has a different title:

- 1) Postlude
- 2) Toccata
- 3) Fantaisie
- 4) Fughetta
- 5) Chaconne
- 6) Choral
- 7) Ricercare
- 8) Rhapsodie sacrée (Sacred Rhapsody)

(Chromatic modal music)

Goal: to create wonderful little poems taking inspiration from the texts (only from a literary point of view).

No ties between these mini-pieces – don't render them slaves toward modal ends. A mode may be frequently perceived but no more. Thus, it will be much more "artistic."

Find the way – which is something really difficult – of containing the very essence of the literary texts in just a few notes. Write well under the fingers. In all, work in the extreme sobriety of

the means available. A synthesis of all the past: Frescobaldi, Buxtehude, Bach and everything I can add!

**1935** Plan of my **Précis (Handbook) d'Execution, Registration et Improvisation à l'orgue**

- 1) History of the organ and organ building. Explanation of all the stops, from the origins until today. Treat the periods rapidly, with absolute clarity and logic.
- 2) Execution, advice on organ technique. Very concise, as complete as possible. The main principles. Take into account the studies already published: Lemmens, Dupré, etc., but suggest new pedaling. Recommend the “toes.” Elegance of the toes. A relative return to the technique of J.S. Bach. For the hands, simplify the fingering. Illustrate these principles with pieces by Cabanilles, Frescobaldi, Buxtehude, and other “precursors,” J.S. Bach, César Franck, my *Triple Choral*, *Fantaisie symphonique*, *Trois Poèmes*, *L'Orgue Mystique* and some modern composers.
- 3) Registration. Propose numerous stop combinations: from the classical combinations to those that are much freer. And treat also exceptional blends of stops.
- 4) Improvisation. The mechanism of improvisation. Economy of means. Composure. Memory. Everything applying to various musical forms. The fusion of “the art of combining sounds” with improvisation. Numerous quotes taken from my book on César Franck.

**1935** **Opus 68 - Postludes libres pour des Antiphones de Magnificat**  
(Free postludes for the Antiphons of the Magnificat) pour orgue sans pédale ou harmonium

**1935** **Opus 69 - Symphonie-Choral d'Orgue**

Six parts in sequence.

In this “Symphonie-Choral,” an immense fresco in sound, are blended the early chorale and the symphonic art. It is like a considerable

enlargement of my *Triple Choral* with, in addition, all the richness of developments of the modern symphony.

**1936**                    **Opus 71 - Symphonie sacrée (Sacred Symphony) pour orgue**

Four parts in sequence.

**1936-1937**            **Opus 72 - La douloureuse Passion du Christ (The Heartrending Passion of Christ), oratorio for choirs, soloists, large organ and orchestra**

**1937-1939**            **Opus 73 - Il Poverello di Assisi, five lyrical episodes in 7 scenes**

**1938**                    **Opus 74 - Suite évocatrice pour grand orgue**

**1938-1939**            **Opus 75 and 76 - Deux Fresques Symphoniques Sacrées (Two Sacred Symphonic Frescos) pour orgue**

The first of these two frescos glorifies the Nativity of Christ, the second, Pentecost.

## **A Galaxy of Pupils**

From 1900 to 1934, pupils aiming at a career in music, mostly poor, full of zeal, gave me the honor of coming to me. It was thus that a succession of “clients” spread out over a period of 34 years, all the more faithful as the honoraria were mythical.

A few names: Lucien Capet, Joseph Bonnet, Ermend-Bonnal, Raoul Morea, Louis Dubreuil, Torrendelle, Madame Paul Simon (this one paying), Mademoiselle Meugé, Panel, Le François, Stiegler, Goodever, Beaucamp

(feebly paying) , Hugon, Mademoiselle Claude Arrieu, Mademoiselle Henriette Roget, Maurice Duruflé, Muset-Ferrer, Langlais, Courmes, Tomasi, Raymond Petit (paying intermittently), Blanche Lucas, André Dulaurens, Mariel Brey (erratic payer), Madame Amirian (a magician in the art of skipping one lesson out of three).<sup>29</sup>

Lucien Capet, famous violinist, founder of a remarkable quartet. Philosopher imbued with oriental culture. A convinced Buddhist. Capet, an admirable interpreter of Beethoven, came to me and for four years studied harmony, counterpoint, the flute, composition and orchestration. We owe him string quartets, *La Mer* (poem for voice and piano), a sonata for piano and violin, a psalm etc. As a student he was perfect, of “extraordinary submission.”

Joseph Bonnet – organist of Saint-Eustache, got to know me in Bordeaux, the city of origin of us both. At the time he was only 17, but already he showed an ardor and a surprising orderliness in his regular daily work.

Having no aptitude for the art of improvisation, later on he had to keep to the domain of interpretation and reach the point of considering that the world revolved round the articulation of the fourth finger. We know the magnificent results!

For many years he scrupulously followed my advice; and, once emancipated, which was in any case his absolute right, he strutted through the fashionable circles, announcing that he had invented, if not gunpowder, at least modern organ technique. He owes me the post at Saint-Eustache; I promoted his first concerts. End result: he turned his back on me! A Benedictine Oblate, he certainly brought honor to this community.

I almost forgot to say that it was he who encouraged (!) me to compose *L'Orgue Mystique*. Naïvely, the day after this gigantic work was finished, he

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<sup>29</sup> Tournemire played only Sunday masses at Sainte-Clotilde, but never any casuals, so he needed substitutes. The most brilliant organists of the younger generation took this role, beginning with Duruflé and Fleury, former First Prizes of Gigout 's class at the Paris Conservatoire. These two young composers were the main deputies for the *Maître* at Sainte-Clotilde until the time each of them was appointed organist of another famous Parisian organ: Duruflé at Saint-Etienne-du-Mont in 1929 and Fleury at Saint-Augustin in 1930. Afterwards, Daniel Lesur, replaced them both. He, together with Olivier Messiaen and Henriette Roget, assisted Tournemire in pulling the stops for him when he recorded his famous Improvisations at Sainte-Clotilde for Polydor in 1930-31. Daniel Lesur was also requested by Tournemire, on vacation in the Puy de Dôme and in L'Herbe, to oversee, at Sainte-Clotilde, the restoration of the organ in September-October 1933. Noëlie Pierront and Jean Langlais were also among those who deputized for Tournemire at the masses.

confessed to me that he had never imagined I would have the power to reach the end. His surprise was such that his hands and feet automatically refused to render homage to the 25 pieces of *L'Orgue Mystique* which are dedicated to him.

Ermend-Bonnal, comrade of Joseph Bonnet, first prize in organ at the Paris Conservatoire, charming improviser, ingenious composer, but a bit of a “wheeler dealer”... He produced 2 or 3 works for organ, a poem for solo voice, choir and orchestra *Francis of Assisi*, on the mediocre text of Francis Jammes, a string quartet, melodies, piano pieces, choral works for female voices, etc. Bonnal, father of eleven children, is uniquely my student, which has not stopped him from claiming to be a disciple of Gabriel Fauré, whom he never knew.

Raoul Moreau, a dreamer, very poor and very courageous. He received my instruction for six years, bread and bed... Result: he too, like Bonnal, claimed to have studied with Gabriel Fauré, whom he had never seen...later put things right and sincerely regretted the past.

Louis Dubreuil, brevet colonel...had a horror of Napoleon! For several years, under my direction, he courageously studied musical technique. What has become of him?

Torrendelle, a Catalan, charming, fresh, an excellent heart.

Madame Paul Simon, gifted, but resistant to the digestion of technique.

Mademoiselle Meugé, first prize in organ at the Paris Conservatoire. Died in 1915, if I am not mistaken! Absolutely exquisite nature. Ingenious improviser.

Panel, organist at the Sacré-Coeur, Paris. Gifted and refined.

Le François, prize in organ at the Paris Conservatoire. A charming student.

Stiegler<sup>30</sup> first prize in organ at the Paris Conservatoire. Same comment.

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<sup>30</sup> Roger Stiegler (1899-1979), First Prize in Gigout's organ class at the Paris Conservatoire, was one of Tournemire's last substitutes at Sainte-Clotilde. From 1942, he also substituted for his successor Ermend Bonnal.

Goodever, Dutch, orchestral conductor in Utrecht (Holland)

Beaucamp, organist at Rouen cathedral. Tireless worker.

Hugon, composer with an expert pen. Unreliable...

Mademoiselle Claude Arrieu, quite a gifted musician. Unreliable.

Mademoiselle Henriette Roget,<sup>31</sup> 5 first prizes at the Paris Conservatoire. Studied with me for three or four years.

Maurice Duruflé, multiple prizewinner at the Paris Conservatoire.

A complete student, both from the point of view of “composition” and that of the “organ.” Extremely gifted. Ten years as my student.

Paris, May 3, 1932

Dear Maître

I saw Monsieur de Miramon, who told me that according to the competition rules, I had the perfect right to enroll for it again, and that, under such conditions, it was difficult for him to give me personally his advice.

Despite the fact that my 3 pieces have been prepared, I prefer not to apply because having already won the prize two years ago, it could certainly be a detriment to me.

I hope, my dear Maître, that you didn't judge my idea to enroll for the competition again excessively ambitious. I had been thinking about it since Mr. de Miramon told me – about a year ago – that I was allowed to. I humbly admit that for material reasons I had been pushed to pursue my project.

Because I dare not tell you that since last October, I only have 5 students left, 2 of whom are in Louviers. This, along with my meager income at Saint-Etienne-du Mont, makes a rather thin total. I find some consolation by thinking that I certainly have colleagues who are not more privileged than I am.

About this, may I be permitted to ask you, dear Maître, if I am not taking advantage of you, that if you hear about a student you wouldn't be interested in, would you be willing to recommend me to him? In advance, I would be very grateful.

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<sup>31</sup> Henriette Roget (1910-1992), pianist, organist, with good teaching skills, professor of the accompaniment class at the Paris Conservatoire from 1957 to 1979. She briefly deputized for Tournemire at the organ of Sainte-Clotilde, in 1929.

Thank you very much for your precious advice about my musical rantings that you have been kind enough to listen to. You have always guided me along the right path and I realize how truly right you are this time again.

I hope to see you soon, dear Maître, and I send you my warm wishes.

Maurice Duruflé<sup>32</sup>

Muset-Ferrer, a Catalan priest - fiery– but shirker. Organist at the Cathedral of Barcelona.

Langlais, very gifted - a distinguished composer and excellent organist-charming improviser.

Courmes – ex-aviation officer, film director, bank employee, orchestral conductor, composer, etc., etc. Will owe me 350 francs until the end of time.

Tomasi - a dazzling Corsican. A dozen “free” lessons. Total eclipse.

Raymond Petit – calls himself the continuator of “Perotin le Grand.” Still owes me several hundred francs.

## **My Organ recitals**

**1890-1934:** Recitals in all the great cities of France: Paris, Lyon, Marseille, Bordeaux, Nantes, Lille, Strasbourg, etc.

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<sup>32</sup> This letter, not included in the *Memoirs*, was written by Maurice Duruflé to Charles Tournemire on May 3, 1932. The 3 pieces mentioned by him are included in his *Suite* opus 5, which would probably have won the 1st Prize at the Composition competition of “Les Amis de l’Orgue” in 1932. Manuscript at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, NLa-339(1) fo 75.

In Paris: Trocadero (1900 World's Fair), Sainte-Clotilde, Saint-Vincent de Paul, Salle Gaveau.

In Belgium, Luxemburg, Holland, Germany, Russia, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, England. The best memories are of those given in Berlin, Moscow, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Palma de Majorca.

## **Appointment to the class of ensemble music at the Paris Conservatoire**

At this point comes a very important event in my artistic career: my nomination as professor of ensemble music at the Paris Conservatoire in November 1919.<sup>33</sup>

I accepted this post without having solicited it, being almost certain to obtain subsequently the chair of organ in this same conservatoire. Alas! I failed... against me were the excellent Widor, Rabaud<sup>34</sup> himself and the Levantine Paul Léon.<sup>35</sup> The day after my failure, the following “friendly” paragraph appeared in the paper *Le Cri de Paris* (edition of March 7, 1926):

Mr. Marcel Dupré has just been appointed professor of organ at the Conservatoire. The minister has ratified the designation of this candidate, submitted, according to the rules, by the superior Council of Education.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> At the age of 49, a year after the end of World War I.

<sup>34</sup> Henri Rabaud (1873-1949), composer, Prix of Rome, academician, conductor, Director of the Paris Conservatoire from 1920 to 1941.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Léon (1874-1962), Director of the Beaux-Arts, elected in 1922 to the Beaux-Arts Academy.

<sup>36</sup> *Le Cri de Paris*, a satirical daily newspaper.

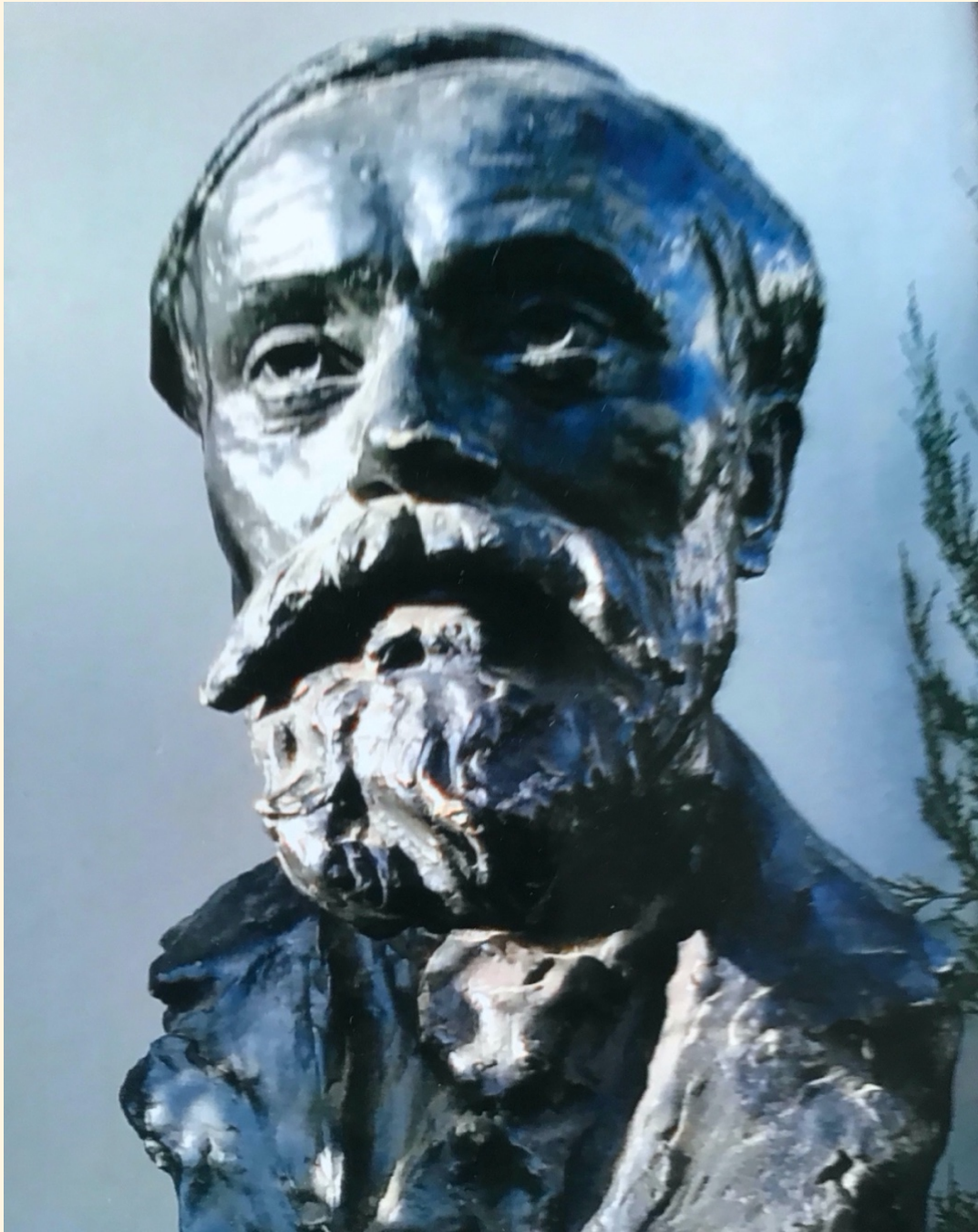




**Charles Tournemire, professor of ensemble music at the Paris Conservatoire**  
(Odile Weber collection)

In this sad affair, one thing only should be retained: the lack of decency of my “rival,” at least towards an artist of my age! The absence of honesty of Rabaud, who had long promised me the post....and the duplicity of Paul Léon. Without mentioning the unflagging hatred of Widor. I’ll be done with this pitiable memory by putting on paper the serious criticism which I addressed to Rabaud the day after this injustice, reproaching him for his breach of faith and his lack of dignity towards one of his teachers.

Being not far from my sixty-third year, my memory is no longer precise about the dates which were the milestones in my life, so I prefer making a leap to April 6, 1933...and to continue relating, from this date until the “end,” the main events of my existence.



**Sculpted bust of Charles Tournemire by B. Patlagean**  
(Musée d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux. Photo by Joël-Marie Fauquet)

# **Journal : 1933-1939**<sup>37</sup>

## **Tuesday April 11, 1933**

Received programs from Spain and Italy in which *L'Orgue Mystique* appears.

## **Wednesday, April 12**

Received a letter from Joseph Bonnet “the world’s greatest organist.” He says so. He announces the performance on his organ at Saint-Eustache of the numbers 2 and 4 of the “Office of Holy Saturday” (*L'Orgue Mystique*). He asks me about a C natural (Offertory) about which he might be in disagreement. This really resembles what could be a semblance of virtue!

## **April 13 to May 13**

No sensational artistic news! Only the publication by Lemoine of my *Trois Poèmes* for organ brings a dim light to the sky.

## **May 15**

At Sainte-Clotilde, 26 stops have been voiced by Mertz, a voicer of great talent. The Flute octaviante 4’ of the second manual is aggressive! Perhaps we should change it?

## **May 18**

The limit of limits! It’s a story of the clergy!  
One of my students was playing at a charity service at the Parisian church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Gare. In the middle of a piece praising the Christ, the priest rushed up to the organ loft, approached the organist, grabbed his hands, lifted them off the keyboard and thus stopped the piece! It was a question of shortening the ceremony...

Here is the letter which I felt it my duty to send to this sub-animal:

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<sup>37</sup> This last part of Tournemire’s *Memoirs* we have entitled *Journal*. It begins on April 6, 1933 and ends at the composer’s death in November 1939.

Reverend Father,

Art is something holy. Above all Christian Art. Having settled this eternal principle, I take the liberty of calling your attention to the way silence was imposed on this young organist. While he was in the middle of playing, his hands were lifted off the keyboard, authoritatively, with an imperious force. And please note: the essential aim of this truncated work was to praise the Christ. You will be the first to regret such a lack of respect to the most spiritual of arts. Moreover, you may say to yourself that for an artist coming to you gratis, it was a question of elementary good manners to allow him to play the whole of the program printed and accepted by yourself. You cannot avoid joining me in denouncing such a shameful incident!

Charles Tournemire

I learned later that it was none other than His Eminence Cardinal Verdier, Archbishop of Paris, who had given the order to amputate the organ piece...

### **May 23**

At Sainte-Clotilde, 31 stops are now voiced. The 4' flute octaviante on the second manual has been softened by Mertz to the extent that one has the impression of listening to a flute douce 4'.<sup>38</sup>

### **May 24**

Charles-Marie Widor has suddenly been promoted "Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor"... César Franck left this world as simple "Chevalier" (Knight).

### **May 31**

Rheumatic pains in my back! A lot of anxiety at Sainte-Clotilde. The work is hardly progressing at all...the manuals are very heavy! So, what are the three Barker machines supposed to do? I wonder! Moreover, the reed vents of the pedal and first manual make an infernal racket!

It's abominable...

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<sup>38</sup> One will notice Tournemire's desire to transform the organ of Sainte-Clotilde towards a neo-classical aesthetic. It is obvious that the powerful flûtes octaviantes 4' installed by Cavallé-Coll could not match the orchestral colors Tournemire wished for his music. So, he asked to soften them as much as possible by removing their harmonic color.

## **June 2**

The ineffable publisher Hérèlle announces the publication of the *Sei Fioretti*:

It is with pleasure that we have the honor to inform the numerous admirers of the *maître* Charles Tournemire, that he has entrusted to us the publication of his latest organ pieces, which will soon, we have no doubt, be in the repertoire of every organist, in church and in concert.

Personally, I have my doubts!

## **June 8**

Organ Examination at the Conservatoire.

The teaching in this class is just about zero! The students play with their legs apart, often with only one foot. The true legato seems unknown! The staccato is that of the piano, as for interpretation, it is inexistent. No musicality whatever.

## **June 11**

This Meunier<sup>39</sup> is up to his tricks again! On the occasion of the inauguration of my organ in Sainte-Clotilde, he wants to appear at all costs. His idea is to use it as publicity, by putting in the foreground his choir of “howlers” of Sainte-Clotilde.

(Author’s note: Tournemire’s anger against Meunier and Widor never ceased as we can see in the following letter from Father Verdrie, vicar of Sainte-Clotilde, to Tournemire in 1932):<sup>40</sup>

March 24, 1932

My dear Maître,

Monsieur Meunier has informed me of your refusal to play the *Grand Orgue* part in Widor’s *Mass* on Sunday.<sup>41</sup> He says that, in this case, we must be content with a plainchant mass, like an ordinary Sunday. This result cannot be tolerated.

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<sup>39</sup> Jules Meunier, appointed choirmaster at Sainte-Clotilde in 1907, conducted the choir which included up to 50 members, both male and female, which Tournemire called the “Gueulerie” (choir of “howlers”).

<sup>40</sup> Manuscript at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, NLA-337, BOB 35709 (12).

<sup>41</sup> Verdrie’s letter was written on Maundy Thursday 1932 and Tournemire was, of course, requested to play the following Easter Sunday Mass.

I will not go into the matter of principle of whether the choirmaster has the right to set up his own program and to request the necessary performers. However, I ask you only to note that the issue of your availability to play in the present case is an entirely separate matter from an offense committed against Art, if there is such a fault. And then, you always have the option, as a protest, to find a replacement to play this part of the Widor *Mass*. I am sure that, above all, your concern not to be disagreeable to me or to the parishioners will inspire you. Do not punish us because we put this small organ in the gallery against your advice. You know, finally, that we could not do any better and that M. Meunier is far from being the main person responsible for the matter...

With devoted respect,

P. Verdrie

Vicar

Went to a performance of *Tristan and Isolde* at the Opera. German singers, including Melchior (admirable). The conductor, Furtwangler, is grandiose. No one can deny, I think, the extraordinary value of the music of Wagner – a few “serious-minded” have perhaps the right to underline some 50% of mediocre music in the first act; as for the third act, absolutely no weakness! It is magic! It was impossible at this time, when Italian music of the lowest period still triumphed in the world, that Wagner did not come under its influence: hence the incriminating stigmas!

As for the libretto, it is worthless. Vague traces of the legend, of our legend. It is a sort of fresco in three immense parts – that is to say, the love philter (that chemistry), the duo, then death. And that, extendable to limits that are “essentially Germanic.”

Joseph Bonnet performed my *Triple Choral* at Saint-Eustache, it was transcendent - and ice-cold. Here is a fragment of a letter he wrote about the first audition of my organ at Sainte-Clotilde:

Dear Master and Friend,

I am so very sorry, but it will be impossible for me to come to Sainte-Clotilde on Monday. It is the only day when I will be able to prepare my recital at Saint-Eustache next Thursday. You give such an example of artistic conscientiousness that I am persuaded you will understand my desire to follow it.

And, to conclude:

Your master's heart will understand me, I am sure, and will approve.

Amen!

### **June 12 to 15**

Nothing very interesting, except that my organ is still not finished. I have to cope with all the material organization: posters, programs, all my job! It's odious.

### **June 16**

The organ of Sainte-Clotilde is near completion.

### **June 18**

Heard the organist of St. Louis-en-l'Ile: he has swallowed a metronome...

### **June 19**

My organ is almost finished. It is very beautiful.

### **June 22**

My organ is, so to speak, ready. Just a few more finishing touches and it will be really beautiful, at least as far as the voicing goes. My dear and faithful companion, to whom I confide my sorrows and my joys to the real terror of the Sainte-Clotilde parishioners; we are to be reunited, forgetting life on earth. That is what you will give me, as if by magic. What alchemy!

The more than ineffable Hérelle, music publisher, persists in delaying beyond measure the publication of my *Sei Fioretti*. My businessman is getting ready to jump on him.

### **June 23**

First rehearsal at my organ in Sainte-Clotilde: admirable "voicing," detestable action of the second manual. Moreover, the ventill pedals are noisy! All this torments me and I cannot sleep properly.

### **June 24**

Today, a session at Sainte-Clotilde which will most likely be a stormy one! The organ builder will no doubt be on the grill...

For a long time, I have been reflecting on the way all of us, professional and amateur organists, register early organ music!

I am more and more convinced that we play stupidly - it must be said - the music of the predecessors of J.S. Bach and Bach himself, especially the faster pieces. There is no argument that Bach only had foundations and mixtures at his disposal on the manuals and a battery of reeds in the pedal. Here and there a manual trumpet and a clarion, but no doubt these stops were used for chorale melodies. (I am not thinking, at the moment, of French organ building of the same period, which offered the luxury of several manual reeds). I am only concerned with the instruments of the North which were the glory of the organ with the finest literature of the time.

It therefore follows that it seems necessary to respect the “orchestration” of Bach and his predecessors, to avoid overloading, with the mass of reeds of our modern instruments, a music which is very complex, very horizontal, and of an absolute clarity, but which is written in the middle - and often in the lower - compass, and therefore excludes the density of our reeds. Moreover, it is an anachronism – and a monstrosity – (let’s courageously blurt out the word) to thicken as some have wanted to do – the fluidity of Mozart’s orchestral music, for example, by adding the luxury of the modern sound-canvas...Heresy! Heresy!

Heresy too, in the same way, for great organ music. If Bach had known reeds on all the manuals, say our organists, organ-addicts, and myself until yesterday... if Bach had known our colors, yes, he would have used them, but he would have written differently.

In our *fff* we keep the distribution of sound elements to the upper registers – it is a necessity imposed by the present tonal design of our instruments. Furthermore, the future of writing organ music is in the high-pitched registers (6 octaves, 61 notes).

### **June 26**

The sonorities of my organ at Sainte Clotilde are magnificent, but the action leaves something to be desired.



### **June 27**

Expertise of the Sainte-Clotilde organ: Joseph Bonnet, Raugel, Marchal, Cellier, Albert Alain, Brunold are the experts.

### **June 30**

Inauguration of my organ in Sainte-Clotilde. A great event. The public loved my *Poèmes* for organ (!). The “Toccata in F” by Buxtehude, the “Tiento VII” by Cabanilles, the *Troisième Choral* by Franck, all sounded superb on the “new” instrument, admirably voiced by Mertz. The action of the second manual is still not satisfactory.

To be noted, the absence of Mr. Beuchet, director of the firm Cavallé-Coll at the inauguration; he had business to see to elsewhere! Flagrant incorrectness. Excuse: 29 years old!

### **July 16**

Took up my service of “harmoniumist”<sup>42</sup> again in the church of Ouessant! Painful!

### **July 19**

Unfathomable melancholy!

### **July 22**

Mists on Ouessant. Sirens!

### **July 23**

Still the mists! And still the mournful song of the sirens.  
Without news from the civilized world. Only black sails on the sea!

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<sup>42</sup> When residing on Ouessant, Tournemire used to accompany the Sunday Mass on a harmonium, the island’s little church having no organ.



**The mill next to Tournemire's house on the island of Ouessant, where the composer installed his office. He gave to the house the nickname of "Tristan."**  
(Odile Weber collection)

### July 28

Nothing. *The Apocalypse*, an extraordinary work, is taking shape in my head, with a clarity more and more marked. The structure is there, before my eyes, fantastic in its satanic parts, luminous in all that pertains to the glory of Christ.

### July 29

Received several interesting letters, notably from Sister Marie-Bernard Rebillot, O.S.B., organist of the St Cecilia monastery of Solesmes.

Fragment:

...We receive with the *Sei Fioretti* a new testimony of your benevolence towards Saint Cecilia: Mother Abbess is very touched and joins her gratitude to that of the organists who do their best to serve the magisterial work *L'Orgue Mystique*. Our judgement is of too poor value to add anything to the renown of the Maître whom the world of music holds in such high esteem, and I hope that you find here just a simple thank you from the sisters who follow in their prayers and in their interest the religious and artistic thought which inspires you to put to the service of the Gregorian melody, the richness of modern art and of your inspiration, which all the composers until now have betrayed rather than understood.

From M. Ermend-Bonnal, director of the conservatoire of Bayonne:

My dear Maître and Friend,

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for sending me your *Fioretti* and I was extremely touched by the affectionate dedication. I admire that after the monument of *L'Orgue Mystique* you can write other pieces renewing your style yet again. Such an abundance of riches is something magnificent and so rare that we had not seen it since Bach!

What a great example you are for us, your disciples!

From Paponaud, organist of Saint-Bonaventure in Lyon:

My dear Maître,

May I express to you again my profound admiration for everything I heard at Sainte-Clotilde on that memorable afternoon of June 30, 1933. If "B" (the greatest organist in the world) spoke to you through nothing but the organ, please allow a

provincial organist to tell you how much he admires your technique as a performer and a composer; your playing and your works, the height of your thinking and the depth of your feeling, which are life itself. All this uplifts me! ... You cannot imagine the place you hold in my life since I have had the joy of knowing you, you are my guardian angel on earth; ah! I am really incapable of expressing all you mean to me.

From Henri Gagnon, organist in Quebec, Canada:

My very dear Maître,

Your *L'Orgue Mystique* has many fervent performers over here.

At Pentecost I played two excerpts from the Office of the Day – whose Finale is wonderfully colorful. Although you may not know it, your name, my dear maître, is associated with many religious feast-days in Canada. I seize the opportunity of telling you how much you are loved and admired by my compatriots and I note with joy that your immense work bears its fruits here; this repertoire, so intimately linked to the beauties of the liturgy, is present daily in the Office, creating the unity you have searched for. I know some young organists, who, in the arabesque of a certain Alleluia, have passed on to me their fervent impressions. I have listened to Marius Cayouette at Saint-Gregoire of Montmorency and to Henry Mercure of Saint-Malo, Quebec, interpret with remarkable style and intelligence certain offices which I have not had the opportunity to play myself. This is to say to you, dear Maître, that in Canada you are one of the benefactors of organ music!...<sup>43</sup>

From Mr Lebout, organist of Saint-Jean-de-Luz:

Maître,

*L'Orgue Mystique*, together with the works of Bach, has become for me the center of my life as an organist. I am working with determination and emotion on the “Carillon” of the office of the Assumption, which I will play at my next recital on August 2. Last year, at the same time, it was the “Offertoire” of the Purification and the “Paraphrase-Fantaisie” of the Saint-Sacrament. This is to tell you the good that your compositions do from afar, the life they infuse into the work of the small

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<sup>43</sup> Henri Gagnon, Québec, Canada, fragments of a letter sent to Tournemire on July 19, 1933. Manuscript at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 35710, Nle 337 (275), fo 32.

provincial organists...and, on their behalf, I take the liberty of expressing an immense gratitude.

From Madame Clemenceau-Jacquemaire (the daughter of Clemenceau), the most extraordinary letter one can imagine:

Sir,

I have heard two of your organ pieces which have enraptured me and of which you are the author. I never heard anything in sacred music - something I particularly love - which resembles your musical intellect, and this is what inclines me to write to thank you for the quality of emotion so delicious - and so novel - which I owe to you.

You unite the religious art of the greatest sculptors of the XIII<sup>th</sup> century - inspired by a simple faith - with today's most subtle and most skeptical of sciences.

It seems to me that you are a poet profoundly refined in cadences and sonorities. On my return from the country I promise to come and listen to you at Sainte-Clotilde.

In the meantime, yours...etc.

Here is my reply:

Island of Ouessant

August 2, 1933

Madame,

Your letter praising my art was not without a particular interest to me, for you would like to see in these pages of music, which are none other than *Fioretti* (little flowers) of pure perfume, not only an aspiration towards the "Beyond," but also a point of skepticism and perhaps even an incursion into the domain in which Baudelaire himself excelled...

From Belgium, in a program of auditions by pupils of Flor Peeters, I see: "Postlude for Sunday in the Octave of the Ascension" (*L'Orgue Mystique*), as well as "Paraphrase et Double Choral" (Easter).

### **August 28**

Comforting news: Mr. Lamoureux, finance minister, is preparing us for a new increase in income tax!

From Germany, or rather “Hitlery”: The *Sunday Referee* exposes how the spirit of militarism is instilled in the German youth in the schools, and how these young people are learning to envisage war as “desirable and inevitable.” Underlining that military science will soon be taught in the schools in the Reich under the direction of professor Edward Bause, the *Sunday Referee* quotes typical passages recently written by Mr. Bause, in a work published under the title “Military Science, Introduction to the New National Science.” Here are some extracts from this exquisite book:

All our moaning on the subject of Versailles leads to nothing and, on the contrary, only renders us ridiculous. We ourselves must take in hand our own destiny, and to begin with, we must get to work preparing ourselves in a practical way for war. No one, in fact, doubts for an instant that it is war which lies between our present misery and our future happiness...Biology (sic) will now give to war the character of a struggle aimed at the complete extermination of peoples... Without doubt, biological warfare is the weapon that best suits the disarmed nations.

“Ruin upon ruin, the whole land is ravaged” is written in the Bible!<sup>44</sup> No doubt these men of “Hitlery” are relying on the Holy Book....

### **August 30**

That same day I received a warm letter from an excellent American organist: Dr. Williams, organist of Saint Bartholomew’s church, New York.

In this letter I read notably:

You have many admirers in New York, and there are several who play your works very well - above all Ernest Mitchell – works which are admirably suited to American organs.

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<sup>44</sup> Jeremiah, 4:20 (edition: Louis Segond Bible)

## September 1

I return to the inauguration of my organ at Sainte-Clotilde (June 30, 1933), so that I can put under the eyes of my all too patient reader, several letters about the event, which I received sometime later.

From Abel Decaux, professor of organ at Rochester (USA):

I had to leave before the Salut, on the day of the inauguration of the organ of Sainte-Clotilde. It was very beautiful.

The final improvisation? Only the word “genius” allows me to express the dazzling emotion which this awoke in me. Truthfully, Sainte-Clotilde must have a foundation stone in heaven to have had a Franck and a Tournemire.<sup>45</sup>

From the director of the firm Heugel, citizen Paul Bertrand, publisher of *L'Orgue Mystique*:

As I feared, I found myself delayed very late by an important meeting which I couldn't avoid, which prevented me from attending the inauguration of your organ in Sainte- Clotilde! I don't know why Mr. Pitoy, an employee of the firm, thought he should tell you that he could not come to this session, to which, moreover, he was not invited and which took place during his hours of attendance at the *Ménestrel*. I had simply told him to mention the inauguration in a few lines in our next issue; but I will gladly welcome the text of the person you spoke of, just emphasizing that it must be extremely short, for otherwise I will be obliged to summarize it in just a few lines.

No comment!

From Mr. Marcel Dupré, organist of Saint-Sulpice:

Dear Maître and Friend,

It was magnificent this afternoon. What beautiful music, what a fine improvisation, what a great organ!

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<sup>45</sup> Fragment of a letter sent by Abel Decaux to Tournemire on August 3, 1933. Manuscript at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, La 337 (180) fo 253.

From Mr. Maurice Emmanuel:

My very dear Friend,

An hour of choice...but why did I have to suffer the yelping of the “Meunerie?” I was hoping for a “finale” from you. Instead, there was a banal and gloomy motet, by whom?

Although I already had a seat, I went behind the altar to relish at that distance the truly magic effects of the instrument and such deeply rare imagination of the composer. You know what I owe this person in exceptional emotion; for it comes from you alone and delivers something which I can neither define nor express. Your “mystique” is a whole drama. (I recently found it again, am I wrong? in your pieces for piano).

So, I will keep to these instrumental remarks:

It seemed to me that your mixtures have transformed the sonority of the tuttis, which are now of a delectable density. The combination of foundation stops and reeds is absolutely perfect.

Never had I heard (at your organ) a Soubasse 16’ so soft and mysterious. Is it not one of your creations?

The Swell box must have been altered, for the graduation of the nuances seemed to me just wonderful. The Clarinette must have changed places, for it has lost its “positive” intransigence<sup>46</sup>, and in the splendid piece of the “Sacris solemnis” it really enchanted me, even if its voice was not heard for long above the concert of your orchestra. But what charm, even in such a short appearance!

Without mentioning the harmonic marvels contained in the great chords (especially the perfect ones) in various pieces, following each other in a grandeur that you handle so well, the sound of these clear components rings with a new nobility, accuracy and significance. If only you could delight in all this in the back of the church, at least sixty yards from the instrument!

I think you must be satisfied. On this instrument, adapted as you desired, you will be able to create the enlarged sound-world of your dreams. I envy you such felicity. And I would wish that all the friends of art come to hear on such an instrument the series of *L’Orgue Mystique*; and above all that the organists who seek an authentic interpretation, may be inspired, as much as possible, by your

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<sup>46</sup> This stop was originally named “Cromhorne” as engraved by Cavaillé-Coll on the pipes placed in the Positif division. Unenclosed, this stop sounded powerfully. By asking to transfer it to the Swell, enclosed, under the name of Clarinette, Tournemire modified completely its sonority. 50 years later, in 1983, Jean Langlais asked to reintegrate this stop into its original Positif division under its denomination of Cromorne, as established by Cavaillé-Coll.



registration. Many other details struck me. But I can't write more. We are in the horror of moving, packing part of our furniture. I am obliged to give up half of my books.

Blasted with fatigue and black with dust, I did not come to give you my impressions at the end of the ceremony. I was just too "dirty" ...

How can I finish this, which expresses so inadequately the joys I owe you, without giving you one more time the most brotherly embrace.

Maurice, June 30, 7 pm

### **September 18**

The young Olivier Messiaen, "musician of the future," as we say, (*Tournemire notes*: this young man has become a terrible "arriviste"), sends me the following letter. It is all the more remarkable as this young artist is only 24 years old! It is true he is a believer!

My dear Maître,

On returning from my holiday, I discover your *Trois Poèmes* for organ.

Thank you very much for sending them and for the dedication which infinitely touches me. I have just read through them. It seems that the style is quite different from *L'Orgue Mystique* (in spite of those very personal touches which render your music recognizable from afar), and that you have yet again renewed yourself, which goes to prove an extraordinary youthfulness of feelings.

Little fugues appear here and there, but the music is much prettier than the "false" Bach that one hears in today's concerts.

The harmonic and modal richness of the first poem, the praising and glorifying in the third, are beautiful pages. I especially like the second: the running water of the 8' Bourdons and the admirable choice of timbres, underline the liberty of the counterpoint and the extreme emotion, both exterior and interior of the music.

To conclude, I am very happy to have received and played these fine pages.

If all the present-day musicians had faith, as you have, they might not attain the quality of your music, but at least their works would have more grandeur, more life.

"Just as the branch cannot itself bear fruit..."

Forgive me, my dear *maître*, for writing at such length, and please accept my renewed thanks and my respect.

Olivier Messiaen

### **September 29 to October 1**

Nothing but anxiety: the possibility of dismissal of professors who are more than 60 years old at the Paris Conservatoire! That would be my case! Undeniable financial discomfort, given the paucity of the pension! Nevertheless, we must wait for the decisions of the Chambers concerning the lowering of the age of retirement of the state-employed, since, as professor of the Conservatoire, I am considered as a pen-pusher... pure and simple!

### **October 19 to November 23**

Mr. Giriat, pupil of d'Indy, has written the following essay about me, which appeared in *Le Lion Republicain*, dated November 1, 1933, entitled "A Great French Musician: Charles Tournemire."

I recently received the latest work of Charles Tournemire: *Sei Fioretti*. six poems for organ of deliberately humble proportions. *Sei Fioretti*...each of these six pages blends intensity and conciseness. In the same way St. Francis eternalized a moment in front of a poetic allusion, then passed on.

A decisive study of the personality of Charles Tournemire would be a large undertaking...The destiny of this master delights in shooting ahead with a rapidity which is none other than magic. At eleven years old, young Charles takes First Prize at the Bordeaux Conservatoire, his birth city, and is organist at the church of Saint-Pierre.

Aged twenty, after only a year in the class of César Franck, his dearly beloved master, the young man is awarded First Prize in organ and improvisation.

Charles Tournemire reaps more laurels: Prizewinner at the French Institute, Grand Prize of the City of Paris in composition...Today, professor at the Paris Conservatoire.

The art of Charles Tournemire is one of the most subtle of our time. Traditionalist in the return he makes to the spirit and the modal forms of a past even prior to J.S.Bach...Evolutionary in his use of modern polytonality; denounced as diabolical by the conservatives and which, nevertheless in the case of Charles Tournemire, blends the harmonies in the same way as the poetry of our cathedrals merges with the perfumes of mystery...The art of Tournemire, turned by preference and by instinct towards spiritualism, is at ease in many different contexts. This musician, to whom today's need of rapid definitions has given the term "mystic," devotes nevertheless his generous genius to all subjects which call for lyricism. Three lyrical dramas: *Nittetis*, *Les Dieux sont morts* (given at the

Paris Opera and elsewhere), *The Legend of Tristan*, eight large symphonies, a *Trilogy* for Marlowe's Faust, a *Don Quixote*, etc. bear witness to a creative spirit which knows no bounds.

Recently, Charles Tournemire conducted in Lyon *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, whose grandeur and originality were for all discerning listeners a definitive record of art of the highest quality.

For today, let us consider in his complete catalogue this astonishing opus: *L'Orgue Mystique*. Many parts of this work, which is of monumental proportions, have been made known to the people of Lyon by Monsieur Paponaud. I will not give in to the desire to analyze its unanalyzable inspirations. It is just enough to say that this work constitutes the most daunting enterprise since J.S. Bach. *L'Orgue Mystique* alone almost equals in duration the complete works of the Cantor.

I can assure you that in the history of music of our time there is virtually nothing so daring, so impressive ... This corpus of sound, moreover, constitutes an effort that is as moving as it is necessary. Just as *Pelléas* liberated our theatre from Wagner, *L'Orgue Mystique* rejoins, after three centuries of oblivion, the most effective of traditions.

*L'Orgue Mystique* offers to the catholic liturgy the equivalent of what Bach bequeathed to the Lutheran. The 255 organ pieces of Charles Tournemire adapt themselves day by day to every necessity of the liturgical year, in the wonderful succession of the commemorations whose variety is as rich as the human soul.

The art of Charles Tournemire, who has no taste for archeology, proves his desire to remain alive through his welcome of the latest additions to musical composition. And – to say everything – as conducive as the atmosphere of the church is to its total understanding, *L'Orgue Mystique* has so many lyrical virtues that concert performance will not hinder its radiance. Beyond denominations (that is to say in addition, human, because so intensely beautiful), these 255 pieces have been adopted successively from Paris to the USA by all those organists who wish to enlarge their repertoire and to associate the liturgical actions with an art that is worthy of them. It is therefore permissible to transmit to the author the homage of our complete admiration.

In any case, the name of this great French musician is already shining with brilliant glory. The initiated know that posterity, which does not underestimate true genius, will consider the works of Charles Tournemire as among the most exceptional and the most generous in a mean and troubled era.

Pierre Giriat

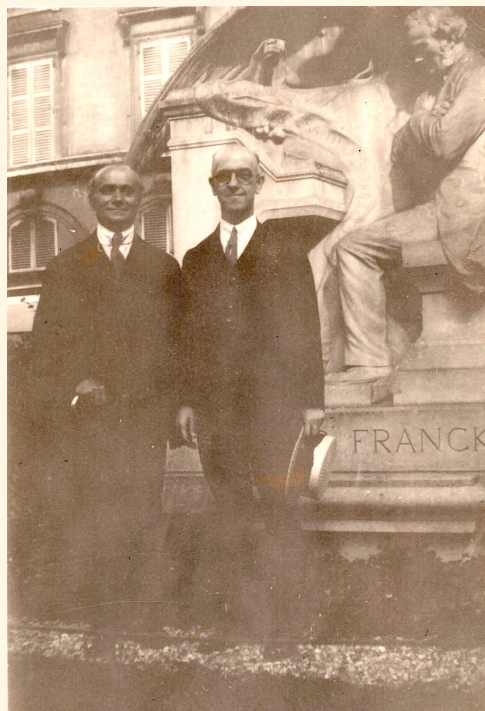
## December 12

Received a letter from England, asking me for some information on *L'Orgue Mystique* for an article:

Dear Sir, I trust you will forgive a complete stranger for approaching you in this manner but I am compelled to it by two things. Firstly, to express my personal gratitude and sympathetic feelings for your monumental work, *L'Orgue Mystique*. When completed it will undoubtedly be one of the great artistic achievements of our time. My own deeply-felt reactions to this work of yours bring me to my second point. With your kind permission I wish to discuss this work in an article and appeal for your valuable assistance. I have already been in communication with your publishers Messrs. Heugel who have been so kind as to send me a biographical note on your good self, also the "Suite"<sup>47</sup> dedicated to the memory of my dear friend Lynnwood Farnam about which I enquired. These together with numbers 8, 17, 18, 21, 24, 25, 27 have enabled me to get a start on this article. There remain, however, a few points about which I would be grateful for your help.

Felix Aprahamian<sup>48</sup>

**Charles Tournemire and Lynnwood Farnam  
in front of the monument to César Franck,  
Square Samuel Rousseau,  
next to Sainte-Clotilde, Paris, July 1930.**  
(photo by Jean Bouvard, Michel Bouvard archives)



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<sup>47</sup> This is the office n°21, « Dominica IV post Pascha » from *L'Orgue Mystique*, dated June 14, 1930, dedicated to Lynnwood Farnam, a Canadian-born organ virtuoso, organ professor at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute until his death in New-York on November 23, 1930, aged 45 years. Louis Vierne dedicated his *6th Symphony* for organ to him.

<sup>48</sup> Felix Aprahamian (1914-2005), Assistant Secretary of the English Organ Music Society, music critic for the *Sunday Times* (1948-1989). Fervent advocate of French music in Great Britain.

### **December 13**

Nothing extraordinary, except that my personal life is heading for a radical change...

### **December 19 to January 18**

Program that I played on my organ at Sainte-Clotilde, December 19:

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| Chorale: “Nun komm der Heiden Heiland”   | D. Buxtehude       |
| Two Chorales:                            | J.-S. Bach         |
| A) “Herzlich tut mich verlangen”         |                    |
| B) “Christum wir sollen loben schon”     |                    |
| Cantabile                                | C. Franck          |
| Alleluia n°5 ( <i>L’Orgue Mystique</i> ) | Charles Tournemire |
| <i>Sei Fioretti</i>                      | Charles Tournemire |
| Premier <i>Poème</i>                     | Charles Tournemire |
| Improvisation                            |                    |

Madame Stanislas de Castellane, a kind-hearted woman, fine and artistic, sent me the following express letter, the day after the funeral of her mother-in-law:

January 18, 1934

My dear Maître,

We have just returned from the country where we attended the sad ceremony, very difficult moments to live through.

Personally, it gave me great sorrow, for I lost the most tender and perfect of mothers-in-law. It was truly soothing to listen to you last Wednesday. You were admirable! What depth of contemplation, what strength of emotion – nothing just for the surface effect, nothing that was not from inspiration, inward meditation. And at times the music, the very vaults of the sanctuary seemed to widen, to open on infinity!

From my heart, thank you.

Countess Stanislas de Castellane

### **January 23**

A visit to my organ in Sainte-Clotilde in the presence of Mr. Marcel Dupré. The action was found to be very stiff and heavy: no less than 350-400 grams of resistance per key, it’s insane!

Mr. Beuchet, director of the firm Cavallé-Coll, is no more than a businessman...the shadow of Aristide has no effect on him!

### **January 29**

Concert of *L'Orgue Mystique* at Sainte- Clotilde.<sup>49</sup>

### **March 5**

Received a letter from Lebout, organist at Saint Jean de Luz. A delicate soul. Here is a fragment of this letter:

Maître,

You thank me for performing the “Paraphrase-Carillon” from the Assumption of your *L'Orgue Mystique*. What words can I find to express the spiritual grace that you have given to a little provincial organ-player, in publishing these liturgical flowers which have blossomed in the secret garden of Sainte-Clotilde?

Received a letter from Ermend-Bonnal in which he confesses that he studied organ and composition with me.

Mr. Joseph Bonnet, Benedictine Oblate, to whom 25 pieces – and not the lesser ones – of *L'Orgue Mystique* are dedicated, is going to give, in a milieu where there will be practically only mitred clergy, a recital of music based on Gregorian chant.

Needless to say, no piece of mine figures in the program.

Generous soul!

### **April 13**

Meunier, that cockroach, having required me, through the intervention of my priest, to perform works for two organs, a stupid thing, given the fact that the instruments are one above the other in two organ lofts at Sainte-Clotilde, I felt.

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<sup>49</sup> On this occasion of the second recital held to cover the expenses of the restauration of the *grand orgue*, Daniel Lesur, Tournemire's official assistant at Sainte-Clotilde, premiered the « Office du Samedi Saint,» (*L'Orgue Mystique* n°16) dedicated to him, as well as several other pieces from *L'Orgue Mystique*: « Paraphrase et double Choral » n°17 (Cycle of Easter), « Fantaisie-Choral » n°9, « Diptyque » n°11 and « Toccata » n°1 (Cycle of Christmas).



**Basilica Sainte-Clotilde, the two organs one above the other, on two separate lofts:  
upstairs, the *Grand Orgue Cavallé-Coll*, and just below,  
on the left side of the second gallery, the *Cavallé-Coll-Converts* choir organ.  
(Jean Langlais collection)**

(author's note: The explanation of this strange situation of two organs placed one above the other can be found in the following letter, sent by Paul Verdrie, vicar of Sainte-Clotilde, to Charles Tournemire<sup>50</sup>):

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<sup>50</sup> Manuscript at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Nla 337

Paris, September 1, 1932

Dear Maître,

I expected your objections and your entreaty. The disadvantages to which you alerted us of installing a small organ in the gallery are real.

However, I think that you exaggerate them. We have been assured that the instrument would be invisible if it were, in fact, placed in the back of the gallery and hidden behind a trellis. Moreover, it goes without saying that this organ, being only for accompaniment, will never be heard by itself when the *Grand Orgue* has a part in a given ceremony.

Finally, my dear Maître, I am obliged to call your attention to the fact that this gallery was most certainly built for singing: as such, it is separate from the *Grand Orgue*, and you know one can have access to it by a special staircase. For singing, you have to have an instrumental accompaniment. Therefore, installing a small organ is justified.

And finally, above all, we are not debating the need. Several years ago, when Monsieur Meunier talked to you about installing an organ in the gallery, there was no urgency about doing it and I was the first to discourage it. Today, the small choir organ is dead. It should be replaced and the pipes of this new instrument should be put above the choir stalls, because the choir has complained, ever since the present installation was completed, that they can't hear the organ. We were asked to consider for the totality of this work, an expense of about 250.000 francs, which is foolishly extravagant since it is a question of a simple choir organ. The Church Council unanimously refused to go down this path: no less unanimously, these Gentlemen declared that putting the choir in the gallery at the back of the church was desirable, especially to free the sanctuary from the unaesthetic impediment of male and female singers. Thus, as you can see, the solution that we have reached is definitely necessary: the one with a side chapel and the one "above the altar" are impractical.

I am deeply sorry about the pain I am forced to cause you. Try, dear Maître, to control your emotions by thinking that your actual domain, that of the *grand orgue*, remains completely untouched. And then, remember that nothing in this world is permanent. We are just giving it a try. If, after a while, the new situation becomes a nuisance, transferring the instrument elsewhere will not be such a big thing. We will have to reconsider it, in that case.

I hope that this matter will not prevent you from making good use of your weeks of vacation. We shall be happy to see you among us again, well-rested, and to hear your beautiful harmonies once again.

Yours faithfully,

Paul Verdrie

Vicar

I felt obliged to compile a little "prosecution" file of six letters from competent persons, which I will submit to my priest in due course. Here is a



letter - a masterpiece - from Mr. Chantavoine, general secretary of the Paris Conservatoire, which is the gem of this file:

April 11, 1934

Dear Sir and Friend,

To perform on two organs, superimposed like two couchettes in a sleeping car, a work conceived for two organs at a distance from each other, is a musical heresy, since the dialogue between the instruments loses amplitude and vitality. In addition, this obtuse heresy is a blasphemy of an almost religious character, since the distance between the unequal voices would normally symbolize, in the mind of the composer, the supremacy of the comforter over the person who begs for comfort and, in a word, the distance that the soul must travel to go from earth to heaven; any work thus stripped of its mystical meaning ceases to have its place in the sanctuary.

Cordially,

Jean Chantavoine

### **April 27**

Went to Mr. Marcel Dupré's, house in Meudon, for the inauguration of his organ which belonged to Alexandre Guilmant. Mr. Marcel Dupré has enlarged it by six or seven stops of "grand fantasy" to charm the ears of Americans who are missing the sounds of the street organ! These miserable stops are to be found on a fourth manual.

On top of this, the compass of the four manuals of this instrument, which has only just over thirty stops (!!!) is 73 notes. Which is, firstly, quite useless. Mr. Marcel Dupré, an organist fully acquainted with the profession, is no more than a "tradesman." A tradesman devoid of taste, only interested in dishonest, corrupt success. Notably: the abuse of the tremulant.

There is great danger here for the future of the French "organ school," for the young musicians who devote themselves to the study of the king of instruments are entirely in the hands (and feet!) of this show-off...professor of organ at the Paris Conservatoire!

The inauguration was a scandal. Just judge it! A work of Bach (*Toccatina and Fugue in C major*), badly played, with no accent. A serious misarrangement of a concerto by Mozart for piano and orchestra: the orchestral part given to the

organ smelling strongly of the Neuilly fair. A transcription for organ of the “Symphonic Poem” *Redemption* by Franck! Yes, this monstrosity! etc, etc.

Ah! What a fool, this Dupré! Perhaps he suffers from a sweet and dangerous madness?

### **May 10**

Received a magnificent album of Spanish organ music (end of XVIIth and beginning of XVIIIth centuries), a gift from the Father Abbot of Montserrat Abbey.

From Belgium, a request to preside over an organ competition in June... On the program, several parts of *L’Orgue Mystique*. They ask me too to give an organ recital. This is to take place in the Floreffe Seminary at Namur.

### **May 16**

Received an invitation from the Countess Murat (debatable nobility). She wishes to create a musical “salon” in her house. She announces Darius Milhaud!  
I prefer to stay at home....

### **May 17**

Letter from an abbot by the name of Hazard.  
He asks me whether the publisher Heugel has gone bankrupt; for he is surprised that the fifth volume of the collection *L’Orgue Mystique* has been unavailable for eighteen months!!

### **May 27**

Not much of interest, except that the organist Ibos played some pieces from *L’Orgue Mystique* at a concert of “Les Amis de l’Orgue.” He also played Vierne’s *Fifth Symphony*, intolerable music, trite, absurd; expressing neither feeling nor idea.

Always the same stupid chromaticism.

Big financial problems.....

I am in the hands of swindlers!

Read in *Paris-Soir* the appreciation of a scamp by the name of Pierre-Octave Ferroud:<sup>51</sup>

The *Symphonie* of Franck, at the beginning of the program, (concert Toscanini), appeared all the more out of date (sic) as the care in detail had extricated it from the halo (sic) so favorable to its false chromaticism...and one can thus measure the great distance which separates the humble organist from Liège (sic)- promoted in all innocence to an unmerited rank - from the German models with which one pretended to compare him, Schumann and Brahms (yes, Brahms!).

This Ferroud will certainly endure a century of purgatory for such an offence to one of the greatest musicians of all time...

### **June 7**

My recital in Sainte-Clotilde. Program:

|   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| <i>Fantaisie Symphonique</i> (premiere) | Charles Tournemire |
| Chorale: "Als Jesu an der Kreuze stund" | S. Scheidt         |
| Two Chorales:                           | D. Buxtehude       |
| A) "Der Tag, der ist so freudenreich"   |                    |
| B) "In dulci jubilo"                    |                    |
| Two Chorales:                           | J.S. Bach          |
| A) "Vater unser"                        |                    |
| B) "Veni creator"                       |                    |
| <i>Deuxième Choral</i>                  | C. Franck          |
| <i>Triple Choral</i>                    | Charles Tournemire |

### **June 8 to June 11**

Nothing, except that the financial problems are more and more oppressive.

Here is a charming letter from Widor, dated May 2, 1930, which I found in my papers:

Dear Mr. Tournemire,

A note signed by you (*La Petite Maîtrise*) has been drawn to my attention. In it you claim that Cavallé-Coll did not attach any importance to mixtures ....

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<sup>51</sup> Pierre-Octave Ferroud (1900-1936), a French composer, disciple of Florent Schmitt, was also a regular contributor to the journal *Paris-Soir*. He died tragically in 1936 in a road accident in Hungary. In his memory, Poulenc composed his *Litanies à la Vierge noire*.

Now it is he that restored them to the French organs (sic) in spite of the resistance of the organists (!).

If you have the chance to correct your unfortunate paragraph, do not hesitate, for it deprecates the Sainte-Clotilde Basilica, the Conservatoire and the erudition of our nation.

Yours,

Widor

A charming and learned man! All organists know perfectly well that Cavallé - the great organ-builder - had the most profound disdain of mixtures.

Examples:

|                                  |                         |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Saint-Ouen, Rouen:               | 2 mixtures for 64 stops |
| La Madeleine, Paris:             | 2 mixtures for 48 stops |
| Saint-Vincent de Paul, Paris:    | 2 mixtures for 48 stops |
| My old organ at Sainte-Clotilde: | 2 mixtures for 46 stops |

### **Summer holidays from July to October 3, 1934**

Visit to Belgium with my Isolde, who became my wife according to God's law (July 21, 1934).



**Wedding of Charles Tournemire with Alice Espir, July 21, 1934**  
Photo taken in front of Sainte-Clotilde (Baudelaire Sociey archives)

Moving and long lasting memories....

Together we admired the beauty of the Belgian Ardennes. Then a stay on

Ouessant, in the little Breton house. The reorganization of the interior of this little house interests her very much. She brings great intelligence and order in perfecting everything that goes to add to its charm. And she readily copes with the material and arduous tasks inherent to the running of this charming residence.

Our stay at L'Herbe, in the villa "Iseut," which today naturally belongs to my wife, passes by in the calm and the happiness of living together.



**Villa "Iseut" at L'Herbe, built in 1925**  
(photo by Daniel Lesur, kindly communicated by his son Christian)

(author's note: in a letter to his friend Pierre Garanger, on May 15, 1926, Tournemire explains the differences between his two houses):<sup>52</sup>

Island of Ouessant

May 15, 1926

Dear Pierre,

Tired of men, I took refuge on my island for three weeks. I will be back for Pentecost. Come and see me at Clotilde's Vespers, that day.

I am supervising the construction of my little house in my beloved island of Ouessant. It will be ready by the end of June, this marvel...

It will be very simple, rustic. Exactly what the country aims.

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<sup>52</sup> Letter to Pierre Garanger. Manuscript, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, NLa-339(1) fo 75.

I acquired old Breton furniture of great character.  
I will have a very moving interior space – I think – Don't you dare think I am rolling in cash!!  
I sold my Paris tapestries off in order to be able to buy myself my little house.  
At *l'Herbe* - it is very feminine and exquisite – hence the name “Iseut”...  
Here, wild. Iseut and Tristan - that's perfect.  
These two constructions are certainly among my best “works.”  
I have all my Tristan with me and I orchestrate in my hotel room.  
My heart is so heavy! Heavy, indeed!!!  
But here I like thinking about you.  
Affectionately,  
Ch. Tournemire

Those who need an idea of the unintelligence of a publisher, may meditate on the following letter:

September 6, 1934

Dear Sir, I would certainly be very happy to publish your violin sonata; effectively, the *Sonate* by Franck does not grow old musically but, unfortunately, its age means that it is falling little by little into the public domain. And now that this sonata, one of the most beautiful, is out of copyright in Germany, we would certainly be happy to have another one which we would never see fall into the public domain. Unfortunately, business today is so difficult that I am afraid the costs of such an edition would be extremely high; above all if the sonata is an extended work. People today don't buy music any more, they listen to it on the radio, a few play the piano or the violin, which means that sheet music is increasingly harder to sell.

What would be the conditions of publication of your sonata? And could we, if it were to be played one day from your manuscript, perhaps hear it? As you are professor at the Conservatoire, would you have the occasion to have it performed by your ensemble class, and I could then perhaps listen to it without disturbing anyone. I assure you that if it is possible for me to publish this work, I would be delighted to do so. With my thanks for thinking of us, yours sincerely etc. etc.

E. Hamelle

### **September 17, 1934**

An “exquisite” letter from the citizen Paul Bertrand, director of the Firm Heugel:

To the Reverend Muset Ferrer  
Reverend Sir,

In response to your honorable communication, we wish to inform you that the collection *L'Orgue Mystique* is still in the process of publication (!!!). But due to the present circumstances, and for various other reasons, we have had to interrupt it for the moment.

We plan constantly to publish the other volumes; as soon as they are available we will send them to you gradually, as we have done until now.

Yours etc. ....

Received from Luxemburg a program in which Flor Peeters played fragments of *L'Orgue Mystique*.

### **October 5 to November 5**

Nothing very noteworthy, except for one or two “successes” with my music publishers: Lemoine will publish my new *Album* for harmonium; Max Eschig my *Précis* for organ. Durand will publish - I hope - my *Fantaisie Symphonique pour orgue*; Hamelle will probably print my *Sonate-Poème* for violin and piano.<sup>53</sup>

Received at Sainte-Clotilde the following letter:

Paris, January 11, 1934

Maître,

You do not know me. I was introduced to you in 1913. But it is certain that you won't remember a little pupil of the Conservatoire of the time. I have lived in England since then, but recently returned to my country. And this evening, I went to Vespers and Benediction at Sainte-Clotilde. And I cannot stop myself from writing to you – it's an English mania which I have contracted, to write at every turn - to express to you my admiration and my enthusiasm on hearing your magisterial improvisations. It was superb, it was marvelous. Certainly, I still remember having heard and admired you in 1913 and, this evening, I had expected something beautiful; but what you gave us, this plenitude of thematic development on the hymn of All Saints, was far beyond anything I could have expected. I was skeptical, ready for a disillusion. You certainly know that English organs are wonderful, as much for their sonority as for their dimensions and their technology. Now the other evening at Saint-Eustache, maître Bonnet, in a program of César Franck, disappointed me by playing with an admirable correctness but a genuine coldness (apparently it is colder at the south Pole than at the North Pole, I haven't been there to check), and the organ seemed to me insignificant in

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<sup>53</sup> These three works were published: The *Précis d'Exécution, de Registration et d'Improvisation à l'Orgue* by Max Eschig in 1936, the *Fantaisie Symphonique* by Gaston Gross and not Durand in 1936, and, very much later, in 1970, *the Sonate-poème* for violin and piano by Heugel and not Hamelle, as intended.

comparison to those I have played: Albert Hall, Queen's Hall, London Oratory, St. Mary Abbot's, Inverness Cathedral etc. Was it poor or rather.....? But I don't want to sully by pure suppositions such a well-established reputation as that of maître Joseph Bonnet. So much so that I went to Sainte-Clotilde, prepared for a disenchantment. And, lo and behold, the organist of Sainte-Clotilde transported me, raised me away above this world. He let me hear ineffable chords, powerful, delicate, extraordinary, but which however strange, were logical and essential to the conception of the improvisation and – it seemed to me – could not have been replaced by any others.

So, I thank you, maître, for these moments of happiness you have given me; I thank you most warmly with heart and soul, without exaggeration as it is my heart and my soul that you have touched.

Very respectfully, yours

J de T.

On November 1, 1934 at Rouen cathedral, the organist, Mr. Beaucamp, played my *Triple Choral pour orgue*...

### **November 6 to January 11**

Nothing sensational! Except that my financial situation is deplorable, thanks to the meanness of people who have literally stolen from me 425,000 francs.

Nevertheless, I am working harder than ever: my *Sonate-Poème* (piano and violin) is finished, but at the last moment, the publisher Hamelle slipped off, after promising me almost formally that he would print my work...

The publisher Durand (Domange) does not seem to have decided to print my *Fantaisie Symphonique pour orgue*...The director of Heugel, the ineffable Bertrand, has dropped me for the last 8 offices of *L'Orgue Mystique*...

I'm waiting for news from America on the subject of my *Precis (Handbook)*: the New York publisher Schirmer, has asked to look at the work...we must remain calm while waiting for the result!!!

Here is an extract of the letter from Mr. Paponaud, organist in Lyon:

I have received nothing from Heugel, although I have written several times during the fragmentary and much prolonged publication of your work, reminding them that I subscribed to the 51 numbers. I am scandalized by such negligence, you can say so to the ineffable Mr. Bertrand.



Received this letter from a young organist, Gaston Litaize:

Dear Maître,

I hope this new year will be for you a year of triumph and that your music, of such rare sincerity, will bring to us new joys. May the number of performers, capable of interpreting it as it deserves, grow from day to day. Moreover, I don't think I am saying anything new if I tell you that young musicians everywhere are turning towards you, drawn by your art so vibrant with mysticism, emotion, novelty and richness, in a domain which no one (we must admit) had so far explored. etc.

Gaston Litaize

And another letter from a young organist, Jean Langlais, an admirably gifted musician:

Dear Maître,

I apologize for adding something more to the volume of your correspondence, but I would regret letting this new year begin without sending you all my good wishes. I seize the occasion to tell you that I don't forget all you have been and continue to be for me. It is thanks to your precious teaching that I learned to make my way in the beauties of Gregorian chant; once again, I want to express to you my artistic gratitude. etc.

Jean Langlais

**Postcard portraying  
Charles Tournemire  
(Sabadell, Spain, 1930)  
given to Jean Langlais on May 1935  
with a manuscript dedication.  
(Marie-Louise Langlais collection)**



Received the following letter:

December 25, 1934

Maître,

This morning, at the midnight mass, I had the extreme pleasure of hearing you at the organ of Sainte-Clotilde. At the risk of repeating myself and bothering you, I cannot avoid expressing to you, yet again, all my admiration for your genius. You are the only organist that I have heard in France who can draw such colors from his organ, the only one who can awake such an emotion, such a force of expression, an elevation of one's inner thoughts and such freshness of musical ideas. It is almost a miracle and I am so happy to think I will hear you again this evening at Vespers and, after that, I hope many times more.

An admirer,

J de T.

### **January 12 to February 8, 1935**

A grotesque event took place: I agreed to visit Widor, now aged 91. I hadn't spoken to him for nearly 40 years. I found him exactly as before: that is to say, stupid. He spends his time untiringly telling little stories. One is obliged to listen and make oneself laugh!! Here is an example of the wit of the "perpetual" Secretary of the Fine Arts Academy:

"Well, the other day, Schweitzer came to see me and said: "I've done my tour of organists: I went to Saint-Sulpice, Notre-Dame, Saint-Germain-des-Prés and... I can't remember the fourth church." Up to me to add: "That must be Sainte- Clotilde" ... Deathly silence!

He, speaking of Joseph Bonnet: "Bonnet? It's mechanics" ...

I forgot to say that to make this visit even better, the hot-headed organist Marcel Dupré made a quick appearance and, in front of me, asked Widor to confer on him the accolade, in order to legalize the wearing of the rosette of Officer of the Legion of Honor. I made a vague gesture of modesty and a pretense of retiring. And Widor to Dupré: "You'll come back, my dear friend, there's no hurry; with or without accolade, just pin your rosette".

All these stories are obviously of no interest.

I have just finished a piece for trumpet and piano as well as one for double bass and piano for the exams at the Conservatoire; but what is even better, I have completed my album for organ without pedal, or harmonium: "*Petites Fleurs Musicales*" (Little Musical Flowers): 40 pieces make up this little ensemble, op.66.

Yesterday, February 8, in the company of my wife, so truly devoted and attentive to my activities of composition, we went to Beauvais. The extraordinary choir of the famous cathedral - which is why I went there - inspired me to write a new work which I am going to start immediately: *Sept Chorals-Poèmes d'orgue* on the seven last words of Christ.

Next Friday, February 15, the organist Alexandre Cellier will play the complete office of the "Fourth Sunday after Pentecost" from *L'Orgue Mystique*, for "Les Amis de l'Orgue."

"Editorial Manners"

Mr. Paul Bertrand, director of the firm Heugel, and myself, have just exchanged the following agreeable letters:

Paris, February 9, 1935

Dear Sir,

Following the wish you recently expressed, I can inform you that we should be able to resume the publication of several new installments of *L'Orgue Mystique*. But the present circumstances unfortunately do not permit us to maintain the basis of commission which was envisaged in 1928, that is to say in a period of prosperity. We will continue to remit to you the royalties of 1,50 francs for each copy sold, but without any advance; that is to say, for these new volumes, the total of copies sold would be calculated at the end of each year and the amount due would then be paid.

Would you therefore be kind enough to tell me if we agree on this proposition...etc., etc.

Paul Bertrand

Reply:

February 17, 1935

Dear Sir,

If I have understood correctly the meaning of your amiable letter of February 9, I suppose you are asking for feelings of sympathy regarding the change in our contract which has concerned until today five-sixths of the corpus, for the greater glory of Art.

It is with a certain pride that I remember what you wrote on June 15, 1928:

"More than ever, I am delighted at the honor *Le Ménestrel* enjoys by the publishing of your very fine collection."

Because of the past, and the sentiments similar to those you express today, may I ask you, by way of compensation, to confirm two points:

- The rate of publication of the last 8 numbers of *L'Orgue Mystique* that you intend to adopt.

- The possibility for you to transmit to me quarterly the proceeds of the sale of these new volumes. Thank you for your reply etc., etc.

P.S. I have not replied to you sooner because I have just returned from central Europe, where I gave numerous recitals of our *Orgue Mystique*.

Charles Tournemire

Mr. Lafontan, another publisher (Schola Cantorum), after firmly promising to publish my harmonium album *Petites Fleurs Musicales* informs me, at the last minute, that he cannot carry out his proposition on the pretext that he has income tax arrears to pay (1931-1933). I add that this Lafontan sat on my manuscript for two months, stopping me from sending it elsewhere! A man devoid of tact and moral honesty...

News from America, England and Belgium, announcing that *L'Orgue Mystique* is being played.

I have finished my *Sept Choral-Poèmes pour orgue* for the Seven words of Christ. An important work for me, source of deep emotion.

I am starting a third album for harmonium.... What virtue!!

### **February 20 to September 10, 1935**

A long interruption: mediocre health, intellectual overwork, enormous musical production which I will talk about later.

### **June 30**

Inauguration of the *grand orgue* of Strasbourg cathedral. It was a question of finding someone to take the place of my friend Widor! The administration of the Parisian Fine Arts, chose me to do this....The last straw!!

### **During June**

At Sainte-Clotilde; first performance of my *Sept Choral-Poèmes pour orgue* on the Seven Words of Christ. A beautiful memory! <sup>54</sup>

Back to my compositions written during the following months: October 1934 to September 1935.

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<sup>54</sup> On June 6, 1935. Jean Langlais, who attended this recital, remembered that there were only 38 listeners in attendance at Sainte-Clotilde that day, and that Tournemire was very pleased with this "good" audience.

Op. 66: *Petites Fleurs musicales* for organ without pedal or harmonium (40 pieces: publisher Delépine).

Op. 67: *Sept Choral-Poèmes pour orgue* on the Seven Words of Christ (A very important work which in the novelty of its plan adds to the history of the chorale for organ).

Op.68: Album for organ without pedal, or harmonium. Title: *Postludes libres pour des Antiennes de Magnificat* (Free Postludes for Antiphons of the Magnificat). 64 little pieces (51 Postludes and 13 Amens for the principal feast days of the liturgical year)<sup>55</sup>.

Completion of the *Precis d'Exécution, de Registration et d'Improvisation à l'Orgue*.

### **Summer 1935**

On Ouessant, preparation of a *Symphonie-Choral* for organ (Op.69).  
Object (Psalms of David): Admirable subject.

### **September 11 to September 21, 1935**

At last, the publisher Heugel has decided to print numbers 43, 44, 45 and 46 of *L'Orgue Mystique*!

Received a letter from Mr. Ernest Mitchell, excellent organist of New York, very devoted to *L'Orgue Mystique*. He is going to see about a possible edition of my *Sept Choral-Poèmes pour orgue* by the New-York publisher Gray!

Letter from Mr. Marcel Dupré, organist of Saint-Sulpice, sending me his program for a session at St. Clotilde, at my request...

### **September 23 to October 1**

A few letters from abroad, England, North America, about a possible edition of my *Sept Choral-Poèmes* and my *Fantaisie* for organ!

Corrections of the proofs of my album *Petites Fleurs musicales*. Very carefully printed.

### **October 2 to December 31**

The *Symphonie-Choral* op.69 is rising from the ground. The deep impressions of Ouessant communicate a grandiose character to this work, finished November 22, 1935. There's a question of a journey to London for two

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<sup>55</sup> Editions Max Eschig, 1936.

organ recitals and a lecture on “The history of the organ throughout the centuries.”

The proof-reading of my *Precis d’Interprétation, de Registration et d’Improvisation* is finished.

Another project of a symphony for organ is taking shape.

At the Conservatoire, menace of dismissal for anticipated retirement! Make way for the “young.” Today someone over 50 is no more than an old rag, physically and intellectually!

The year 1935 ends without any salient facts, apart from those mentioned above.

### **January 1 to October 1, 1936**

On January 1, a little trip to Amiens. Reason: preparation of a sacred Symphony for organ. The magnificent setting of the Amiens cathedral, masterpiece of Robert de Luzarches (one of the rare architects of the Middle Ages whose name has come down to us) was a great help to the author.

Rapid composition in 6 weeks.

At the end of a service at Sainte-Clotilde, Mr. Abel Combarieu, onetime general secretary of the Presidency of the Republic and a distinguished amateur, passed on the following note to me:

My dear Friend,

I feel I must tell you how deeply I was hurt, I would even say shocked, when at Sainte-Clotilde, on Sunday, your improvisation was brutally shattered by the extinguishing of the lights and the cry of “Closing!” You were transporting us by your genius to the highest places, to God himself, while we, practicing Catholics, were already in this delicious state of communion with Him who is the supreme Power at the same time as divine Goodness; this aspect of Goodness was just becoming open to us, when an initiative, certainly not a religious one, painfully threw us back down to earth. May the celebrants (if there are any!) who do not understand the ascension that your music gives to our souls, go and celebrate mass in Beotia!...

To you, dear great musician and great Christian, with all my heart,  
Abel Combarieu

Some statistics:

The organ works of Bach amount, in the Peters edition, to 773 pages - and what pages! The organ works of the author of these *Memoirs* reach 1466 pages!!! It would perhaps be unseemly to add: and what pages!

Posterity will judge... Gone with the wind!

The trip to London, in February 1936, enabled me to hear, on an old organ by Willis (the father) some of my own works and pieces by Bach, Cabanilles and Franck, without forgetting an “improvised Symphony.”

On top of that, to add a little something to my pocket, I found myself forced to play an absurd organ at the BBC: 140 registers but in reality 36 stops!

Deceit!!

My *Précis d’Interpretation, Registration et Improvisation* at the organ has just been published. A carefully finished edition.

Mr. Marcel Orban, music critic of *Le Guide Musical* of March 36, gave me the distinguished honor of the following lines:

No master was better qualified than Mr. Charles Tournemire to give us this *Précis* of interpretation, registration and improvisation at the organ, dedicated to Dr. William C. Carl, director of the Guilman Organ School in New York. In this work, extensively researched, and in a form both clear and concise, the author studies the organ and its evolution through the centuries, the various types of instruments, and the characteristics of the principal stops. The keyboard technique is the subject of numerous chapters, illustrated by examples of legato, substitutions, staccato, portato, accents and pedal technique.

Precious advice on the interpretation of certain masterpieces (from the XVI<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup>), considerations based on the fruit of a long and prolific experience (the Art of registration and the Art of improvisation), and a captivating study of Hindu modes, and of Gregorian modes descending from the Greek modes, complete this *Précis* which, in just over 100 pages, testifies to an incomparable richness of technical and esthetical substance.

A commission of the following organists: Marcel Dupré, Joseph Bonnet, Edouard Mignan,<sup>56</sup> Ludovic Panel<sup>57</sup> and Charles Tournemire has been formed by the Fine-Arts, to draw up plans for the renovation and increase of the number of

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<sup>56</sup> Edouard Mignan (1884-1969), organist at Saint-Thomas d’Aquin, then successor to Henri Dallier as organist at La Madeleine until 1962.

<sup>57</sup> Ludovic Panel (1887-1952), Abel Decaux’s successor at the organ of the Sacré-Cœur de Montmartre (1923-1945)

stops of the *grand orgue* of the Trocadéro, in view of the Universal Exhibition in 1937.

Successive clashes between the commission and the architects resulted in twice forcing the above-mentioned organists to resign!

The first time: obstinacy of the architects in refusing to understand the necessity of a logical layout of the instrument in order to obtain the maximum of sound. The second time: a bizarre project by the same architects consisting in placing the entire instrument, with all its mechanisms on a metal platform of 18 x 5,5 meters (height 8m.60), a mobile platform permitting an organ of 80 stops (!) to shuttle back and forth between the back of the stage and the footlights!! That is where things are at the moment and we are in September 1936. The exhibition opens in 7 months (!!). What are we going to do?

From April to June 1936, five organ recitals were given in Sainte-Clotilde by Messrs. Marcel Dupré, Peeters, Duruflé, Fleury and myself. Marcel Dupré played his *Symphonie Passion*, a work of substantial virtuosity; the other organists played small works of their composition.<sup>58</sup> As for me, I played my two symphonies.

The manuscript of my *Sept Chorals-Poèmes* on the Seven Words of Christ, sent to Schirmer, USA, in the hope that this opulent publisher might be interested in editing it; was returned to me after meeting with a glorious refusal of publication!

Performances of *L'Orgue Mystique* are mentioned in France and abroad.

The Lasserre Prize (“rewarding” the musician who, during his lifetime has produced an important ensemble of works) has not been awarded to me.....it’s true that the jury was composed of my friends, Rabaud, Emmanuel, Pierné, someone called Laparra (from Bordeaux and composer now and then), the distinguished citizen Gaubert, etc.

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<sup>58</sup> Tournemire played on March 26, 1936 (*Symphonie-Choral* and *Symphonie Sacrée*, world premieres); then Dupré played his *Symphonie Passion* on April 23th, Peeters, Fleury and Duruflé on May 28th, and, to conclude the series, Tournemire performed his *Sept Chorals-Poèmes* on June 11<sup>th</sup>. The “small works of their composition » mentioned by Tournemire about the May 28th recital were nothing else than, for Duruflé, his “Prélude” en mi b mineur (*Suite*) and his “Choral varié sur le Veni Creator” (*Prélude, Andante et Choral varié sur le Veni creator*) and for Fleury, his *Prélude, Andante et Toccata* !



A belated joy: *L'Orgue Mystique* is completely published, that is to say the total of 51 offices: more than 1000 pages of organ score. The firm Heugel has taken 8 years to decide to publish this grand work "in its entirety."

Here is a letter addressed to Mr. Paul Bertrand, director of *Le Ménestrel*:

Paris, September 22, 1936

Dear Sir,

The last volumes of *L'Orgue Mystique* have just appeared! A monument of this importance, delivered in its totality and distributed broadly thanks to the power of printing, cannot leave indifferent the person who gave it birth; and, in the eyes of our contemporaries – and even more in the coming generations- you may be sure that the composer and the publisher will be, as it were, merged in a single feeling of gratitude, emanating from those who will appreciate these religious and pacifying thoughts!

No one then will imagine your anxieties or my bitterness.

Perhaps, neither you nor I, thanks to the present social disruptions, will witness the veritable triumph of my work; but be convinced, as I am, that the day will dawn and brighten these "Grand Love-Cycles" with a singular light of brilliant rays.

Yours...

Charles Tournemire

### **End of September to October 10, 1936.**

Nothing special, except that the Conservatoire is keeping me for another year.....

The "beginning of term" in Paris isn't bringing me anything in particular from the musical point of view; nevertheless, from Switzerland I have received from the organist Montillet a program including my *Fioretti* n°5 and 6. I am next-door neighbor to Scheidt and Buxtehude. That's great!

In Frankfurt, some priests are organizing a congress of catholic music. Naturally, *L'Orgue Mystique* is excluded. It's just in the order of things...or rather, in the disorder!! Oh the traitors!!

I have been thinking that for the last few centuries in western music, the three essential elements of our language: line, rhythm and counterpoint, are extremely rigorous (line above all). Now, what do we see today in the year of disgrace 1936?

The press, amateurs of greater or lesser distinction are crying out “it’s prodigious” about the renewal of organ music by the “under thirties” who inundate the market of human thought with absurd and ugly rantings. They’re just children! Here, amongst many others, is a sad example of the melodic poverty that characterizes a certain organ music which is announced as a sort of revelation:



**Copy by Tournemire of the first bars' melody of Messiaen's  
*L'Ascension, n°4: "Prière du Christ montant vers son Père."***

What follows is even uglier. The harmonies are unbelievable. It's a sauce in which the pepper and all sorts of ingredients are mixed together.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> This criticism is very surprising and represents a strange turnaround of Tournemire, who was, at first, a firm supporter of Messiaen's music and strong catholic faith. He wrote a beautiful appreciation about Messiaen's *Les Offrandes oubliées* in the magazine *Le Courrier musical et théâtral*, on December 15, 1931, n°20, p. 594.

### **October 11 to October 31**

Today, Sunday October 25, 1936, at the end of the Sunday mass at Sainte-Clotilde, a parishioner, whose daughter is to be married next week, wanted to oblige me to play the “Toccata” by Boëllmann and that of Widor. I refused.

The same lady said to me: “But you wouldn’t mind playing something by Franck; for we know how much you admire this musician; the proof of this is your walk each Sunday in the square of Sainte-Clotilde and your contemplative and repeated stop at the foot of his statue!!”

One can’t be more unfathomably stupid ...

### **October 31 to November 25**

Where is humanity going?

Can we not fear in the near future a European conflagration even more terrible than that of 1914-18? If it happens, we needn’t be surprised, for we must not forget the prediction of the Virgin at La Salette 75 or 80 years ago!<sup>60</sup> A prediction which announced the destruction of millions of human beings, the heaping up of ruins of all kinds at frequent and repeated intervals, and this, as the atonement for the sins of the world!!

A project of a major organ work is born. May I be able to realize it after *Il Poverello di Assisi*.

Here are the main lines: *Fresques symphoniques sacrées* (Sacred Symphonic Frescos) for organ<sup>61</sup>

- Nativitas D.N. Jesu Christi (Nativity of Jesus Christ)
- Dominica Resurrectionis. (Sunday of the Resurrection)
- In Festo Pentecostes (on the Feast of Pentecost)
- In Assomptione B.M.V. (The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary)

- \* The first fresco could be inspired by the very humble church of St. Damien of Assisi...
- \* The second by St. Pierre of Chartres
- \* The third by Reims cathedral

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<sup>60</sup> *Our Lady of La Salette* is a Marian apparition reported by two children, to have occurred at La Salette, France, in 1846. In her message, she is to have said to the young children: “If my people will not submit, I shall be forced to let fall the arm of my Son. It is so strong, so heavy, that I can no longer withhold it.”

<sup>61</sup> The last organ works composed by Tournemire, these *Fresques symphoniques sacrées* are only two and not four as previously intended; the first one, op.75, glorifies the Nativity, and the second one op.76, Pentecost (nos 1 and 3 of the intended plan).

\* The fourth by Chartres cathedral.<sup>62</sup>

The four frescos will be in sequence.

From the Nativity to the Assumption there is a disturbing fact: the “mother” has given birth to God and, logically it is therefore impossible that she should not ascend triumphantly to the skies after accomplishing on earth her sublime act, through the Will on high.

So, there is an admirable and mysterious link between the Nativity and the Assumption. Then, for the two central frescos, “Easter” and “Pentecost:” the very heart of the great corpus for Easter, the understanding that the whole life of Christ which, after unspeakable suffering, attains the triumph of the Resurrection; for Pentecost, the glorifying of the Holy Spirit, extension and consequence of the Resurrection.

The intensity of the “tongues of fire.” The sublime image of the propagation of the Christian principles on the surface of the earth. Thus, a magnificent center, and Beauty both tragic and consoling in the idea of Redemption, in the person of Christ.

That’s it. That is the wonder carried by the Virgin in her breast. A detail: in the “Nativity” there is a seed: “Easter” (and the whole life of Christ) - “Pentecost” (and the whole intensity of the Holy Spirit).

Lastly, in conclusion, the “illumination” of the “Assumption” which in this glorious Ascension, envelops and bathes sublimely the fourfold idea, in transporting her to the azure sky in the middle of the angels.

Garlands around “Jesu Redemptor”

“Victimae paschali Laudes”

“Veni Sancte Spiritus”

“Veni Creator”

“Ave Maris Stella”

Each fresco, without a break. But a rest between each one.

A few details concerning my artistic life and some events of more or less interest. At the Conservatoire, I had the nice surprise to find they will keep me for another year.

The organization of my 5 organ recitals at Sainte-Clotilde ended in a complete non-success. It seems that more and more people are indifferent to the

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<sup>62</sup> In fact, Tournemire will write later in his “unrealized projects” that the church Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre in Paris inspired him the “Nativity,” and the Beauvais cathedral “Pentecost.”

aims I pursue: the glorifying of true organ music, of music that is essentially religious... It seems that people prefer sinking completely into the stupidity of a secondary art, which is only interested in the “hands and feet” of the organist.

The performances of *L'Orgue Mystique* continue, mostly abroad: Switzerland, America (New York), Belgium, Canada, Holland, etc.

The days go by with the work of the mind...and the relative obscurity which besets my extensive works thickens each day! When will the hour of justice sound?

The citizen Felix Raugel, choir director not without talent and an important musicologist, has not done me the honor of replying to one of my letters: I asked him if he could slip in (he could do so) one of my symphonies on a radio program...and yet he writes fine pages on my art...it's incomprehensible!

He was even the first to promote the performance of my *Psalm LVII* on the Radio...and on that occasion I took care to express to him my gratitude...the day after a fine performance of the work.

Winter passes in the anxiety of political events and war is prowling... It will finish by exploding! It seems inevitable! 6,000 years of civilization, of which 2,000 of Christianity, have not been able to improve in reality the destiny of man. It's hopeless!

In March, the public performance of my Conservatoire students took place, probably the last one, as I will have the advantage of “being retired” in October 1937. A sorry dateline which will definitely reduce the lifestyle of my wife and myself!

Nothing special until June. My life is all composition and contemplation.

The publisher, Max Eschig, (Marietti, his successor) has had the courage to accept the publishing of my *Sept Chorals-Poèmes pour orgue* on the Seven Words of Christ,<sup>63</sup> and, at the same time, to commission a little Elementary Organ Method.<sup>64</sup> This publisher is a Saint.

At Sainte-Clotilde, the horrible Jules Meunier (the worst musician in Paris and the most crooked of men) has let his choir fall to zero. There are no more

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<sup>63</sup> Refused previously by Schirmer in New-York.

<sup>64</sup> Max Eschig, 1949.

children, no women; only three men are still there to sing - if I may use the word - disgracefully. These three wretches give the impression of three drunkards... constant musical blunders during the office, they squabble with each other and make a real scandal...and the clergy - the low clergy - don't notice anything; I'm expecting that this Meunier will get the "Legion of Honor" decoration... This Great Day is surely not far off!! And it will be during the Exhibition...most likely!

Mr. Norbert Dufourcq,<sup>65</sup> musicologist, has written a little book in which he speaks of the organistic "movement" from the point of view of the literature of this noble instrument. According to him, there are two modern currents: on one hand...Widor and Vierne (!) (in the same sack, two heads in the same bonnet) and on the other myself, alone... On one hand, art (if I may say so) without God; on the other, my *Orgue Mystique*. All very well...

But why has the idea not penetrated the French organists, principally, that organ music where God is absent, is a body without soul!

The organist Paponaud, from Lyon, sends me a program in which my *L'Orgue Mystique* figures as the musical representative of sacred art. Excellent appellation...and a thousand thanks to him.

The young Olivier Messiaen (magnificent name) is an accomplished show-off. He exploits, unblushingly, the holiest of ideas...he acts "as an apostle" ... and various "striplings" follow in his footsteps....

Moreover, this young Messiaen is an anti-musician (his beginnings were good but he is in constant regression). He delights in sustained ugliness...and various dopes follow him.

More Messiaen...

In a local newspaper...he wrote a little article entitled: "Reinforced concrete behind the door." In this article, he dares to equate the art of Wagner (in his *Parsifal*) to reinforced concrete, and what is more, he banishes behind the door: J.S. Bach, César Franck, and...Charles Tournemire (sic). He agrees that these musicians have shown to the coming generations the path to be taken, but then, after covering them with flowers, demands that they be forgotten. Lastly, he

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<sup>65</sup> Norbert Dufourcq (1904-1990) was a French organist and musicologist. An amateur organist and pupil of André Marchal, he was organist of Saint-Merry, in Paris, from 1923 to his death in 1990. Professor of music history at the Conservatoire de Paris, he is the author of numerous articles and books and co-founder of the *Association des Amis de l'Orgue* in 1926-27. Founder of the magazine *L'Orgue*, he was, along with André Marchal and the organ builder Victor Gonzalez, an active promoter of the neo-classical esthetic.

places himself at the head of the modern movement, the only one who is genuinely great, true, sublime...

Little idiot !!

The congress mentioned earlier took place. It was the occasion of an exhibition of the “luminaries” of international religious music.... In the front rank were Messrs. Joseph Meugé, Georges Jacob, Vivet, Joseph Bonnet, Marcel Dupré, two abbots and myself.

On the international side: the young Flor Peeters, from Malines. Somewhat limited, the international side!

Various lectures were announced : Mr. Marcel Dupré spoke about Alexandre Guilmant; Mr. Joseph Bonnet launched into his own opinion of liturgical organ music based on Gregorian chant; first of all he quoted the old names of the past: De Grigny, Buxtehude, Frescobaldi, Bach; then a group of young scamps; finally, because I was sitting near him, he mentioned my name, after those of my students, merely saying that the “Collection” (one could have imagined novelties in a department store), the gigantic “Collection” of *L’Orgue Mystique* was made up of 51 offices...That’s the soul and the heart of this false artist, whom I taught free, for several years, music and the art of the organ...and to whom I dedicated 25 pieces of this work !!

As well as lectures, organ recitals and vocal works took place at Saint-François-Xavier, Saint-Eustache, La Madeleine, le Sacré-Coeur and Sainte-Clotilde.

At Saint-François-Xavier, a very bad organist by the name of Marty, massacred several pieces of his composition, my student Duruflé played Bach extremely well as well as Vierne, and 3 minutes of *L’Orgue Mystique*, (as little as possible, of course).

At Saint-Eustache, Joseph Bonnet gave a heavy performance of Bach’s Passacaglia, a rotten piece by Mr. Erb, absurd pieces of his own composition, and the “Fantaisie-Paraphrase” from my Office of Pentecost, full of mistakes.

The registration of Bonnet is without measure... he seems to ignore the principles of balance between the contrasts...he goes abruptly from the sweetness of the Gamba and Vox celestis to the tutti *fff* with the 32’ Contra-Bombarde. It’s intolerable!! In Bach, he’s not afraid of “thickening” it by pulling out everything! It is certainly not the way the great Cantor registered, for the very simple reason that at his time reeds on the manuals were more or less non-existent...and, for the even better reason, which must guide every artist of good taste, to avoid rendering confused a splendid but complex “texture,” often situated in the middle register of the manuals; which obviously calls for a

registration that is transparent, clear and colorful, and which can only be obtained by the combination of foundation stops and mixtures to the exclusion of reeds. This is clear, without discussion...

At Sainte-Clotilde we heard three organists: Messrs. Flor Peeters, excellent performer organist of Malines cathedral; Georges Jacob, the organist at Saint-Ferdinand des Ternes, and myself. Peeters played early music and two or three pieces of his composition, Georges Jacob interpreted some primitive composers and three pieces of his own, I played the *1<sup>st</sup> Choral* of Franck and my *Symphonie-Choral*. One more word about the congress: I was forgetting to say that I gave a lecture on "The Art of the Organ through the Centuries."

The organist Louis Vierne was struck down by a heart-attack in the middle of a recital on his instrument at Notre-Dame, Paris (June 1937). We studied together in the class of Widor. I always found him an extremely mediocre comrade, hardly straightforward and excessively touchy. He inundated the market with six second-rate organ symphonies, of immodest banality and where the idea of God is forever absent. Perhaps this is why our young virtuosos are drawn to this music, which will not be long in foundering like that of Guilmant (*note by Tournemire*: perhaps one could make an exception for him for in his miserable music he never offends God), Widor and Co.

The appointment of his successor to the Cathedral of Paris gave rise to much agitation; organized by the half-crazy Mr. Béranger de Miramon Fitz-James, president of "Les Amis de l'Orgue," a self-attributed title and his only merit on this earth....

The object of this agitation was to require a competition on the difficult art of improvisation as well as on the complete technique of execution. An excellent idea, one must admit, to which practically all the "professionals" subscribed. I subscribed also. Unfortunately, Mr. de Miramon Fitz-James had not taken into account the stubborn determination of the sixteen titular canons of Notre-Dame of Paris, who would not accept the principle of a contest, in spite of the insistence of Jean Zay, minister of Fine-Arts, or the director of the Conservatoire Rabaud, and other personalities. So, no way out. The choice of the canons, in spite of a "pretense" of protest by the Cardinal Verdier himself, fell upon a little pupil of Vierne, half amateur, half professional: Léonce de Saint-Martin, who is not afraid of using the swell box in the "Grand Chœur" (full organ) and whose playing is hazy, splashing, swimming - it is somewhat depressing, all the more so as the playing of this poor organist is not without giving great pleasure to these canons with sinecures ...it's all in order, or rather, in disorder!



That's it: the "government" of the French Republic has decorated that Meunier with the Cross of "Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur!!!" Grotesque and indecent.

I have just signed the imprimatur for my *Sept Chorals-Poèmes pour orgue* on the Seven Words of Christ.

Honor and Glory to the firm Max Eschig!

On Ouessant, during the holidays of 1937, I composed at the request of Max Eschig the little elementary organ method which I mentioned earlier. It is a small volume of some 110 pages.

What good will it do? Chi lo sa? <sup>66</sup>

I have just been put into retirement as professor by the Conservatoire. Will have to scale down my lifestyle...materially speaking! I have found some old articles which are not without interest. Here are a couple of extracts:

*The Echo de Paris:*

The *Don Quixote*, a symphonic poem by Richard Strauss, in spite of all its orchestral virtuosity, is certainly one of the most disorderly, incoherent and boring compositions that one can listen to.

It is surprising that the musicians don't fall asleep. As for the listeners who resist, they must be aching all over.

If one wishes to program a *Don Quixote* in concert, one would do well to remember that of Mr. Tournemire. And I seize the occasion to point out, yet again, the profound injustice of which this remarkable composer is a victim.

Here is an artist of incontestable value. His works for orchestra, as well as his compositions for organ, are of a scope and high inspiration which command attentive responsiveness. He is the author of several large-scale symphonies, of which certain fragments have reached the ears of the finest connoisseurs....

It can't be helped; he is performed once every two or three years.

Adolphe Boschot.

### Contemporary musicians:

Charles Tournemire is, in some ways, an anachronistic composer in our era, characterized by lightweight and quivering sonorities, eccentric harmonies and sounds that are cruel to delicate ears,

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<sup>66</sup> Who can tell ?

In the French school, one must go back to Roberday and Titelouze to find musicians of the same nature as Tournemire.

His finest work, to my knowledge, - he has written eight symphonies which I do not know - is a *Triple Choral* for organ, of surprising amplitude and a very rare nobleness, a monument no doubt inaccessible to many excellent musicians, of whom some may well feel an irresistible aversion to this musicality. But all must venerate the high moral ideal, both metaphysical and mystical, the solidity of the structure, the abundance of thematic development and the absolute probity.

It is the work of a solitary dreamer who only devotes himself to a few chosen listeners.

Charles Tournemire has also composed *Le Sang de la Sirène*, prizewinner of the City of Paris, several lyrical dramas and organ pieces of great value.

Do we need to mention Charles Tournemire as a virtuoso of the organ?

He is one of our greatest organists.

As an improviser, he is admirable from all points of view and seems to delight in the evocation of somber cathedrals, where rainbow-colored rays of light surge here and there through the stained glass, the living flames of candles penetrate the pure arches of the vaults, the simple lines of the pillars, the moving gold of the chasubles and holy chalices...

Charles Tournemire reminds us of Huysmans and of Hello!!

Jean Huré.<sup>67</sup>

Widor has died aged 93. So, have I lost my most inveterate enemy of 45 years.

His extremely official funeral naturally took place at Saint-Sulpice. In less than 20 minutes at the most, the whole French Institute, the entire musical world, the press and an ill-defined crowd marched past with incredible rapidity...

He had decided that his body should “rest” inside the church of Saint-Sulpice, where for 60 years, he lavished his poor mundane harmonies.

One of America’s best organists (E. Harold Geer) writes to me:

Recently, the post brought me (doubtless from you) a copy of your *Fantaisie symphonique* for organ, which I find extraordinarily interesting.

The constant but varied use of the theme keeps the interest alive, and the musical effect is always original and engaging.

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<sup>67</sup> Jean Huré (1877-1930), organist and musicologist, founded the magazine *L’Orgue et les Organistes* in 1924 and succeeded Eugène Gigout at the organ of Saint-Augustin.

I really like the constant development, the variety of color, the contrasts which don't interrupt the musical logic and the brilliance of the conclusion. I don't express this well, but you will know what I mean.

### **October 1. Return to Paris**

An unexpected surprise: I am still professor at the Conservatoire, but without doubt, not for long.

Saw Mr. Jean Marietti, managing director of the publishing house Max Eschig. My *Sept Chorals-Poèmes pour orgue* on the Seven Words of Christ and the *Petite Méthode élémentaire d'Orgue* have been paid (as the "advance on royalties" is a way to remunerate "classified" authors!) 3,100 francs! It's truly ridiculous...

And to obtain this sum, for two and a half hours on the clock, I had to put up with this publisher and his commercial motives, consequently confused and certainly hardly clear!!

### **October 7 to 13**

Received a booklet from Flor Peeters, the best organist in Belgium, on the subject of "the Construction and the Literature of the Organ" (September 1937). This is how he speaks of me:

The masterpiece of Frescobaldi is his *Fiori Musicali*. These are pieces for organ, principally based on themes of the Gregorian masses. From this point of view, we can say that Frescobaldi, as a catholic artist, is a predecessor of the modern French composer, Charles Tournemire.

And further on:

It is in a masterwork, *L'Orgue Mystique*, that Tournemire really finds himself and begins to speak to us in a language that is completely original and personal. Moreover, in this work, he proves to be the faithful and worthy successor of the ancient tradition of organ literature, in which a Frescobaldi, in his *Fiori Musicali* (also based on Gregorian melodies) and a Bach (in his ornamented chorales) have given us such genial and radiant examples.

Moreover, one must recognize his great merit to have restored the organ to the service of faith and of the Church. For we must not lose sight of the fact and this has even more meaning for the Christian artist, that the organ is and remains above all the instrument of prayer...

It is the mentality of a Frescobaldi, a Bach, a Tournemire that we, the young, fed and buoyed up with a juvenile and rational dynamism, want to commit ourselves body and soul to the service of the Church and to work hand in hand!

### **October 14 to 18**

Received the following letter from a Conservatoire colleague, Jules Mazellier, excellent musician and a man of heart:

My dear great friend,

It is with real sadness that I have just learned, through the nomination of your successor, that you have left the Conservatoire, to which you have never ceased to bring the prestige of your fine talent and your remarkable personality.

It is one of the brainwaves of our politicians to destroy what is our best; this will not make me like them any better.

Personally, I always regret the departure of a colleague who has known, in difficult moments, to prove to me that a great artist can also be a great and honest man.

Sincerely, etc.

Jules Mazellier

### **October 21 to November 7**

A Swiss organist asks if I will receive him for a lesson on my *Triple Choral*, which he is shortly due to broadcast on Radio Lausanne. He will undertake the journey from Switzerland to France uniquely for this. A virtuous man indeed....

### **November 7 to 22**

Nothing very interesting to note in this brief period. Nevertheless, may I be allowed to impart in a few lines the following news:

The firm Pleyel-Cavaillé-Coll, in its attempt to emerge from its present "commercial" dead end, has found nothing better than to imagine the two following diversions: Firstly, to build little touristic canoes which, lacking in stability, sink like a stone, offering two or three of the firm's "employees" a free bath in the muddy waters of the St. Denis canal; secondly, to fabricate skis in such bad conditions that their insufficient resistance leads them straight to the boiler.

Poor house of Pleyel! And very poor house of Cavaillé-Coll, so glorious in the past!

### **December 17 to 29**

Maurice Ravel has just died. Apparently, it's enough to be a very elegant craftsman, to mingle excellently little ideas, not necessarily very healthy ones

nor going anywhere, and above all without “God,” to have the right to a universal admiration. Obviously, these second-rate qualities can be understood by mediocre souls and parched hearts... and there are many...

This composer leaves us “like a nobody,” his remains transported the quickest way - from house to grave – What an example!!!

### **December 29 to March 1, 1938**

Beginning of the year 1938; in a sad way financially! My retirement from the Conservatoire is imminent. Life is more and more expensive from day to day. The rent is reaching worrying proportions! I shall probably be obliged to abandon my lovely apartment rue Milne-Edwards, where I have lived for thirty-four years and where I composed my greatest works.<sup>68</sup>

Apart from the pleasure of my daily hours of composition, life only brings me disappointments: people turn away from my music, I’m in complete isolation. My one-time pupils: Duruflé, Bonnet, Bonnal and so many others, have neither heart nor real intelligence. They are just cold-hearted careerists, “cheaters” while we’re at it, all in all, sorry individuals.

Various performances of certain of my works have taken place in Paris, in some great cities of France, in Canada, etc. At the Gand Conservatoire (Belgium), my *Sept Chorals-Poèmes pour orgue* took pride of place.

### **Beginning of 1938 to the end of the same year.**

The last session of my students at the Conservatoire went off very honorably. I wanted to do a good job before leaving this establishment where I had been teaching for some 19-20 years. And so here is my dismissal in the form of a retirement. And a fortune of a pension: 10,316 francs a year, just enough to pay the rent.

Students from abroad: Americans, Swiss, etc. have come to ask me for lessons. It seems to me they like *L’Orgue Mystique*. In this group, one young organist from New York stands out clearly: Hugh Giles. He has a real passion for my organ works. His idea is to create a “movement” in New York, in order to try and arrange some organ recitals for me. A definitely desirable project if successful! For the journey could be a lucrative one.

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<sup>68</sup> This fear was unfounded, as Tournemire died less than two years later in Arcachon. His widow, Alice, left this apartment one year later to reside at 3, rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, Paris, 6<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, where she lived until her death, in 1996.

This same Giles is busy arranging the publishing of my *Symphonie sacrée* for organ in his country.<sup>69</sup>

On the same subject, I must not forget to say that a publisher, in Brussels: Junne, director of the firm Schott, has agreed to publish my *Symphonie-Choral* for organ under the most deplorable conditions.<sup>70</sup> To “slip in” this work I was obliged to accept, as a compensation, the arrangement of absurdities such as “Noëls” by Dandrieu, Lebègue and Daquin!<sup>71</sup> A sorry market...What would one not do for one’s spiritual “children”?

I have received programs from America in which figure *L’Orgue Mystique*. Would my “Truth” be at last awakening?

My devoted wife is organizing a small “celebration” for the fortieth anniversary of my nomination as organist of Sainte- Clotilde. A touching and praiseworthy intention.

I have just been to the Parisian church of Saint-Gervais, to play the *grand orgue*. The instrument is famous for the distant (XVIIIth century) presence at the console of François Couperin, exaggeratedly baptized the great! And what then of J.S. Bach? What adjective should he be awarded?

This adorable organ has the following stop list:

First manual, Positif, 51 notes (C to D)

Montre 8

Flûte 8

Prestant 4

Doublette 2

Nasard 2 2/3

Tierce 1 3/5

Plein jeu 5 rangs

Trompette 8

Clairon 4

Cromorne 8

Basson clarinette 8

Second manual, Grand Orgue, 51 notes (C to D)

Montre 16

Montre 8

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<sup>69</sup> This work was published, in fact, by Les Editions de la Schola Cantorum in 1959, N°44 of the “Orgue et Liturgie” collection).

<sup>70</sup> Schott, 1939.

<sup>71</sup> *Douze Noëls anciens pour orgue*, Schott, 1938.

Bourdon 16  
Bourdon 8  
Flûte 8  
Prestant 4  
Nasard 2 2/3  
Quarte de nasard 2  
Plein jeu 6 rangs  
1<sup>ère</sup> Trompette 8  
2<sup>ème</sup> Trompette 8  
Clairon 4  
Voix humaine 8

Third manual, Bombarde, 51 notes (C to D)  
Bombarde 16

Fourth manual, Récit, 32 notes (G to D)  
Hautbois 8  
Cornet 5 ranks

Fifth manual, Echo, 27 notes (C to D)  
Flûte 8  
Trompette 8

Pedal, 28 notes (A to C)  
Flûte 16 (from C)  
Flûte 8 (from C)  
Flûte 4 (from C)  
Bombarde 16 (from A with a short octave)  
Trompette 8 (from A with a short octave)  
Clairon 4 (from A with a short octave)

Total : 38 stops: 2259 pipes.

It is the ideal organ of this period and is still as Couperin knew it. After steeping myself in the “retrospective poetry” of this lovely instrument, I had the idea to write a *Suite évocatrice* for it. This miniature-work took shape not without pleasure, at least so it seemed to me.

Mr. Paul Brunold, the present organist of Saint-Gervais, to whom this composition is dedicated, had the delicate idea to organize a concert I would give in his church and on his organ. It will be next October. Here is the program:

- |  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| a) “Fugue”                             | François Roberday (XVIIth century) |
| b) “Caprice sur le mesme sujet”        | de Grigny (1671-1703)              |
| c) “Récit”                             | Louis Marchand (1669-1732)         |
| “Basse de trompette”                   |                                    |
| “Offertoire sur les grands jeux”       | François Couperin (1668-1733)      |
| d) <i>Suite évocatrice</i> .....       | Charles Tournemire (1970- ?)       |
| Grave                                  |                                    |
| Tierce en taille et récit de cromhorne |                                    |
| Flûte d’écho                           |                                    |
| Jeu doux et voix humaine               |                                    |
| Caprice                                |                                    |

Received the following letter from Paul Brunold:

April 14, 1938

My dear Maître and Friend,

Thank you with all my heart for your kind letter. You can be assured that all of us - Couperin, the organ and myself - are happy with your excellent idea of writing a composition for the venerable instrument. I personally am very proud that a great master of the French organ school is demonstrating that our old organs are not simply to be thrown into the junkyard, and that one can still make them express many beautiful things when one loves and understands them. This is what you did masterfully on Sunday. You honor me in wanting to dedicate your work to me, and with all my heart I accept your offer and thank you for it.

Please give my regards to Madame Tournemire and accept my warm wishes

Paul Brunold<sup>72</sup>

The inauguration of Flor Peeters’ organ in Malines has taken place. It is a good instrument, by the Belgian organ builder, Stevens. The main colors are there. On this occasion I played several pieces from *L’Orgue Mystique*, one of my *Sept Choral-Poèmes* and some Peeters. On his side, Flor Peeters played various pieces by Bach, by me, and of his own composition.

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<sup>72</sup> Letter by Paul Brunold to Charles Tournemire. Manuscript at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, N.L.a.337 (128).



As well as this I played a program on the organ of the Lemmens Institute (66 stops) a wide program containing Bach, Buxtehude, Franck, Peeters and Tournemire; a lengthy improvisation crowned the whole thing. It was a very successful family gathering. And here I must pay homage to the excellent fellowship of Peeters; a soul and a heart of great delicacy, without doubt an artist of the future. He offered me a very cordial reception in his “home.” My wife accompanied me to the great pleasure of both of us.

On June 18, 1938, the small celebration for the “glorification” (!) of the fortieth anniversary of my appointment to the *grand orgue* of Sainte-Clotilde, took place under the presidency of Monseigneur Beaussart, auxiliary bishop of Paris. The parish priest, Father Verdrie, delivered the following sermon from the pulpit:

Your Excellence, dear hearers, the mass which we are celebrating just now and at which you are present, is a mass of thanksgiving. Today, the deeply religious soul of Maître Tournemire wishes to say thank you to God, the author of all gifts.

We share this feeling, and all the others which fill his heart, in particular the joy of being for the last forty years at the console of the *grand orgue* of Sainte- Clotilde. It was in fact, in April 1898, as the result of a competition, that the young musician, Charles Tournemire, was elected titular of this organ, which for many years was held and made famous by the great César Franck. The new organist began his duties on Easter Day in that same year of 1898.

Since that date, he has become more and more attached to this fine instrument, to which he has given his artistic soul.

We witnessed this when, a few years ago, we undertook the restoration and development of our organ. The solicitude of the Maître for the success of this task resembled that of a father if not of a mother. How could he not love it, this organ which, docile servant of his prodigiously gifted fingers, has transmitted for the last forty years all his thoughts, all his artistic fervor? One had to see Maître Tournemire at his post of command – a show that many are fond of– to understand and admire the amazing and loving domination, which he exercises on this immensity of sound.

.....  
No one will mind, without doubt, if today I take on another title as the spokesman of you all. It was in 1898, I was here; the modest curate that I was heard in this basilica the first chords of the new organist. He was, I must say, more faithful to these vaults than I was, since I was then absent for ten years, whereas he never left his organ loft. But nevertheless, I came back, and it will soon be twenty-five years that, as parish priest, I have enjoyed the collaboration of Maître Tournemire.  
.....

After forty years there is no decline in the talent of our organist; his heart is still young and vibrant, his fingers still as agile; at his console he still appears as an indefatigable wrestler who adjusts, at his pleasure and with mastery, the floods of sound. The outlook is promising! Forty years is a fine duration, but lacking just a little in plenitude: plenitude which demands at least fifty years. And how greatly is this desirable and desired! Why should he not still be here in 1948? He just needs to follow some famous examples: for instance, that of Widor. So, we express to him our irrepressible wish and it will be the object of the mass which follows!!”

And now here are some letters received from several foreign countries and from France, by way of congratulations.

From an organist in New York: David McKay Williams

June 15, 1938

Dear Maître Tournemire,

A heartfelt thank you for your invitation to come to the mass for your fortieth anniversary.

It is with infinite regret that I cannot be in Paris to congratulate you and to shake your hand in all friendship.

I admire you enormously and wish so much that I could express my admiration – alas I cannot do it in French – but you well know that the good will is not lacking.

I send you my best wishes for good health in the coming years and the continuation of your incomparable music.

All yours,

David Williams

Fragment of a letter from Messrs. Alain, organists in Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Paris:

June 19, 1938

Dear Maître,

My son and I, on both sides, were caught up yesterday in a veritable turmoil of work and we had to abandon our plan to be at the ceremony at Sainte-Clotilde.

It was surely a very agreeable occasion, as much by the pleasure which it must have engendered as by what one could learn from it.

Your career is a great example for Christian artists, and it is a bitter thought that the majority do not even take the trouble to raise their eyes that far. We wish that for many more years you will be able to preach from your admirable pulpit.

From Noëlie Pierront, organist of Saint-Pierre du Gros-Caillou, Paris.

Paris, June 14, 1938.

Dear Maître,

I cannot tell you how deeply touched I am that Madame Tournemire and you have wished me to add my voice to your joy and the homage that all the musicians will fervently render you on Saturday. Your magnificent activity, the youthfulness of your heart and spirit will never be sufficiently praised, nor will the spiritual enrichment, nor the creative impulse which you never cease to impart to all those around you, friends and disciples.

It will really be a “thanksgiving” which will rise from our hearts on Saturday morning, and we will pray with all our might that music and its musicians may still benefit from your radiance for a very long time.

Noëlie Pierront

Received the following letter from M. de Miramon Fitz-James, president of “Les Amis de l’Orgue”; he encloses the article by Dufourcq, published in *La Revue Musicale*:

The great art of Charles Tournemire is of those who address themselves to an elite; he speaks first of all to our sensitivity, but he demands of the listener both culture and effort. During a broadcast visit that we made to Sainte-Clotilde with Charles Tournemire, the latter accepted to be interviewed. When we asked him how he conceived his role of organist, he replied: very strictly merged with the liturgy; that is to say taking one’s inspiration from the splendor of the liturgical texts as well as from the Gregorian chant, which is like “the aerial paraphrase and moving of the immovable structure of the cathedrals”(Huysmans). In a word, one should comment each Sunday on the divine office, through improvisations or works directly related to the texts of the day...The musical forms I prefer are the Prelude, the Fugue, the Chorale, and above all the form of all forms: the great Beethovenian variation.

In these few lines we find the exact definition of the “doctrine” of Tournemire; the titular organist of the Cavaillé-Coll of Sainte-Clotilde has searched, for the first time, to merge these two ideas: the symphonic organ and the liturgical organ. Successor to César Franck, it is not surprising that he attempted the Beethovenian variation: the author of the “Grande Pièce Symphonique” and the *Trois Chorals* was one of the first to have used this form at the organ. Tournemire takes it up again, but extends its horizon and its significance by letting it enter into the setting of the religious office...Forsaking the architectures of the decorative organ, abandoning the rigid construction of the Symphony, Charles Tournemire creates a vibrant art, rich in color, sensations and images. A Christian impressionist, the artist excels as much in sumptuous frescos as in subtle “sketches.” On one hand,

we find “Postludes, “Paraphrases-carillons,” “Fantaisies,” “Chorales,” “Guirlandes alléluïatiques” (Garlands on Alleluias), on the other, visions, in which the themes of the office of the day discreetly appear and reappear. In the final piece, of fuller substance, it is the fantasy, the romanticism of the composer which dominate: the symphonic organ with all its warmth and vigor, the decorative organ with the radiance of its “grand jeu,” find here every opportunity of tonal contrasts, of set choices between darkness and light. On the other hand, how measured, how perfumed and delicately registered are these brief pages – there are some which are wonderfully evocative - where the soul of the mystic unfolds, adding its comments to the sacred texts and singing, in place of the faithful, the verses of the Propers.

At the organ, the art of Tournemire reveals a registration perhaps more refined than that of his contemporaries. The neo-classical instrument, with the richness of its mixtures simple and composed, is in part, the answer to the preoccupations of the author, a poet of sounds and a magician of tone. The touches of radiant colors, an incandescence suddenly launched to which reply the most tender nuances, superimposing and completing one another; the plainsong theme passes here and there from the pedal to the upper manual registers, often a simple pretext for flamboyant arabesques or ardent harmonies. From a unique Bourdon, an 8’ Flute or a Vox Humana, Charles Tournemire can extract enticing poems. In the same way, using the whole force of the instrument, he can be willfully strong and indulge in a real harshness of language, adding to the austerity of this modality. While he pays particular attention to registration, Charles Tournemire although remaining symphonic, distrusts overloading, the enemy of balance. So the air circulates between the different parts, and the composer, ever attentive to clarity and limpidity, enjoys letting the voices sing in the higher compass without remaining attached to the middle register (...) Charles Tournemire has realized the most original concept whose birth the 20<sup>th</sup> century has witnessed.<sup>73</sup>

The *Suite évocatrice* which I mentioned earlier, will be published by Bornemann in Paris. The *Symphonie-Choral* is to be published by Schott in Brussels.

### **September 1 to November 2**

The month of September 1938 has been terribly troubled by Hitler. It’s a miracle that we have escaped the greatest slaughter this war would have engendered on earth, sea and especially in the air<sup>74</sup>...

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<sup>73</sup> *La Revue Musicale*, August 1938, 38-41.

<sup>74</sup> Tournemire refers to the Munich agreement of September 1938 that France and England signed with Nazi Germany.

One wonders whether the terrible prophecy pronounced by the Virgin at La Salette will not happen one day...

Received a letter from Hugh Giles: (author's note: Hugh Giles (1911-1963), organist at the Central Presbyterian Church, Park Avenue, New-York, who took lessons from Tournemire in the summer 1938, proposed to organize an organ tour for him in America. Here is an extract of his letter):<sup>75</sup>

New-York, October 25, 1938

...I have spoken to Bernard Laberge about the possibility of a concert tour, and he seems to think it possible to arrange a tour for the spring of 1940 if that is convenient for you (...) He spoke of a courtesy guarantee of 500 and of course he works on a commission. I shall write you at greater detail later on. It looks as if, due to the fact that he has most of his concerts booked for 1940, you would not make a great deal of money as only 12 or 15 concerts could be fitted into this schedule, and organ recitals pay very little in America. Let me know if this interests you at all, and I will see Mr. Laberge again. He is the only organ manager in America.

Hugh Giles

Received the visit of the author Georges Duhamel<sup>76</sup> at my organ in Sainte-Clotilde. The following day he wrote in *Le Figaro* an article entitled "The Absolute Power."

Here is an extract:

The most powerful man in the world, if he wishes to exercise and maintain the apparently exceptional authority which he holds, must come once or twice a week to speak to his troops, to those who do his dirty work, to the members of his gang. At all costs, the solitary Adolphe Hitler must exhibit himself before the sort of pandemonium which characterizes each ceremony of his party. Those who are intoxicated there are above all his faithful followers, those on whom Hitler can count and in front of whom it is absolutely vital to appear.

The impartial observer listens to this sobbing and brutal voice, then hears the vociferations, shouts and howling. The observer then shakes his head, turns off the radio and thinks: "How is it possible that this world be conducted in this inhuman racket? Is the most powerful man in the world no more than the slave of his slaves?" The observer ponders further and cries out in conclusion: "If that is what is called absolute power, well then! Absolute power doesn't exist."

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<sup>75</sup> Manuscript at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Parisn B.N.F, Mus., N.L.a 337 (306). Note that in the Spring of 1940, Tournemire would have been aged 70...and Laberge seems to have ignored the imminence of a War In Europe.

<sup>76</sup> Georges Duhamel, French author and poet (1884-1966), member of the Académie française.

I have nonetheless dreamed what the absolute power could be. I even managed to see a true and fine image.

It was the other Sunday, in the organ loft at Sainte-Clotilde. The great artist who occupied the place where César Franck formerly sat, made the instrument of 1,000 voices sigh and growl. Alone, calm and serene, he manipulated all the controls, pulled the stops, touched the pedals, caressed or struck the manuals, called at one time the fifes, at another the trumpets, filling the silence of the church now with a solo chant, now with a grandiose choir. And all this in the empire of spiritual force, of harmony and of creative inspiration. All this in obedience to the rules of a magnificent art. So, I thought to myself as I left the organ, here is the only true possible image of absolute power.

Moreover, I didn't forget that the master of sounds and rhythms, this live image of an ideal power, must nevertheless obey time, fatigue, habits of all sorts, the rules of his church, the liturgical rites and, above all, it goes without saying, God, of whom he is the servant.<sup>77</sup>

Reply to the above article, November 2, 1938:

Dear Sir, dear Maître,

In *Le Figaro* of November 1<sup>st</sup>, I found a splendid echo of your recent visit to my organ. I did not expect such praise of the artist's humble effort to ascend, by means of the king of instruments, towards the spheres where the soul may rest. You consider this opposition to the brutal force which can only lean on a tottering - and truly vain - footing, as the veritable expression of "absolute power."

It is a magnificent and highly philosophical idea, undeniably religious, and it is not without real emotion that I find myself chosen by you as an example of the only true force on earth: humility in the conception of a work and, from there the road which leads to interior gladness, thus giving the illusion as you so eloquently put it of "absolute power."

The organ loft of Sainte-Clotilde is yours, I should be happy to see you there again etc.

Charles Tournemire

Two long months have passed since the unique visit of Georges Duhamel to Sainte-Clotilde and today it is silence and abandon! I could only expect it. Alas, I am used to the budding enthusiasm of people, even of crowds, then desertion! It's my fate...

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<sup>77</sup> *Le Figaro*, November 1, 1938, pp. 1 and 3.

My *Suite évocatrice* has been published by Bornemann in a luxurious edition. My *Symphonie-Choral* has also appeared; it is Schott of Brussels that has published it in a splendid engraving.

Now is a very painful date in my life: November 12, 1938! On that day I entered the clinic in the rue Bizet. I had to stay there for forty days, following a very serious operation<sup>78</sup>. Nine months later, I still feel the “post-operative shock”. May God help me retrieve the moral and physical balance so indispensable to everyday life.

Two new works for organ of my composition: the first a few days before my big operation; the second in February 1939. I gave the first performances in June 1939 on my organ in Sainte-Clotilde, at a recital organized by “Les Amis de l’Orgue.” These two frescos glorify one, the Nativity of Christ, the other, Pentecost. The publisher, Max Eschig has undertaken their publication.

Alas, since my operation, my activity as a composer is more or less null... will God give me the strength to realize a project which I have been caressing for the last year? Six grand Organ Chorales are waiting...

Very numerous performances of my organ music are taking place in America, Belgium, Holland and Canada.

I cannot forget to mention the organ recital which I gave in April 1939 on the historical organ of Saint-Gervais. This is the concert which should have taken place in November 1938 (month of my operation). I confess, with a certain pride, that my *Suite évocatrice* composed especially for Saint-Gervais, gave me great satisfaction. It was an absorbing concert; and in a fairly large audience, some artists— which should be noted – were slightly “moved,” at least I thought so.

In June 1939, journeys in Belgium and Holland. Their purpose was to be part of an organ jury examining some pupils of my friend Flor Peeters.

My health is really bad. No doubt the consequences of the serious operation in November 1938! God grant that the strange troubles from which I suffer will dissipate ...

Composition is completely at a halt.

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<sup>78</sup> A prostatectomy.

Hitler, this monster, has put Europe to fire and sword... God cannot abstain from thrashing him... Let us wait!

And in the meantime, each day deaths by the thousands attest to his cruelty.

Here we are, refugees in Arcachon, in my sister's house. And we are settled here, most likely, for a long time, as this damned war threatens to expand considerably.



**One of the last photos of Tournemire taken in Arcachon, October 1939**  
(photo: Hugh Giles, Alain Hobbs collection)

## **END OF THE *MEMOIRS***



# *Epilogue*

by Marie-Louise Langlais

On Tuesday, October 31, 1939, Charles Tournemire left the villa “Nitettis” to take a walk. When they did not see him return in the evening, Berthe and Alice Tournemire reported his disappearance to the police of Arcachon, adding “that he suffered from mild amnesia and that they thought him lost in the forest.”

Unfortunately, it is a Death Certificate that brings to a close the Memoirs of Charles Tournemire in a most grim way—with the handwritten conclusion “accidental death by immersion.”

On Friday, November 3, a fisherman who lived in Arcachon found the lifeless body of the composer in a small canoe while towing a flat bottomed boat over an oyster bed at a place called Tessillat, in the bay of Arcachon.

The body was examined and the medical report indicated that “the death had occurred approximately 24 hours earlier and must be attributed to a prolonged immersion.” The circumstances require the determination that it was a natural death, declared Dr. Laplante.

Some have hypothesized that it was a suicide, which could be possible but nevertheless surprising for such a strong Catholic. And what exactly was meant by “mild amnesia,” an idea put forward by his wife and sister in the course of their statement of October 31, 1939 to the Police Commissioner? Certainly the composer complained frequently about his health and strange episodes of weakness which kept him from his composing, his creative activity, while leaving him able to complete the orchestration of *Il Poverello di Assisi*, a mechanical action, not a creative one.

In the absence of an autopsy, which was ruled out by the doctor and the Police Commissioner, one will never know the truth.

Unquestionably the period of the beginning of World War II was extremely disturbing; the authorities probably had better things to do, from their point of view, than address the death of Charles Tournemire...

This being said, one can not help but be moved when imagining this elderly man, fragile and sick, leaving the house where he lived with his wife and his sister for a simple walk by himself, wandering disoriented during three days and three nights, from Tuesday, October 31, until Thursday, November 2, only to die in a small canoe in the bay of Arcachon.

Three days and three nights without drinking or eating, and without anyone paying the slightest attention to him...



**View of the Bay of Arcachon**  
(Daniel-Lesur collection)

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**Marie-Louise Langlais** is Jean Langlais' widow.

Doctor of Musicology from the Paris-Sorbonne, *diplôme de virtuosité* for interpretation and improvisation in the organ class of Jean Langlais at the Schola Cantorum in Paris, she held positions as professor of organ at the Paris Regional Conservatoire and the Schola Cantorum. She served also as Distinguished Visiting Professor of Organ at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music (Ohio, U.S.A.).

Dividing her activities between teaching and concertizing, she has performed throughout Europe and North America since the early 1970s and has recorded for many French and European Companies (Arion, Festivo, Koch International, Lyrinx, Motette, Solstice).

She has given numerous lectures and classes on French music, mainly on her favorite topic, "The Sainte-Clothilde Tradition," featuring the three major composers of the Basilica of Sainte-Clothilde in Paris: César Franck, Charles Tournemire, and Jean Langlais, whom she assisted between 1979 and 1991.

Marie-Louise Langlais is the author of several books and articles on this subject, the latest being, in 2016, the book *Jean Langlais Remembered*, published on the internet by the American Guild of Organists. The publication of Charles Tournemire's *Memoirs* is intended to commemorate the anniversary of the composer's birth in 1870, 150 years ago, and also to remember his tragic death on November 4, 1939.