

THE COMPLETE
WORKS FOR ORGAN

Marcel Dupré
JEREMY FILSELL

Jeanne Demessieux
STEPHEN THARP



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH
FIFTH AVENUE

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Marcel Dupré

THE COMPLETE WORKS FOR ORGAN

✧ PROGRAM IX ✧

JEREMY FILSELL, ORGAN

OCTOBER 2, 2021 | SATURDAY AT 3PM



POÈME HÉROÏQUE, OP. 33

Dupré wrote the grandiose *Poème Héroïque* for organ, brass and percussion, for the inauguration in 1935 of the restored Cathedral of Verdun in eastern France, which had been devastated during some of the bloodiest battles of the First World War. He later made this arrangement for solo organ, at the request of his American publishers. Few composers are at their best when writing self-consciously patriotic music for great public occasions, but the eloquent dedication ‘To Verdun’ bears witness to the integrity of his intentions. An introduction of fanfares and pregnant dotted rhythms heralds the arrival of the main march theme above repeated chords, evoking the procession of the doomed soldiers to the battlefield. A second more consoling, elegiac theme is developed at some length before the return of the march, leading to a frenetic *Presto* coda in which the antiphonal phrases of organ and brass are crowned by the triumph of the second theme.

DEUX CHORALES, OP. 59

Freu’ dich sehr, O meine Seele — Liebster Immanuel, Herzog der Frommen
These two liturgical pieces were commissioned by a New York publishing house in 1963. Returning to the classical style of his 79 *Chorales* and parts of *Le Tombeau de Titelouze*, Dupré treats both cho-

rales as a cantus firmus in the manner of Bach's *Orgelbüchlein*. The first piece, for an *organo pleno* registration, has the chorale in the pedal beneath a boldly rhythmic contrapuntal texture on the manuals, while the second prelude is more delicately registered, with the chorale in canon at the fifth in the treble, on a solo flute.

DEUXIÈME SYMPHONIE, OP. 26

Preludio — Intermezzo — Toccata

THIS is the last of the three great symphonic works that Dupré composed during the 1920s, and in harmonic language and technical wizardry it represents a striking advance on the first two (the *Symphonie-Passion* of 1924 and the *Symphony for Organ & Orchestra* of 1927). When he gave the premiere in New York on 30th September 1929, Dupré was making his first American appearance since his appointment as Professor of Organ at the Paris Conservatoire three years earlier, and in this work he gives the impression of a composer at the height of his powers, secure in his inspiration and rejoicing in his own virtuosity. But this symphony is not about superficial display; behind the dazzling invention one senses dark forces at work, and the ferocity of much of the music disturbs and thrills in equal measure . . .

The *Preludio*, in C-sharp minor, immediately lays down the gauntlet in its dissonant opening flourish. This movement is constructed in a kind of modified sonata form, with the exposition introducing three strongly contrasted themes — the aggressive opening motif of two repeated notes followed by a downward rushing scale, a delicate, chattering étude for flutes, and a luscious chordal theme for strings. Only the first two themes are involved in the central development, where the repeated-note motif inspires a new march-like idea. The powerful rising modulations of the march propel the music to a torrential climax, which subsides into the reprise of the flute and the string passages from the exposition, but they are brusquely interrupted by the angry flourish and the modulating march, which suddenly explode into a thunderous coda.

The B minor *Intermezzo* is in the form of a theme and variations, based on a gentle dancing tune in a strange halting rhythm, with some quirky shifts of harmony reminiscent of Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony*. It is followed by three short variations, the first soft and delicate, with an intricate combination of duplets and triplets, the second more aggressive, with the introduction of the reeds, and the third a captivating dance for flute and piccolo with a rhythmic accompaniment for strings.

The final *Toccata* in C sharp major is unconventional in the extreme. Beneath an insistent accompaniment of stabbing repeated chords, a very rhythmic, rather jazzy tune is hammered out first by the left hand, and then by right hand and pedal in unison; the music is soon submerged in a torrent of cross-rhythms, unable to decide whether six equals two times three or three times two. An expressive, rather spooky solo for bass Clarinet provides a brief moment of repose before the *Toccata* explodes into life again, and pursues its way to a conclusion of prolonged and breathtaking brilliance that takes both player and audience right to the edge.

SCHERZO, OP. 16

Between 1916 and 1920 Dupré combined his post as Widor's Assistant with a temporary appointment as acting organist of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame. His sensational improvisations here attracted a good deal of attention, and their spirit is reflected in his two organ compositions from this period, the Vesper Antiphons, Op.18 and the Scherzo, Op.16. The Scherzo is a relentless *moto perpetuo*, with a thread of staccato semiquaver figuration running through every bar of its 13 pages. Set against the semiquavers is a short melodic motif which is first heard in dialogue between right hand and pedal, occasionally erupting into a more emphatic display, and twice expanded into a more long-breathed melodic line which soars up the keyboard and down again, briefly recalling (unusually for Dupré) the style of Notre-Dame's *titulaire* Louis Vierne. This rarely-heard tour-de-force provides a vivid illustration of

the dynamism of Dupré's inspiration as he approached the dawn of his international career.

MÉDITATION, WOO

This little shaving from the workbench of the composer's old age was commissioned by the Americans Henry and Enid Woodward for their *Library of Organ Music* in 1966; unfolding in a gentle *Moderato*, with elegant part-writing and deft touches of harmonic color, in an approachable idiom ideal for the amateur organist, this is admittedly the kind of music that Dupré could improvise in his sleep, but it is beautiful all the same...

SYMPHONIE-PASSION, OP. 23

*Le Monde dans l'attente du Sauveur — Nativité —
Crucifixion Résurrection*

Dupré's first visit to the USA in 1921 was organized by Dr Alexander Russell, the director of the Wanamaker concert bureau. It comprised a series of 12 inaugural recitals on the new enlarged organ in the Wanamaker Auditorium in New York, followed by six concerts on the Grand Court Organ in Wanamaker's store in Philadelphia, and it was the last of these, on 8th December, that saw the birth of the work that many still consider to be Dupré's greatest masterpiece. Presented with four themes of plainsong for the program's concluding improvisation, he had the idea of building them into a four-movement symphony inspired by the life of Jesus. 'As my plan was announced,' he said, 'the entire hall was on its feet, and I played in a state of exaltation that I have seldom known'. The reviews were ecstatic: 'The improvised symphony became a tone-poem of surpassing beauty, its final thunderous climax of tone, thrilling and triumphant...' Encouraged by this warm reception, Dupré decided to undertake a properly composed, written version of the work, but the next few years were to be the busiest of his whole life, and the Symphony was not completed until the fall of 1924, just in time for the inauguration of the second stage of

the organ in Westminster Cathedral in London in October.

Abbé Delestre once asked Dupré if he could be at all precise about the relationship between the Philadelphia improvisation and the final version of the symphony: 'Apart from the general conception of the four movements, and the four plainsong themes', the composer replied, 'there remain, in the finished work: the form of each of the pieces, the tonal schemes (*les rapports des tonalités*), and a certain number of 'notes' that I hastened to write down, during the night, in my hotel room. After all, what can survive of a fugitive improvisation? — only the ideas that have struck you sufficiently strongly for your consciousness to seize hold of them on the spot, with the specific intention of retaining them.' On another occasion, referring specifically to the first movement, Dupré told Jeanne Demessieux that the essence of the earlier improvisation was there, but that the end was different; when he was writing down the symphony, he 'found' the end of the first movement while he was improvising and experimenting in private on the organ of Saint-Ouen ... 'he was searching for it, and all of a sudden he found it.'

The four movements of the symphony trace the life of Christ through the seasons of the church year, from Advent to Christmas, Passiontide and Easter. In Dupré's dramatic conception of *The World awaiting the Savior*, pounding chords and irregular rhythms depict a world of tormented and restless souls. After an abrupt climax, the Christmas hymn *Jesu Redemptor omnium* is introduced very softly as a symbol of light in the darkness. The unrest resumes, but the hymn cannot be silenced; it becomes more and more insistent in a great crescendo, finally ringing out in triumph, as hope overwhelms despair.



In *Nativité* Dupré adopts a naive, pictorial style; this movement takes the form of a triptych, portraying the Virgin and Child, the March of the Shepherds to Bethlehem, and finally the Adoration. The tender, swaying lullaby of the first section has a mysterious, almost oriental flavor; it returns in the third scene, where it is combined with the familiar melody of *Adeste Fideles*, before the angels add their blessing in two distant Alleluias.

HYMN.
VI
A D-és-te fi-dé-les, laéti, tri-umphántes : Vení-te, vení-
te, in Béthle-em : * Ná-tum vi-dé-te Régem Ange-ló- rum :
Vení-te, adorémus, vení-te adorémus, ve-ní-te adorémus Dó-
minum.-

The sinister jagged rhythms of *Crucifixion* depict the faltering steps of Christ's ascent to Calvary, and mount relentlessly to a harrowing climax. Then, in a whispered, desolate epilogue, we hear the ancient melody *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*: 'At the cross her station keeping, stood his mournful mother weeping ...'

HYMN.
VI
S Tabat Ma-ter do-lo-rósa Juxta Crucem lacrimósa,
Dum pendébat Fí-li-us.

Résurrection is conceived as a vast crescendo, built on the theme of the Communion hymn *Adoro Te*. The dissonance of some of the music reflects the bitterness of Christ's struggle with the powers of darkness, but the home key of D major is finally established in a jagged toccata, around which the chorale thunders out in canon between treble and bass, and the final chords echo and intensify the climax of the first movement of the symphony, recalling the text of the final verse of the hymn: 'To gaze on Thee unveiled and see Thy face, The vision of Thy glory and Thy grace.'

Hymn.

A D-óro te devó-te, la-tens Dé-i-tas, Quæ sub his fi-
gú-ris ve-re lá-ti-tas: Ti-bi se cor me-um totum súbji-cit,
Qui-a te contémp-lans, totum dé-fi-cit.

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R.S.V.P.