

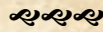
A black and white photograph of Jean Langlais, an elderly man with white hair, wearing dark sunglasses and a dark suit with a bow tie. He is seated at a large, light-colored wooden console, likely a pipe organ, with his hands on the keys. The background shows a wall with several framed portraits and a bookshelf filled with books. The overall atmosphere is formal and scholarly.

*Marie-Louise Langlais*

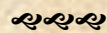
**Jean**  
**LANGLAIS**  
*remembered*

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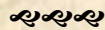
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# Foreword

My first introduction to the music of Jean Langlais was in 1964 at the Cathedral of Saint Joseph the Workman in La Crosse, Wisconsin, an impressive new neo-Gothic building with eight seconds of reverberation. The cathedral was finished and consecrated in 1963.

I was 11 years old and a member of the newly formed Cathedral boy choir when we welcomed our bishop and an entourage of about 100 priests, Brother of Saint Pius X, Knights of Columbus, Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre and other dignitaries into the cathedral for a Pontifical mass with Langlais' *Sacerdos et Pontifex*, Op. 109, composed for unison choir, trumpets and organ. For the dedication of the cathedral, the bishop ordered four long heralding trumpets and these were used for the very long procession that lasted almost fifteen minutes – the work was sung through twice.

This imposing work had been composed in 1959 to honor the Archbishop of Omaha, the Most Reverend Gerald T. Bergan, and was premiered in Boys Town, Nebraska, in the archbishop's presence at the 1961 Boys Town Summer Liturgical Workshop. The influence of Langlais at the Boys Town workshops had a profound effect on Roman Catholic sacred music around the United States and his music became extremely popular. Langlais was also one of the most highly esteemed French concert organists. He was especially revered for his extraordinary improvisations.

The impressive organ part of *Sacerdos et Pontifex*, with its neo-medieval harmonies and modality, stirred my soul as a young child of 11 years old and it was from that moment I knew what my future would be.

Only one year later, I had the great fortune to begin my first serious organ studies with a master organist-teacher, Byron L. Blackmore, a former student of André Marchal and Arthur Poister who had just moved to La Crosse and became the first musician to ever be employed as a full-time church musician in the city. Prof. Blackmore was very devoted to the music of Langlais and performed his music regularly. Thanks to him, I was able to study more than 25 major works of Langlais and hear an amazing amount of Langlais' music in concert before I turned 18. In 1965, I was appointed one of the three organists at the La Crosse Cathedral by Msgr. Joseph Kundinger. I regularly performed Langlais' music for the 6-10 weekly masses I was assigned.

To this day, I credit Jean Langlais with my decision to become an organist.

I never lost my love for his music and I have continued to faithfully perform, teach and promote it throughout my entire career. I had the great fortune to spend much time with Langlais in 1973-1974 when I was living in Paris and studying with his close friend, Marie-Claire Alain. I attended Sunday services at Sainte-Clotilde very often and took some private lessons at Langlais' home on the rue Duroc. Our friendship continued until his death.

*Foreword*

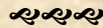
I am extremely grateful to Marie-Louise Langlais for all she has done during her entire career to keep her husband's name before the public.

Mme. Langlais' first book, *Ombre et Lumière*, is an extraordinary reference and a 'must have' for anyone who is serious about the composer's life and music. It is available only in French and it is a masterpiece.

Because of Langlais' great devotion and gratitude to his American public, Mme. Langlais decided to write a new book in English and make it available for free on the Internet to commemorate the 25th anniversary year of his death. This book was written over seven years and was a labor of love in honor of her late husband and their American public. I would like to express our gratitude to her for this extraordinary gift to us.

This foreword was written in Paris on the day Langlais' beloved daughter, Caroline Langlais-de Salins, gave birth to her son, Jean Langlais' grandson, Félix (February 8, 2016). We can imagine that Jean Langlais is smiling and looking down from heaven with pride and joy!

James David Christie



*For Margaux and Félix  
My beloved grandchildren*

# Preface

In the aftermath of the death of Jean Langlais on May 8, 1991, the French daily newspaper *Le Monde* published an obituary on May 15, 1991, stating conclusively, "...his organ pieces, skillfully composed, have overshadowed the rest of his production." This summary judgment spurred me to ask:

Would the writer reduce his entire *oeuvre* simply to his organ works?

Will Langlais leave a broader mark on 20<sup>th</sup> century music?

Was he an innovator or a follower?

This book was written to try to answer these questions.

It is now 2016, and the choice to publish this work on the Internet rather than as a printed book, as tradition would dictate, was quickly made. This text, offered as open access, addresses the widest possible audience. The most influential language in the world today is English, so it seemed essential that it be published in this language. Conceived and written in French, my native language, it was translated by four American translators, Bruce Gustafson, Arthur Lawrence, Ross Wood and Shirley Parry, listed in the order of their involvement. Without them, nothing would have been possible.

And so that readers can fully benefit from this online version, 64 photographs, some in color, have been included in the text. Jean Langlais would certainly have embraced this contemporary medium of distribution...he, who loved to keep up with the times.

Born February 15, 1907, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jean Langlais died 25 years ago, May 8, 1991, at the age of 84. Together with him, their deaths just before or just after his, these last of the "sacred monsters" of French organ music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were gone: Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986), Gaston Litaize (1909-1991), and Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992). One of their glorious brothers, Jehan Alain, born in 1911, had died much earlier, cut down by the war in 1940 at the age of 29. Duruflé, Langlais, Messiaen, Litaize and Alain were all Paris Conservatory prize winners and had in common some of the same prestigious teachers: Paul Dukas in composition (Duruflé, Messiaen, Langlais, Alain), Marcel Dupré in organ (Messiaen, Langlais, Litaize, Alain), and Tournemire in improvisation (Duruflé and Langlais).

Alone among this group, however, Jean Langlais has been very active--30 years, to be precise--in the United States. Between 1952 and 1981 he gave some 300 concerts and master classes there. From the end of World War II, his works were published by American publishers H. W. Gray, Belwin Mills, Elkan-Vogel, McLaughlin & Reilly, H.T. FitzSimons, Theodore Presser and Fred Bock. This book retraces his life in the United States in particular.

Unlike Jehan Alain, who died at age 29, before he could realize the full potential of his genius, Jean Langlais had ample time to express himself throughout his 62-year career, which lasted from 1929 to 1991. His more than 250 numbered works spanned all genres: music for



solo instruments (especially the organ, with more than 300 pieces), sacred choral music, chamber music, symphonic music, and melodies. What is striking at first glance, is the disparity between the heavy proportion of sacred music (organ, vocal music) and the smaller number of secular compositions (orchestra, chamber music, melodies). This imbalance was undoubtedly a consequence of the early success of his organ compositions ("The Nativity," the "Te Deum"), which quickly enclosed him in the circle of "organist-composers," just as his seniors, Charles-Marie Widor, Louis Vierne, Charles Tournemire and Marcel Dupré, had been. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, only the organists César Franck, Camille Saint-Saëns and Olivier Messiaen, whose universal genius no one questions, escaped this restrictive classification.

Jean Langlais' blindness also limited his creative freedom; he would have liked, he stated, to compose a ballet or music for a film, but no one sought him out for this, even though he had successfully illustrated many radio plays after the World War II. Slowly, imperceptibly, his musical universe was limited to the organ and the church. Was this painful for him? Yes, he said so many times, but this did not prevent him from admiring unreservedly and without jealousy the major works for large orchestra by his sighted colleagues Messiaen, Dutilleux or Jolivet.

Langlais' career falls into three periods. In the first, from the 1930s to the 1950s, his musical vocabulary is forged, with key elements being a mix of materials such as modality, free or Gregorian, tonality and chromaticism. The modal-chromatic idiom, with its tonal-chromatic variant, will thus be his signature during all the pre-war years; his "Te Deum" (1934) for organ remains the best example of this. The novelty of his message lies not so much in the language he used, which was traditional, as in his method of assembling and juxtaposing it, in the way that 20<sup>th</sup> century painters created collages. Joining together diverse and opposing elements of different historical origins--this is what he did that was revolutionary.

In the second, post-war period, he was seduced by a certain "neo-classicism." This is the period of his great "Suites" for organ: *Suite brève* (1947) and *Suite française* (1948). He even let himself be tempted by the "neo-medieval" pastiche in *Suite médiévale* (1947) and *Missa Salve Regina* (1954). His music met with immediate success everywhere.

He could have continued in that style that had done so well for him; however, in a third and final period extending from the early 1960s until his death in 1991, he preferred to explore different techniques of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as serialism (*Sonate en trio*, 1968), irregular rhythms (*Cinq Meditations sur l'Apocalypse*, 1974), semi-clusters, atonalism, or polytonality. This shift toward modernism will be definitive from *l'Essai* for organ (1961) on. And even if we notice, starting in the 70s, some flashbacks (*Offrande à Marie, Huit Chants de Bretagne* for organ), he is definitely getting "into" modernity, thus disorienting his traditional audience, who will judge this new language as too advanced, or, on the other hand, as not advanced enough, especially those who felt that after Messiaen's *Livre d'Orgue* (1951), one could no longer compromise with "neo-classicism" – something of which Langlais was regularly accused.

Was he subjected to a mock trial? Almost all 20<sup>th</sup> century musicians, Stravinsky being at the top of the list, suffered such setbacks at one time or another. A musical revolutionary is often the one who draws from other sources, like Messiaen, who was fascinated by the rhythms and percussion of the Far East. Neo-classicism is certainly questionable when it is slavish imitation. But was that the issue for Langlais? Perhaps it was rather that his attraction to the past echoed Arthur Honegger's assertion: "To advance the art, one must be firmly attached to the past, like the branches of a tree. A branch cut from the trunk quickly dies."

By changing his style, Jean Langlais condemned himself to creating malcontents of every stripe. He, whose "modernism" seemed acceptable when the works of Messiaen shocked people in the 1930s and 1940s, suddenly seemed outdated at the beginning of the 1950s, when music drew its inspiration from serial concepts and experimental music.

But indifferent to these shifts in opinion, Langlais followed his path without letting himself be influenced. Gradually, leaving behind orchestral and secular instrumental music, he increasingly concentrated his energy on the organ, at the moment when the "baroquists" triggered a kind of devastating cyclone which limited organ music of the time to that of J. S. Bach. I experienced those years, the 1960s and 1970s, during which César Franck inspired only amused contempt and during which the organs that Aristide Cavaillé-Coll built seemed doomed to the artistic trash heap. Undaunted, Langlais played and taught Franck, Tournemire and Vierne when some of his colleagues did not go beyond Buxtehude, Couperin or Grigny.

And when, in the 1980s, the 19<sup>th</sup> century becomes fashionable again, Langlais was roundly rebuked for electrifying the Cavaillé-Coll of Sainte-Clotilde, an unforgivable crime for those who saw this organ solely as César Franck's instrument and who refused to admit it was also Tournemire's and Langlais'. In short, Jean Langlais, who had up until then enjoyed in France very broad approval, found himself the object of all kinds of opposition starting in the 1960s. However, he still felt free and found a rigidly applied system foreign to him. One day in 1975, reading a letter that Olivier Messiaen had just sent him after receiving the score for *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*, Langlais remarked: "Messiaen has discovered a lot of things (especially Hindu rhythms) that I have found by accident."

This book does not analyze all the works of Jean Langlais, for there is not enough time and space. I have selected the pieces that I consider essential; they will be presented with some technical analyses, press reviews and letters from colleagues.

Three different font styles are used in this book. Text in the largest font presents the biography of Jean Langlais. Reviews, commentary and correspondence appear in a slightly smaller font. Finally, in a different and still smaller typeface is detailed musical analysis of individual works. If this latter is deemed too abstract or complicated reading, the reader should feel free to skip these passages. This eleven-chapter book concludes with the funeral oration delivered by Msgr. Jehan Revert during the funeral Mass for Jean Langlais at Sainte-Clotilde on May 30, 1991. Of very high quality, it is both moving and rich in symbolism. Finally, a chronological catalog of works by Langlais from 1929 to 1990 can be found in a postscript.

Jean Langlais was born poor in Brittany, which in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the most impoverished of French provinces. Blind from the age of 2, he lived through two world wars, almost dying in 1917 during the first war when he caught the Spanish flu. In Paris he suffered through the second war, with its privations and cruelty. But thanks to his gifts, to his tenacity and his optimism, and sustained by an unshakable faith, he knew success in his lifetime. The triumph of his *Missa Salve Regina* in 1954 was one of his proudest moments, justifying his profession of faith: "My best music is that which I have written to the Holy Virgin." Considered by critics as an "accessible" modern, he was revered. In the following decades, America took over, and Langlais was then acclaimed from coast to coast, attracting both audiences and students eager to receive his message and ready to follow him to France. In the last years of his life, however, he had the impression of being neglected in his own country.

## Preface

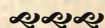
Staying true to harmonic and melodic music, deviating from the Catholic Church's new directive concerning religious music while opposing in the strongest terms the triumph of the baroque, he had much to lose. People wanted to oppose him to Messiaen, Duruflé and Alain. But to no avail. These musicians complement each other more than they contrast, and the sum of their talents represents a richness beyond compare in France in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Impervious to all exoticism, Langlais summed himself up: "I am a Catholic Breton." This statement expresses everything, from his provincial origins to his religious beliefs. The art of Jean Langlais is an art of synthesis which, combining languages and aesthetics from different eras and backgrounds, succeeded in giving new life to timeworn material. This "naïf from the Middle Ages," with a character as rough as his music, was perfectly able to exercise the most exquisite refinement, as his harmonies testify. He lived his life with passion and enthusiasm, and his music is in his unique image, full of sound and fury, but also overflowing with poetry and subtlety. Donning a thousand faces, it spans the 20<sup>th</sup> century without deviating from its authenticity.

Will he remain known solely as a composer of sacred music? Perhaps not, as evidenced by the almost simultaneous recent publication, for the first time, of some of his manuscripts in diverse genres. These range from melodies (see the Jean Langlais website), to large pieces with orchestra like his *Messe Solennelle* (the 1949 version for choir and orchestra, with or without organ, published by Schola Cantorum (Switzerland) in 2015), to *Essai sur l'Évangile de Noël* and the *Te Deum* of 1934, published under the generic title *Diptyque symphonique sacré* by Bonnorgue editions (Germany, 2016), to his 1937 *Thème, variations et Final* for organ, orchestra and brass, published by Doblinger (Austria, 2016). All these pieces from the 1930s are being reborn today, nearly 75 years after their composition. Could this be a sign that sacred music may not be the single category under which Jean Langlais will be referenced?

...We dare to think so...

Marie-Louise Langlais  
Paris, February 8, 2016



# *Acknowledgments*

I especially want to thank my translators whose help has been indispensable.

First of all Bruce Gustafson, Charles A. Dana Professor of Music Emeritus at Franklin and Marshall College, author of over two hundred articles in scholarly journals and encyclopedias, publications which have been very well reviewed; and Arthur Lawrence, former organ faculty member at the Manhattan School of Music, editor of several organ magazines, and author of articles, reviews, and CD booklets. Both accepted without hesitation the heavy challenge of translating Chapters 1- 6 from French into English. In addition, they carefully researched all the sources which were not available in France. Their very musicological approach has been indispensable in shaping the section on the first period of Jean Langlais' life. They also met the challenge of translating several poetic, sometimes obscure, and always complex passages by Olivier Messiaen into readable English.

Chapters 7 - 9 were translated by Ross Wood, an expert in sacred music as well as in organ repertoire, including the music of Langlais. He has served as associate organist and choirmaster at Boston's Church of the Advent from 2001 to 2016. I especially appreciate his ability to bring to life the direct and unsophisticated personality of Jean Langlais.

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, translated chapters 10 and 11. An experienced editor, she had the responsibility of harmonizing the translations of all the chapters while maintaining the different "esprits" of the various translators. This was difficult and delicate work for which I am very grateful.

My very good friend James David Christie, Chair and Professor of organ at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, international recitalist all over the world, gave me unceasing support from the beginning, and with his help, this translation received support from the Boston chapter of the American Guild of Organist's Special Projects Fund. My thanks to him and to the Fund's coordinator Martin Steinmetz.

John Walker, president of the AGO, has been a close friend since the 1970s. He has always been present and has been invaluable in arranging contacts with the AGO for this project. I am delighted that, with his help, the AGO will be able to offer this book for free to all AGO members.

And, for their tributes, always given without any restrictions, I wish to thank George C. Baker, Marjorie Bruce, Lynne Davis Firmin-Didot, Douglas Himes, Thomas F. Kelly, Jan Overduin, Emmet Smith, Kathleen Thomerson, Bishop Pierre W. Whalon, and French film director Coline Serreau.

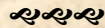
## *Acknowledgements*

Sylvie Mallet brought great patience to the task of transferring and organizing the 63 photographs contained in this book. Richard Powell has been invaluable in transcribing several of Langlais' unpublished songs and these editions now figure in the Langlais' website. Alice Benevise-Germain and Matthieu Germain used their computer expertise to transform this book unto a pdf document available to everybody.

I am grateful for all the many letters, documents, stories, given by close friends of Jean Langlais, all dead now, including some of his prestigious teachers. Let me cite many names particularly dear to Jean Langlais's heart: Paul Dukas, Olivier Messiaen, Charles Tournemire, Gaston Litaize, André Bourgoin, Rachel Brunswig, Pierre Denis, Pierre Lucet, Msgr. Jehan Revert, and, from the United States, Seth Bingham, Catharine Crozier, Charles Dodsley Walker, John Forshaw, Theodore Marier, Robert Sutherland Lord, Lilian Murtagh, Father Francis P. Schmitt.

Of course I will not forget the members of Langlais' family whose help was essential to his life: his first wife, Jeannette, who copied all his music, his son Claude and daughter Janine, and, at the end of his life, his second daughter Caroline. Her father died when she was only ten, but I can testify that she has been the light of his painful last years.

Marie-Louise Langlais



## CHAPTER 1

### *Childhood and Early Education (1907-1930)*

#### **Birth at La Fontenelle, February 15, 1907**

In the year nineteen hundred and seven, the sixteenth of February at four o'clock in the afternoon, certified by Pierre Mazure, Mayor and Supervisor of the Civil Registry for the community of La Fontenelle, district of Antrain, Ille-et-Vilaine, Jean Langlais, stonemason, twenty-six years old, a resident of the village of La Fontenelle, appeared before us and presented a male child born yesterday, the fifteenth of February, at half past eleven o'clock in the evening to him, he attested, and to Flavie Canto, seamstress, twenty-four years old, his wife, living with him, and to said infant he attested to giving the first names of Jean, François, Hyacinthe.

These declarations and this presentation are witnessed by François Canto, cart-maker, twenty-eight years old, and by Arsène Gaignon, teacher, fifty years old, both residents of La Fontenelle. The father and the witnesses signed the present birth certificate with me after it had been read to them.

This is an excerpt of the official birth certificate of Jean-François-Hyacinthe Langlais, which unequivocally documents the date, time, and place of Jean Langlais' birth: February 15, 1907, 11:00 pm, at La Fontenelle, France. His parents were Jean Langlais, 26, stonemason; and Flavie Canto, 24, seamstress.

Where is La Fontenelle? It's a small village in the very northern part of the province of Brittany, just two miles from Normandy, and only about twelve from the famous Mont Saint-Michel. The name of Langlais' village, La Fontenelle, refers to a little fountain at the rear of the community called "Saint-Samson fountain" and which never ran dry; local lore had it that its waters were miraculous. And it's true that in this village—as elsewhere in Brittany—legends, beliefs, and superstitions mingled freely with Roman Catholic religion.

At the time of Jean Langlais' birth, La Fontenelle had the charm of a traditional little rural market town, with its somber granite houses and slate roofs. At the center of the village was the parish close, considered to be sacred by the villagers. This impressive grouping included the cemetery, the Calvary (an outside crucifix that was treated as a shrine), and the church, the entirety surrounded by a low stone wall. The whole center of the village is gone now, as

in most villages in Brittany, and the cemetery was moved outside the town later in the twentieth century—but this was the community that Jean Langlais knew as a child. The church with its Calvary is striking for its large size, the result of many eras of building from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries:



**Saint-Samson Church in La Fontenelle and its “Calvaire”**  
Figure 1. (photograph and collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

## **Family Life**

The condition of the Langlais family when little Jean was born can be summarized in one word: poverty. Jean and Flavie Langlais, who were married in 1906, rented from their relatives a house abutting the cemetery at the back of the church. They shared this house with Flavie’s parents:



**Birthplace of Jean Langlais in La Fontenelle**  
Figure 2. (photograph and collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

The Canto couple lived in the right-hand portion of the house, while Jean and Flavie made do with a single room that had a packed-earth floor (in the foreground of the photograph). The granite chimney served the kitchen, and their diet essentially consisted of bread soaked in vegetable soup. In the winter, chestnuts enriched the meager daily meals, and on feast-days some seafood, such as fresh sardines and shellfish from the nearby ocean, was added to this frugal everyday fare. There was, of course, no running water in the village, and Jean Langlais never forgot the weight of the buckets filled to the brim which he had to bring from the Saint-Samson fountain, 550 yards from the family home.

Four children were to be born in the home of Jean and Flavie Langlais: Jean, the eldest, in 1907; then the only daughter, Flavie, in 1915; and later Louis (1920) and Henri (1925). Almost twenty years separated the eldest from the youngest. Following tradition, the first son was named for his father and the first daughter for her mother.



**Jean and Flavie Langlais, 1906**

Figure 3. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

In his “Souvenirs,”<sup>1</sup> Jean Langlais painted a detailed picture the family:

I didn't know my paternal grandparents well. My grandmother, Joséphine Lemarchand, was an admirable saintly woman. She had eight children, six girls and two boys, of whom my father was the elder. She died when I was very young, and unfortunately I have very few memories of her. On the other hand, I was present at the death of my paternal grandfather in 1910. Attending him were my mother and my Aunt Valentine, my father's youngest sister, and I remember these two women perfectly, sitting next to the dying man who couldn't die. Together the women fervently read the prayers for the dying out loud. I heard my grandfather's last sigh, and then, as tradition dictates, they had me embrace him. I was only three years old and yet I remember it as if it were yesterday.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Langlais, “Souvenirs,” recorded on 60 minute audio cassettes in 1977, intended for his three grand-sons; these recollections, held by Marie-Louise Langlais, are a veritable goldmine of spontaneous information. They will be cited frequently as Langlais, “Souvenirs” as we recount the life of Jean Langlais.



On my maternal side, my grandmother lived to be very old (she died at 87). She was born on March 25th, a date that was very dear to her because it was the feast of the Annunciation. For her whole life, she went from one washtub to another. During the “War of ’14” she washed the soldiers’ clothes at the hospital near Antrain. And to do this, she was on her knees all day long, with nothing in her stomach except a thin soup gulped down before leaving home. She had terribly swollen hands, but she never complained.

My maternal grandfather was a stonemason, and he also worked for one farm or another. He left home at five in the morning with the clay pipe that he smoked from the time he got out of bed. Naturally, as a stonemason, he always worked outside. It also shouldn’t be surprising that people like him needed alcohol—coffee without alcohol was unthinkable! Thus, before starting his day at a farm, my grandfather drank down a cup of coffee generously laced with calvados, an extremely strong apple brandy. After that, he worked until nightfall. He and my grandmother had three girls, of whom my mother was the youngest.

There’s no doubt that my parents’ wisdom and teaching had a huge influence on my future. My mother was a woman of unimaginable courage. In 1915, during the First World War, while my father was at the front, she—like her parents—went to work on farms, repairing the farmers’ clothes; and for this she earned ten sous per day. At this time she had three people to care for in addition to herself: my father, to whom she sent packages, my young sister, and me, all with ten sous per day.

And that is why, when she returned home after working on the farms, she started another day’s work: sewing for her personal clientele. And there we shared wonderful times together, she and I. She used to buy the cheapest wood shavings from the clog-maker, and she lit the fire (which hardly warmed me, I must say); and as for me, I was in charge of maintaining the hearth and throwing in handfuls of shavings from time to time. During this time she sang songs, sewed, told me stories, and when we were put to bed she read me stories, which of course enchanted me. That is, she had unfailing devotion, not only to fill the material needs of her family, but also to think of my mental development; for to read me stories—often at midnight, when she was falling over from exhaustion and had to get up the next day at six—that was truly the stuff of heroism. This life could have killed a bull, but not a courageous woman!

## **Blindness**



**Jean Langlais at age two**

Figure 4. (photograph A. Henry, Paris, collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

At Jean Langlais' birth, nothing suggested that he would soon become totally and incurably blind. However, from the age of six months the first symptoms of a terrible illness, congenital infantile glaucoma, appeared: the infant rubbed his red and crying eyes, turning his head away from the slightest light, to the point that his mother covered the windows with thick curtains. Soon the interior pressure in the eyes increased so much that it literally caused an explosion inside the eyes, in a surge of intense pain. Henceforth he could no longer distinguish what was around him, no longer even differentiating day from night. His parents tried, with little hope, to fight against this fateful event, going so far as to spend their meager means to consult an eye surgeon at the hospital in Rennes. An operation was attempted. It failed.

Since medicine seemed powerless, the mother turned towards God: on a beautiful day in 1909, carrying her two-year-old on her back, she undertook the trip to the little town near Pleine-Fougères on foot and with an empty stomach, as tradition dictated—that is, she walked fifteen miles a day for nine days in a row. The tomb of the beloved Father Bachelot was there. Popular faith had it that if one simply embraced his tombstone, one would heal. Little Jean repeated the gesture nine times, in vain. Many years later, when the composer, who was an ardent believer, would be asked why he never went to the Marian sanctuary at Lourdes, famous for its miraculous cures, he would reply:

If I had been sighted like everyone else, I would have inevitably followed my father as stonemason. One has to believe that the Virgin Mary had other plans for me, which included blindness. May her wishes be fulfilled.<sup>2</sup>

At La Fontenelle, Jean and Flavie Langlais had to accept the harsh reality of their little son's blindness, and they constantly faced the clumsy sympathy of their neighbors:

Today, they say that you should be careful about what you say in front of a child. But how many times did I hear someone say to my parents, right in front of me, "It would have been better if he had lost an arm or a leg rather than his vision." It pained me to hear such words throughout my childhood, and I developed an inferiority complex that I'm sure I'll retain until death.<sup>3</sup>

Usually the family of a blind child makes a choice between two strategies, both equally bad: overprotection, or the opposite (and happily rarer), rejection of the handicapped person. Jean Langlais' parents, however, were to adopt a third choice, dictated by their instincts and their intelligence: they made it their business to teach independence to this blind child who was to become a composer and an autonomous man for his whole life.

At the beginning, they held his hand so that he would not bump into the furniture, then little by little they let him explore his universe on his own; the child therefore established landmarks in the house, knowing where the table was compared to the armoire, to the bed. To be sure, he used his hands for this, but also his hearing, listening to where something he held in his hand fell, or locating a voice and moving towards it. Similarly, he differentiated

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

between the packed earth of the family room and the gravel of the road that passed his house. With the tip of his foot, he sought the border of the sidewalk, the corner of the wall, and—more and more—got bolder and acted as if he saw.

He later said:

I can say that my early years were happy. Instead of emphasizing my blindness, my mother treated me as if I were normal. Thus, when she had need of a roll of string, or of needles, she sent me to get them at the village store; I found out later that she followed me to be sure that I would find the door without incident, but she never told me. I wasn't afraid of anything: I rode a bicycle by myself, I climbed trees. I remember that I went all the way to the top of the tallest ones at full speed, much to everyone's dismay! Vertigo was unknown to me at the time. I think that I was considered a phenomenon in the countryside. I went alone to mass and to catechism class, alone to school as well. From the age of six I went to public school like my sighted friends. They were very kind to me, as well. Unfortunately, the teacher took little interest in my kind. Naturally, he knew nothing of writing in Braille, and I remember that he sat me at the back of the class. I could only understand history and oral mathematics. I was very strong in mental calculations, as well. When there was a reading, of course I listened, but I must admit that when I entered the National Institute for the Young Blind at the age of ten, I didn't know how to read or write.

My maternal grandmother, who was as illiterate as I, learned to read in 1914 in order to teach me my catechism. She was a marvelous woman, deeply religious, who told me fantastical stories from the popular tradition—but also the lives of the saints.

Another remarkable woman brightened my early childhood: my cousin Marie Langlais, with whom I spent my days while my mother worked at the farms. This cousin had received her primary school certificate, the only such female in the village, and I owe much happiness to her. She taught me so many things and loved me so without making a show of it; a May 10th, her birthday, never goes by without my thinking of her. The unfortunate woman died at the age of 29 from tuberculosis.

From the time I could go to school, I had lots of friends, and I think that in the realm of games, nothing distinguished me from them. I especially remember being very good at hoops! One of my favorite places at the time was... the cemetery, whose gate was only fifty feet from our house. I climbed to the top of the Calvary, and jumped with feet together from one tomb to another. It seemed natural to me, and in no way blasphemous. It should be said that our mother always taught us to be familiar with death and the dead.<sup>4</sup>

The reality in Brittany was that death was part of daily experience. Epidemics, wars, shipwrecks, and famines had taught the tough people to think of it constantly. But even if the idea of death was familiar to the people of Brittany, its physical image filled them with terror: it was Ankou, the skeleton with his scythe and disturbing cortege of apparitions, the announcements of imminent death seen in the unexpected omens of a crow or a particular pattern of smoke coming out of a chimney.

In La Fontenelle, the people were firm believers in the existence of Ankou and his apparitions, and during the long evenings they of course often recounted the sinister stories in front of the little blind boy who, truly shocked, remembered them forever. Nevertheless, he wasn't really afraid, because he knew that heaven was at the end of the road. His grandmother had told him so, and she had painted a marvelous picture of a paradise filled

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

with thick, soft carpets, compared to their miserable packed earth. The child protested, “But grandmother, the carpets must be worn out, with all the people who walk on them in Paradise!” The grandmother replied decisively, “Paradise’s carpets don’t wear out because the Good Lord doesn’t *want* them to.” Thus religion was powerful for the people of Brittany, so afflicted with hardships. The Langlais family were strong believers; they went to church faithfully, never missed the Stations of the Cross, processions, or the Marian devotions of the Month of May. On Sundays, everyone gathered for the high mass at ten o’clock. There one sang the masses by Henri Du Mont, but also French hymns, like the famous “Sainte Anne, O Bonne Mère,” with its eloquent text:

Sainte-Anne, ô bonne mère,  
Toi que nous implorons,  
Entends notre prière  
Et bénis tes Bretons.

*Saint Anne, oh good mother  
You whom we implore  
Hear our prayer  
And bless your Bretons*

Until they had made their first communion, the children were supposed to attend Vespers with the women. Almost all the men demurred, except for the truly devout. Obviously, no one worked on Sunday, and the rector formally forbade it. In this connection, we should note ecclesiastical terminology idiosyncratic to Brittany: the principal priest serving a parish was always called “rector” (*recteur*), which is to say the one who leads, while the vicar was called “curate” (*curé*), he who takes care of the parish.

In August of 1914, France declared war, and the father of the Langlais family, mobilized immediately, left for the front as a stretcher-bearer. In the first days of the war, word came of the death of uncle Louis, the brother of Jean senior, and many sons of La Fontenelle lost their lives in the carnage.

On May 20, 1915, Flavie Langlais gave birth to a daughter, Flavie, baptized two days later, following tradition. Time moved on, and we arrive at 1916. Little Jean is now nine, and a photograph from the time taken for the father, still in the nursing corps on the front lines, shows the child beside his mother and his little sister:



**Jean Langlais, his mother and sister Flavie, 1916**  
Figure 5. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

The question of his future was becoming more and more insistent, but what could the mother do, barely able to feed her family with a husband at the front?

It was here that providence intervened in the form of a distant uncle, the commandant Jules Langlais. A singular figure, this officer began his military career as a simple soldier in Indochina, rose to the level of commandant by force of his courage, but ended his career as a captain, preferring to give up a stripe rather than obey the chain of command. Transferred to Paris, he acquired influential connections and soon took an interest in his young nephew, whose personality and vivacious spirit weren't lost on him. He advised his cousin Flavie to send little Jean to the best French school for the blind, the National Institute for the Young Blind in Paris (Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles de Paris).

The only problem, but a major one, was how could Flavie Langlais, with her meager income, pay the annual expenses of the school? Captain Langlais swept away this objection and arranged for a scholarship for his nephew. As for the 270 francs needed for ancillary expenses (sheets, towels, uniforms, shoes, and clothing), he paid them out of his own pocket. Jean Langlais thus returned to school, not in La Fontenelle but in Paris, in November of 1917, the date of the re-opening of the Institute. Closed to students during the first three years of the war, it had served as a military infirmary for the wounded.

At this moment when the young boy is entering a totally new phase of his life, a question that we have not yet addressed becomes obvious: what role had music played during his first years? The answer is: practically none. Except for the songs that his mother sang to him or that he heard at church, little Jean Langlais knew no music at all. He didn't know how to read music or play any instrument.

The only organ that he had ever heard, that of the church in Antrain (the main town in the district, a little over a mile from La Fontenelle) literally terrified him. In an instant, he thought that a storm, with its thunder and lightening, was pummeling his head. And this was only a modest rural organ. Certainly the dull harmonium at La Fontenelle, under the clumsy fingers of Father Jules, the local blacksmith who had been promoted to organist, wasn't what sowed the seeds of a musical vocation in the child. In starting down the path of the Institute for the Young Blind in Paris, ten-year-old Jean Langlais couldn't read or write and knew nothing about music, but he was endowed with a rock-solid faith and the kind of knowledge that was communicated orally by his loved ones.

Never will he forget the heritage of his birthplace.

## **L'Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles<sup>5</sup> à Paris**

Thursday, November 9, 1917. The young Jean Langlais, ten years old, walks through the gates, intimidated, into the courtyard of this venerable Institute located at 56 Boulevard des Invalides in Paris.

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<sup>5</sup> The National Institute for the Young Blind.



**The National Institute for the Young Blind in Paris**

Figure 6. (photograph and collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

It is worth recounting the history, sometimes difficult, of a modest school created as a charitable gesture that was transformed into one of the most important places in Paris for musical instruction. On the eve of the French Revolution, in 1784, Valentin Haüy founded the first school for blind children in Paris, l’Institution Royale des Jeunes Aveugles. During the Revolution, the Constitutional Assembly decided to keep it, giving it legal status as a national public establishment in 1791. Its location was moved to a place so unhealthy and dilapidated (the “Quinze-Vingts” hospital) that according to doctors at the time, “they’re dying there like flies.”<sup>6</sup>

It wasn’t until 1843 that the great poet Alfred de Lamartine, at the time a Deputy, outraged at the unsanitary places that he saw during a visit, made a vigorous public protest in the Chamber of Deputies. His action proved effective and a new building was constructed on the spacious site where it still stands today. It was high time, and as the director, Dufau, reported at the time,

Since moving to the Boulevard des Invalides, the number of student deaths was reduced by half.<sup>7</sup>

In the meantime, a huge event in 1825 had turned the world of the blind upside-down: the invention by Louis Braille, only 16 years old, of a system of notation with raised dots, allowing the blind, with their highly developed sense of touch, to read and write literature, mathematics, and music as fast as a sighted person. The introduction of this brilliant system was to give the teachers at the Institute the means for real instruction, and one of these teachers, Gabriel Gauthier, who was born blind in 1808 into a farming family, quickly

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<sup>6</sup> A communication from the Chambre des Députés as reported in *Le Moniteur*, 1 March 1832. 614.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre-Armand Dufau. *Notice historique, statistique et descriptive sur l’Institution Nationale des Jeunes Aveugles de Paris*. Paris: Concierge de l’Institution, 1852. 28.

understood the professional importance of church music to the blind: a well taught blind person could make money by becoming a parish organist, a position where one could get, in addition to the fees for accompanying the religious services, money for giving private lessons in piano, organ, and other instruments.

Thus organ study came to be at the center of the education of the students, and under the direction of excellent teachers such as Gabriel Gauthier and Louis Lebel, this resulted in the blossoming of numerous artists, especially organists such as Adolphe Marty, Albert Mahaut, and Louis Vierne, future organist of Notre Dame in Paris.

In 1847, there were 30 blind organists in Paris and the other major cities in France, and some of them occupied prestigious Parisian organ lofts: Louis Braille at Saint-Vincent-de Paul and then at Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, Charles Boissant at Les Invalides, Gabriel Moncousteau at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and Gabriel Gauthier at Saint-Étienne-du-Mont.

In 1886, Adolphe Marty, César Franck's first blind student, won a memorable first prize in organ in Franck's class at the Paris Conservatory. The magazine *Le Valentin Haüy* devoted an article to this event:

A student from the National Institute for the Young Blind in Paris, Mr. Adolphe Marty, has just won the First Prize in organ at the Paris Conservatory in the class of Mr. César Franck. The jury, chaired by Mr. Ambroise Thomas<sup>8</sup> and including some of the best organists in Paris, showed its satisfaction in awarding the first prize to the blind contestant, and his sighted fellow students, older than he, were ranked well after him. The program for the examination, very difficult, consisted of performing a large work, improvising a scholastic fugue (*fugue d'école*)<sup>9</sup> and a piece in free form, as well as accompanying plainchant in four voices in florid counterpoint<sup>10</sup>.

In 1888, the first prize in organ was awarded for the first time to a woman, Joséphine Boulay; she was 19 and was blind. The next year, the other blind pupil Albert Mahaut won a first. We should also note César Franck's devotion to blind organists, as Mahaut emphasized in his reminiscences about his mentor:

Franck loved our school. He wrote one of his works for us and dedicated it to us; it was for choir, organ, and orchestra: *Psalm 150, "Louez le Dieu caché,"* which was performed at the school in a memorable concert on March 17, 1883 for the dedication of the new Cavallé-Coll organ (34 stops on three manuals). It was in our chapel that he himself conducted one of the very first performances of his *Mass in A*, which today is so famous. Our choirs outdid themselves in his presence and under his direction that was so magnetic. Already we owe the best of our aspirations to him.

And further on he continues:

He improved my counterpoint and fugue writing, and when he decided I was ready, in October of 1888, I joined his organ class at the Conservatory. An unforgettable year when three times a week I felt myself grow from contact with the master. He started his class at eight o'clock, usually arriving on foot, always punctual, even if he had stayed

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<sup>8</sup> The opera composer Ambroise Thomas (1811-1896) was then the Director of the Paris Conservatory.

<sup>9</sup> A "fugue d'école" is a fugue written according to quite strict rules developed at the Paris Conservatory, beginning in the early nineteenth century. The classic text is: André Gédalge, *Traité de la fugue*. Paris: Enoch, 1901; English translation, Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1965.

<sup>10</sup> *Le Valentin Haüy*, July 1886; this newspaper was named for the founder of what was to become the Institute for The Young Blind and was concerned primarily with issues relating to the blind.

up late the night before (and he always stayed up late), or if he had returned from a trip that very morning. How short his class seemed to us!... The master was amazingly good for all his students. He encouraged me, he loved to show me off, and when he was to have a notable visitor, he always contacted me: “Come tomorrow,” he would write, “and bring your tools.” That’s what he called the device for writing in Braille. I went, armed with my “tools”; he himself would dictate a plainchant which I accompanied in florid counterpoint. Deprived of my left hand, which was busy reading the Braille text, I substituted with a double-pedal part, and I got along fine with this test, playing the bass with the left foot, the tenor with the right foot, and the two upper parts with the right hand.<sup>11</sup>

This excerpt helps us better understand the immense devotion that the blind organists always had for César Franck and his works.

After Franck’s death in 1890, five blind organists received first prizes at the Paris Conservatory, between 1894 and 1915: Louis Vierne (1894), student of Widor; Augustin Barié (1906), student of Guilmant; Rémy Clavers (1912), André Marchal (1913), and Cécile Joseph (1915), all students of Gigout. What better proof could there be of the great value of the instruction at the National Institute for the Young Blind than all of these young people being crowned at the Conservatory?

Little Jean was a long way from all of this when he passed through the gates of the school, accompanied by his mother. He had a heavy heart at the thought of being separated from her and finding himself alone in the midst of strangers, boys from ten to twenty years old, partly or totally blind, in the closed world of the boarding school where blindness was the norm. Fortunately, his optimistic and vigorous spirit helped overcome this tribulation, and from the fourth day after his matriculation he found a life-long friend in the person of André Bourgoïn, as tall and robust as he was short and frail.

What exactly did they teach at the Institute in 1917? Actually, the curriculum was more or less the same as that established in 1784 by Valentin Haüy at the foundation of the school: professional, musical, and intellectual instruction.

Music was in first place, since besides obligatory piano, the pupils had to study a second instrument that allowed them to play in the orchestra. Every student in the music division began with three years of solfège, followed by three years of harmony and two of composition. Only after the first two cycles were completed could the student begin to study the organ. In addition, unless one had a special dispensation, everyone was required to learn a trade, having a choice among among recaning chairs, turning wood, or repairing and tuning pianos.

Obviously, at the center of learning was the study of the Braille alphabet, which is based on a grid of only six dots, variously disposed within a rectangle :



<sup>11</sup> Albert Mahaut. *L'Œuvre d'orgue de César Franck*. Paris: INJA, 1923. 16.



With arrangements of these six embossed dots, Braille created 63 different symbols to represent all the letters of the alphabet, not just simple letters, but accented vowels, diphthongs, punctuation, numbers, and mathematical symbols. And as an excellent musician, Braille did not neglect his own art, to which his system was perfectly adaptable, as Pierre Villey, the great and blind intellectual, explained:

The most invaluable of these uses of Braille is musical notation in raised dots. The system's sixty-three characters are sufficient for all the demands of musical notation, and today a piece of any sort of music can be transcribed without omitting the slightest symbol... At the least, "sight-reading" is possible for singing, for which the hands are otherwise unoccupied, and to a great extent also on the organ, where the left hand follows the music while the right hand plays it, assisted by the pedals. Further, since memorizing is the law of the blind, musical notation in raised dots gives the blind person at least the possibility of learning other than by ear, without outside help and especially if he is not blessed with an exceptional ear. This is what has allowed the blind the place in the musical world that they have already claimed for a long time.<sup>12</sup>

Villey also debunks received wisdom about the compensation of the senses:

People glibly think that the surviving senses of a blind person are more acute than those of the sighted. That's how one generally understands the compensation of the senses. Mssrs. Griesbach and Kunz have made some thousands of clinical observations on this subject.<sup>13</sup> They concluded that:

- The ability to distinguish tactile differences is the same among the blind and the sighted; the difference in perception is more in favor of the sighted;
  - The blind smell less well on the tip of the index finger than the sighted (even though the index finger is the reading finger for the blind, therefore the one most used);
  - There is no difference between the blind and sighted, neither in terms of localizing sounds, nor the acuity of hearing (for sounds made at a distance).
- Thus it is firmly established that the senses of the blind are not superior in acuity to those of the sighted.

So let us reject once and for all this false notion that the blind have a "sixth sense," a sort of providential and mystical gift by which Nature (or God?) compensates the victims. On the contrary, let us admire their formidable strength of concentration and attention, as well as their ability to use their memory -- tactile, auditory, and intellectual. That's the key; just watch a blind person walk down the street alone: on the lookout, attentive, all senses in play to avoid obstacles.

At the National Institute for the Young Blind, there was always a schedule that was completely full and minutely regulated, from getting up to going to bed. Here is the schedule for an average day in 1917:<sup>14</sup>

5:30 am	Wake-up bell
5:30 to 6:10	Wash
6:10	Class in sacred history
7:10	Clean-up of the dormitory and making of beds
7:30	Breakfast in the refectory: soup and a 2 oz. round of bread

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Villey. *Le Monde des aveugles, essai de psychologie*. Paris: Corti, 1984. 38. (First published in 1914).

<sup>13</sup> One can find the articles by Griesbach in Pflüger's Archiv, 74:577-638, 75:365-426, 523-573, under the title, "Vergleichende Untersuchungen über die Sinneschärfe Blinder und Sehender."

<sup>14</sup> This list is based on the reminiscences of André Bourgoïn recorded on cassette by the author in 1982.

7:45	Break
8:00	Class (practice in Braille and verb conjugations)
9:55	Break
10:05	Class (reading)
12:00 pm	Lunch in the refectory, with another 2 oz. round of bread
12:30	Recess in the courtyard
1:30	Class (music)
3:30	Break and snack of another round of bread (with nothing else)
4:00	Class or study
7:00	Dinner in the refectory (with a fourth 2 oz. round of bread)
7:30	Break
8:00	Lights out

This routine applied to every day of the week except Thursday and Sunday, because on those days there were, in addition, Mass at 8:30 and Vespers on Sunday afternoon. Today, we fret about the intensity of school life imposed on young people, but what would people say about ten hours of class daily and 5:30 a.m. rising, inflicted on children ten years old?

The school year of 1917–1918 was, however, almost completely lost because of the enormous disruptions of the war. “Big Bertha” fired ceaselessly on Paris.<sup>15</sup> A shell even landed in the Saint-François-Xavier Place, 200 meters from the school. Often the alarms went off two or three times during the night, and the barely-dressed children had to take cover in the cellars of the Institute. The school year of 1918 was shortened by a month because of the bombardments. To make matter worse, during these last months of the war little Jean Langlais was attacked by a potentially lethal disease, Spanish influenza, from which he miraculously recovered.<sup>16</sup>

But to return to musical studies at the Institute. All the students were required to study solfège, piano, and an orchestral instrument chosen according to their physical aptitude. Thus André Bourgoïn was assigned the oboe, Jean Langlais the violin. For piano and the assigned instrument (organ came later in the pedagogical plan), the pupils were grouped into seven divisions, going from the beginning level and moving up through seven years of study, but numbered in ascending order (division seven was the first year of study, etc.).

If no division was repeated, one arrived in the eighth year at the “supplemental” division, and then at the “division of honor.” After that one was “outside the divisions,” which is to say outside the juried system. Theoretically, students were admitted at the age of ten and remained at the Institute until twenty. The exams were at the end of each trimester: in January, before Easter, and in July, this last being the annual end-of-year competition. Starting with the fourth division, every student had to play in the orchestra, which gave four concerts a year, not counting those given for special occasions.

The building was divided into two sections, one for boys, one for girls, rigorously separated according to the rules in force in education in general; the girls only joined the boys for religious services and choral rehearsals or concerts. For orchestral rehearsals and concerts the girls and boys sat on opposite sides of the chapel (now Salle André Marchal). All of the teachers in all disciplines were blind, unlike the members of the administration.

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<sup>15</sup> “Big Bertha” was the nickname for the huge German howitzers that bombarded Paris during World War I, said to be named for Bertha Krupp, elder daughter of and heiress to the German weapons manufacturer Friedrich Krupp.

<sup>16</sup> About 165,000 died from this pandemic in France, the most lethal in the XXth century.

The students, who wore uniforms, had little leisure time; during the years 1917 and 1918, authorized excursions were limited to once a month and only on a Sunday afternoon. Nevertheless, Langlais had fond memories of the educational enterprise in these quasi-military conditions:

This school was admirably run. They gave us our schedule hour by hour, and all we had to do was follow it...

At the beginning of school in 1918 we were in the joy of the armistice, and that gave us wings, but my first good memories were my Sunday outings: I went to visit my uncle, commandant Jules Langlais, who lived in the rue de la Glacière. He came to get me at the school and brought me to lunch at his place.

I had oysters there, something that had never happened to me in Brittany, because that was much too expensive.<sup>17</sup>

Starting with his first year at the Institute, Jean Langlais followed a daily regimen of two-and-a-half hours of music per day with one hour of solfège, quarter-hour lessons in piano and violin, and an hour-long private harmony lesson at one of the two small practice organs at the Institute.

He always realized how much he owed to his piano teacher, Maurice Blazy, a friend of Louis Vierne, a fine musician, and a cultivated man, who later could connect him with first-rate outside people, such as the pianist Lazare Lévy.<sup>18</sup>

His instrumental teacher, Rémy Clavers, was in charge of violin instruction. He had received a first prize in Gigout's organ class at the Conservatory, was equally comfortable playing piano, organ, and violin, in harmony with the Institute's goal of not creating specialists, but rather, fully formed musicians ready to be disseminated throughout France.

André Bourgoïn remembers:

In the second year we knew how to read and write in Braille, and we were moved up to the teachers of "intellectual" content: French, mathematics, history, and geography. We had a big anthology of literature, and we read, in short excerpts, the prose writers and the great classics. We did a summary each trimester, and a dictation every month, with spelling less than stellar! We read very few books. In any case, we were very mixed in terms of age, because 15-year old boys — that is to say, much older than we were— began school at the same time that we did.<sup>19</sup>

But the teacher whom Jean Langlais remembered as the most influential on him, was unquestionably Albert Mahaut, who had won a first prize in César Franck's Conservatory class.

I've always retained unbounded admiration for Albert Mahaut. Just think about the fact that he played Franck's complete organ works at the Trocadéro in 1896 in a single concert, more than two and a half hours of music, and Mahaut was blind! He was the first to accomplish this feat, and I doubt that many organists have done the same thing since!

I'll never forget the harmonic language taught by Monsieur Mahaut (and that's what I've always called him). It was something transcendent: everything was explained

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<sup>17</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

<sup>18</sup> Also known as Lazare-Lévy (1882-1964), influential French pianist, organist, composer and pedagogue.

<sup>19</sup> Bourgoïn tapes, 1982.

orally, without reference to a textbook. We had to do one exercise per day and play it by heart on the harmonium.

Monsieur Mahaut had his own style of teaching: he explained something once, then he asked if anyone failed to understand. If that was the case, he explained it again. Then he never mentioned the issue again. Thus, you had to follow his explanations very carefully. Obviously, with this kind of regimen, we had a lot of technique, somewhat akin to the pianists who play scales every day.

At the end of the first three years, when we previously had an hour to do our harmony exercises, we were given no more than ten minutes for them. I remember that my friends and I finished so fast that we used the remaining time to sight-read at the harmonium, each one with a hand on the 63 pieces from Franck's *L'Organiste*. Obviously, not everyone could maintain such a workload. Thus it was that we were 34 in the first year of solfège, and at the end of the harmony classes we were... three, which is to say that 31 pupils were left along the way, repeating classes (perhaps more than once), or dropping out altogether.<sup>20</sup>



**Albert Mahaut playing the Cavallé-Coll organ  
at the National Institute for the Young Blind in Paris**

Figure 7. (Valentin Hatty's Association Museum in Paris)

Once one began harmony class (at the age of 13 or 14), the schedule of music classes was more demanding, increasing to two hours each day of lessons and practice on each instrument, plus an hour at the harmonium to do harmony homework, not to mention learning liturgy through the obligatory participation in the choir directed by Adolphe Marty, three times a week between 5:00 and 6:00 in the afternoon. As he grew older, Langlais sang soprano, then tenor, then first bass!

I always worked with a genuine passion. My mother kept all my report cards from every trimester during my thirteen years of boarding school; the summary at the end of all of these documents was always the same: "A student who fully satisfies all of his teachers." I remember that in 1926, when I was really worn out, I only got second

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<sup>20</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs".

prizes in more or less everything. A second prize was not a bad thing, but because I had had so many firsts, my parents concluded that I had completely thrown the year away.<sup>21</sup>

Fortunately, there were vacations at La Fontenelle. There he rejoined his family and his familiar environment.



**Jean Langlais at age 12, in the Institute's uniform, with his sister Flavie**

Figure 8. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

To make up for the lack of a piano at home, his father bought a violin in 1923, for which he paid 12 francs.<sup>22</sup> “More expensive than a cow,” his mother observed! And so the child played, dazzling those around him with his facility.

He even entered a competition: in a community not far from La Fontenelle, for a civic festival, an assistant to the mayor and member of the festival committee, thinking himself to be the only person in the area who could wield a bow, decided to organize a violin competition with a 25-franc prize, which he assumed he'd pocket. But Jean Langlais, on vacation, got wind of the event and showed up. Climbing up onto the stage, he pointedly removed a string from his instrument and on the remaining three played *La Berceuse de Jocelyn*, a favorite in the countryside. Of course he won first prize, but nevertheless had to share the 25 francs with the municipal organizer.<sup>23</sup>

In 1923, Langlais was 16, and the first part of his education was finished: He had completed his three years of harmony with Albert Mahaut, simultaneously with the so-called “intellectual” courses, and could therefore dedicate himself completely to music, at a rate of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> about \$12 today.

<sup>23</sup> This anecdote was related 15 years later by Pierre Cressar in *Ouest-Éclair*, May 15, 1941.

eleven hours a day! Judged to be exceptionally gifted, he was excused from learning a manual trade because his teachers had ambitions for him. Rémy Clavers especially saw him as a professional violinist. But the boy had other ideas and preferred to begin organ and composition studies with a barely 29 year-old teacher at the school, André Marchal, a match that would prove crucial to the rest of his life. Marchal, although a novice teacher, was already crowned with laurels: first prize in organ in Gigout's Conservatory class in 1913; he succeeded Augustin Barié (blind organist and composer who died at 31) as the chair of organ, improvisation, and composition at the Institute. He was then just 25.

In 1923, the year that Langlais joined his class, Marchal was very much in the public eye because of four organ concerts in the Berlioz auditorium at the Conservatory, dedicated to classic, romantic, modern repertory, concluding with the *Prelude and Fugue in B Major* by Marcel Dupré, published barely a year earlier. A rounded musician, interested in all eras and open to all styles, André Marchal gave the impression of being a sensitive performer, refined, the possessor of magical technique, a top-notch improviser, and notable for his keen sense of poetry and orchestral colors.

When Jean Langlais began learning organ with him, Marchal had at his disposal, for his teaching, the Institute's Cavaillé-Coll organ, a three-manual instrument built by Aristide Cavaillé-Coll in 1883–1884, and dedicated by César Franck in 1884.

With his new ideas about repertory and colors of the organ, André Marchal was one of the creators of a new aesthetic for the instrument, insisting on “neo-classicizing” the Institute's Cavaillé-Coll in 1926, a task entrusted to Auguste Convers, the new director of Charles Mutin's firm, which was the successor to the Cavaillé-Coll company.

In so doing, Marchal found himself in direct opposition to Marcel Dupré, who was firmly attached to Cavaillé-Coll and was the uncompromizing guardian of this aesthetic for his organ at Saint-Sulpice, which he obstinately refused to modify in any way during his tenure there. The two schools opposed each other, and Jean Langlais, still a beginning organist, very shortly found himself at the center of this aesthetic quarrel.

Much later, after Marchal's death in 1980, Jean Langlais paid homage to his first teacher:

His biggest artistic step was probably the tremendous assault that he launched against what one then called “The Tradition.” In 1922, at the age of 28, he presented a recital on the Paris Conservatory organ on which he played the Triptych in C by Johann Sebastian Bach in a uniquely personal way that, in spite of the delicacy of the registrations, created a big stir. This magisterial audacity was just at its beginnings. It continued with total independence throughout a long and beautiful career of one who was called “the blind man with the fingers of light...”<sup>24</sup>

Returning to 1923: from his very first lessons with Marchal a special understanding was established between the young teacher and the adolescent. Right away, Marchal assigned pieces thought to be difficult, such as the “Dorian” Toccata by Bach.

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<sup>24</sup> “Jean Langlais, organiste de Sainte-Clotilde de Paris,” *L'Orgue*, special issue: *Hommage à André Marchal*, ed. Norbert Dufourcq (1981): 57–58.

For pedal study, he used the work of his blind colleague, Adolphe Marty, *L'Art de la pédale*, while for keyboard technique he recommended the method of the Belgian organist, Jacques Lemmens, based on a rigorously legato touch.<sup>25</sup> Simultaneously with technique and repertory, Marchal taught his students improvisation. André Bourgoïn, 62 years later, still remembered the extraordinary progress that Langlais made from one lesson to the next, to such an extent that, beginning in 1925, Marchal would ask Langlais to substitute for him at Saint-Germain-des-Prés.



**André Marchal at the Saint-Germain-des-Prés organ**

Figure 9. (collection Jacqueline Englert-Marchal)

In addition to organ and improvisation, Langlais studied counterpoint and fugue with Marchal, and from 1923 regularly brought to his mentor his own compositions: little piano preludes or accompanied songs.

At the same time, he became part of the orchestra directed by Adolphe Marty, who made him first chair of the second violins. In this orchestra of blind players conducted by a blind leader (what a performance!), the young violinist gradually learned the repertoire. One day, since all the other second violinists were sick, he even had to carry his part alone in the andante and scherzo of the *Symphony in D Minor* by César Franck, one of Marty's favorite works.

Thus, patiently and methodically, at the price of intense work, Jean Langlais forged a rock-solid command of musical technique. His reputation within the Institute grew, and both teachers and students recognized in him a future professional, undoubtedly a future master.

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<sup>25</sup> Adolphe Marty, *L'Art de la pédale du grand orgue, ouvrage contenant des gammes majeures, mineures, des exercices pour les octaves et l'indépendance des deux pieds*. Paris: Macker et Noël, 1891. Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens, *École d'orgue basée sur le plain chant romain*. Mainz: Schott, 1862.



**Jean Langlais at age 18 (passport photograph)**

Figure 10. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

But one day in February of 1926, an unexpected competitor from Nancy arrived at the Institute, the young Gaston Litaize, 17 years old, who remembers with an astounding wealth of detail his first encounter with Langlais, two years his elder:

I entered the Institution February 4, 1926, and after the traditional medical exams, I found myself at lunch in the dining hall. There were three tables: at one of them were 12 students who were distinguished from the group of the others by one or more stripes on their sleeves, a sign that they were inscribed on the Tablet of Honor. There were four or five "regents" with two stripes and a "dean" who had three. It was a kind of super Award of Excellence of the School. But when I entered the dining hall that day, the "dean" was none other than Jean Langlais.

Because I entered in the middle of the year, I had been put by the Administration in classes where there was space available. That's why I was not with Jean either for piano (I was in Bourdeau's studio and he was in Blazy's) or organ (I was with Marty, while Jean was with Marchal).

I have a very precise recollection of our first end-of-year competitions, which took place that year on July 5 and 6, 1926. That was the period when Jean, who was exhausted, for the first time in his career as a student received only second prizes—except for the violin for which he won the prize in a remarkable way with an impeccable performance of the First Sonata for solo violin, in G minor, by Bach. In piano, he competed with the Caprice in B-flat Minor by Mendelssohn. For the organ competition, there were four of us, two of Marchal's students, of whom Jean was one, and two of Marty's, of whom I was one. Marcel Dupré was the head of the jury that year, and I got the first prize, Jean the second. In composition he was to present a quartet (introduction and allegro). I remember that he had written a big canon in A for his introduction. I thought it was very good, but for some inexplicable reason it didn't win the prize.<sup>26</sup>

Shortly before these final exams the first article about our young musician appeared in the press. Here it is in its entirety:

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<sup>26</sup> A reminiscence recorded by the author in Paris on cassette in 1983 (cited henceforth as Litaize tapes 1983). The quartet movements are no longer extant.



A very young artist, Mr. Jean Langlais, gave his first recital on the organ the other night, at the Valentin Haüy Association.<sup>27</sup> Very few are those virtuosos who dedicate themselves to this instrument; thus we should especially thank him because while he is very gifted on the piano and violin, and he has somewhat neglected them to cultivate his talents as an organist. He seemed to me to possess all the resources of his art. In a well- designed program, bringing together Bach, Palestrina, Schumann, Dupré, and Vierne, he demonstrated his absolutely solid technique as well as a very expressive and agile touch, especially in the Toccata by Gigout. He is a student of Mr. Marchal, who—recognizing excellent abilities in him—sometimes entrusts the organ at Saint-Germain-des-Prés to him. The parishioners at Saint-Étienne-du-Mont also have the pleasure of hearing him because he substitutes for Mr. Singery from time to time. Next October, Jean Langlais plans to join the organ class at the Conservatory. This was certainly a debut of interest and full of promise for a career that is just beginning.<sup>28</sup>

Gaston Litaize recounts:

During 1926, Marchal told Jean that he was thinking of sending him to the Conservatory. He asked Dupré to come and listen to his young student at his home at 22 rue Duroc, close to the Institute, which Dupré did. Jean improvised on a free theme and a fugue which he himself judged to be bad. Nevertheless, Dupré accepted him as an auditor of the class, but only for the following year. Marcel Dupré, at barely 40 years old, had just taken over from Eugène Gigout at the Conservatory; Gigout had died at 81 on December 9, 1925. And so it is likely that Dupré preferred to hone his teaching with just the last Gigout students before taking new students in the class.



**Marcel Dupré at his Meudon house organ**

Figure 11. (Association des Amis de l'Art de Marcel Dupré collection, Paris)

In December of 1925, six students were in the Dupré's organ class: André Fleury, in his fifth year; Maurice Béché, in his fourth; René Malherbe, in his third; Noëlie Pierront, abbé Delestre, and Joseph Gilles, in their second.

<sup>27</sup> The Valentin Haüy Association was founded in 1889. It was named for the founder of what became the Institute for The Young Blind and is located not far from it in Paris's 7<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*.

<sup>28</sup> J.B.Le Conte, "Jean Langlais", *Artistes d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, May 1, 1926.

In June 1926, Fleury and Béch  won the first prize; so the only ones staying in Dupr 's class were Ren  Malherbe, No lie Pierront, Father Delestre and Joseph Gilles. Thus it was to be another year before new students were admitted; as it turned out they were: Olivier Messiaen, Jean Langlais, Henri Cabi , and me.<sup>29</sup>

Before starting in at the Conservatory, Langlais was committed to erasing his “bad” results from the Institute in 1926; and from this standpoint his awards in July of 1927 were dazzling, dominated by a first prize with congratulations from the violin jury in front of a distinguished jury headed by Paul Oberdoerffer, solo violinist from the Opera Orchestra, who predicted for him a brilliant career as a solo violinist; Jean Langlais didn’t care about this at all, to the great disappointment of his teacher, R my Clavers. In what one could see as a premonition, he won this award with an extremely remarkable performance of the Violin *Sonata* by C sar Franck.

The success did nothing: Langlais abandoned with no regrets his stringed instrument, in his view too dependent on an accompanist, to turn towards the piano, the organ, and composition, where he felt he could better express his personality. Another big success: first prize in piano accompanied by a scholarship of 500 francs, awarded for his performance of the Sarabande from *Pour le piano* by Debussy and the Overture from *Cantata 29* by Bach, transcribed by Saint-Sa ns. Then in organ, he took the prize in the first division, with congratulations of the jury, for playing the Fantasy and Fugue in G Minor by Bach and improvising on a single line of a plain chant and a free theme based on a subject by Louis Vierne. In composition, finally, the first prize honored his *Scherzo in C sharp minor* for string quartet, a score that is now lost.

After these brilliant examination results, Jean Langlais had only one goal that was urgent: to enter the Paris Conservatory, the “holy of holies” of a musical career in France.

## The Organ Class at the Paris Conservatory

When Marcel Dupr  was named professor of organ the Paris Conservatory in 1926, he was considered the last link in the French School of organ, already celebrated internationally. Below are the names and the dates when they taught the organ class at the Paris Conservatory:

Fran�ois Benoit	1819-1872
C�sar Franck	1872-1890
Charles-Marie Widor	1890-1896
Alexandre Guilmant	1896-1911
Eug�ne Gigout	1911-1925
Marcel Dupr�	1926-1954

In the early nineteenth century, the first professor to be named to the newly established organ class at the Paris Conservatory was the pianist, organist and composer Fran ois Benoit (1794-1878), holder of a Grand Prix de Rome, who kept the position for 53 years, evoking

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<sup>29</sup> Litaize tapes, 1983.

this mocking comment from Jules Massenet: "During his tenure, M. Benoist killed three kings, an emperor and two republics!"

César Franck succeeded Benoist in 1872. Born in Liège, at that time part of the Low Countries (becoming part of Belgium in 1830), Franck was trained at the Liège Conservatory before continuing his studies in Paris at the age of 13. He joined Benoist's organ class at the age of 18 in 1840, and a few months later won a second prize in organ. Shortly after, surprisingly, he quit the class; he then left the Conservatory completely in order to concentrate on composition and his career as a piano virtuoso. Because of his brief sojourn as Benoist's organ student, Franck always had the reputation of being a Belgian pianist and composer without much organ background, something that was still said when he was named professor of organ at the Paris Conservatory in 1872.

His successor was Charles-Marie Widor (born in 1844), who—in order to avoid the Benoist class—went to Brussels for his composition and organ studies at the Royal Conservatory, with the Belgian teachers François-Joseph Fétis and Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens. Franck's successor, Alexandre Guilmant, did the same, so that one could say that what we call the highly esteemed French School of organ was actually a Belgian School of organ, which is not the smallest of paradoxes. Also, when Marcel Dupré, born in 1886, first prize in organ in the class of Alexandre Guilmant, was named professor of organ at the Conservatory, he can be seen as a product of this Belgian organ school. This was the opposite of his predecessor, Eugène Gigout, exact contemporary of Widor and successor to Guilmant at the Conservatory from 1911-1925, who was a pure product of the Niedermeyer School in Paris, founded in 1853 with the goal of restoring sacred music in the face of the secular Conservatory.

Since then, one can distinguish two opposing organ worlds in Paris: that of Dupré, direct successor of the Franco-Belgian school; and Marchal, Gigout's disciple. In joining Dupré's class after having been a student of Marchal, Jean Langlais inherited these two parallel and competing traditions, something that will not be without consequence for his future.

Louis Vierne described the revolution imposed by Widor in 1890 when he took over the organ class at the Conservatory after Franck's death:

Widor's big reform in organ teaching had, above all, to do with technique. We were obliged to redo all manual exercises using the Lemmens method; it was necessary, and it wasn't fun... Absolute legato in all parts, precise articulation of repeated notes, tying when parts cross, planned nuances... all this was rewarded with a marvelous clarity.<sup>30</sup>

The basis of the Lemmens method was legato; in codifying and expanding the rules in various treatises and prefaces, Dupré elevated them to the level of unquestioned dogma that he imposed on all his students from the moment they started at the Conservatory in 1926.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *In memoriam Louis Vierne (1870–1937)*. Paris: de Brouwer, 1939; reprinted in *L'Orgue*, special number 134 bis, 1970, 1: 29, 33–34.

<sup>31</sup> The following rules are based on the recollections of Rachel Brunswig, Langlais' fellow student in the Dupré class in 1927–1928 (conversation recorded by the author in 1986; henceforth cited as "Brunswig tapes, 1986").

- It is impossible to play the organ well if one hasn't first acquired real piano technique.
- Durations should be rigorously observed, and the connection of notes produced with neither gaps nor overlaps, to make an absolute legato.
- The length of time between two detached or repeated notes should be just as precisely measured as a printed rest. These notes are shortened, depending on the situation, by a half, a third, or a fourth of the written value.
- The common notes between two chords in different voices should be tied.
- One must slow up at cadences that are truly important, and slightly delay chords that are the dynamic high point of a phrase. Nevertheless, to abuse these retards is to be unfaithful to the work that one is playing.

Dupré thought that once these rules ("purely common sense," he said) were applied, the performance of any piece in the repertory would become, *ipso facto*, perfect. One day when a woman from an audience waxed ecstatic about his technique, he said to her, "Really, madam, it's very simple: one just plays the right note at the right time, having pulled the right stops."

Performance was, however, only one aspect of organ instruction at the Paris Conservatory. Following an old French tradition, organists especially cultivated the art of improvisation, and since the nineteenth century this discipline was divided clearly into three strictly defined genres: the scholastic fugue (*fugue d'école*), the free theme, and plainchant. Although Franck, Widor, Guilmant, and Gigout introduced a few adjustments, the basic principles were never questioned, and Marcel Dupré inherited a mission to teach them to his students.

When classes resumed after Easter holidays in 1927, Jean Langlais was admitted as an auditor in Dupré's class, at the same time as a timid, sweet young man, aged eighteen, already crowned with laurels in various disciplines: Olivier Messiaen. That very day an unflinching friendship between the two musicians was born, a friendship that continued undiminished until their deaths. A few months later, in the fall of 1927, new auditors joined the Dupré class: Gaston Litaize, Henri Cabié, Yvonne Desportes, Rachel Brunswig, and Monique Debroise; but at the examinations on December 17, 1927, only four of these auditors were named official students: Messiaen, Langlais, Litaize and Cabié. They joined those already officially part of the studio, Noëlie Pierront, Joseph Gilles, and René Malherbe, making a total of seven organ students for the 1927–1928 school year.

Jean Langlais recalls this class as follows:

At that time, group classes took place three times a week from 1:30 to 3:30 in the afternoon, with the following schedule:

- Monday: improvised fugue
- Wednesday: improvisation on a free theme
- Friday: performance of pieces from the repertory

Dupré didn't put up with lack of discipline or inaccuracy. Thus, his classes began precisely at 1:30; those who arrived at 1:31 would find the door closed and could consider themselves expelled from the class, he told newcomers by way of an introduction.<sup>32</sup>

This was unnecessary advice for Litaize and Langlais, who were used to a quasi-military discipline at the Institute for the Young Blind. Further, because they were thought of as prestigious alumni they still had the support of the Institute for lodging, board, and practice

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<sup>32</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

instruments, which allowed them to be financially independent and devote all of their time to their studies.

Dupré was a demanding teacher. He told them, “At your age, I worked twelve hours a day. You would be smart to do the same!”<sup>33</sup> The students had to bring a new piece every week to the performance class, learned perfectly by memory. To Langlais, who played Bach’s Fugue in B Minor (BWV 544) for him two weeks in a row, Dupré said coldly, “If you want to stick with the same piece for the whole year, I don’t think it will get you far.” The shamefaced adolescent never again played the same piece more than once. Later, Langlais paid homage to this demanding teacher:

He was a marvelous mentor and a charming man. We were very intimidated by this Master who had made a world tour, receiving acclamations everywhere. On his first American tour, he played 102 concerts in 99 days, a feat no one has duplicated. He held first prizes in piano with Louis Diemer, in organ with Guilmant, and in fugue in Widor’s class; and he won the Grand Prix de Rome in composition in 1914, also in Widor’s class. We were all in awe of his prestige. I am still influenced by his sense of order, precision, clarity, and his enthusiasm for beauty, which were infused in me, much like the love of work and its regimen.

He recalls the ambiance of the class:

We students got along together perfectly. After Dupré’s class, we made a habit of going out together to a café called “Les Capitales.” We had a hot-chocolate or a coffee with cream, and ate croissants—especially Litaize and I, who were so poorly fed at the Institute for The Young Blind: how many times had my meal there consisted of dipping my bread in reddened water, which is to say 90% water and 10% wine of poor quality—and the rest of the food that we were given was inedible!<sup>34</sup>

Gaston Litaize also talks about this era, in his case about Dupré’s repertory classes:

He was a conformist in the sense that he never stopped us except for technical problems (lack of attention to release of notes, bad hand position, excessive body motion). I especially remember that he made Jean repeat, for he had staccato technique in which he shook his hands. Sometimes he gave a fingering, but he rarely played himself. When he did take over the console it was dazzling, and we were really awed by him. But he didn’t say much to us about style, editions, or musicology. It should be remembered that at this time we were barely at the beginning of the rediscovery of Bach’s organ works, and most organists had a very limited repertory.

Dupré, in 1920, himself had given a series of ten recitals at the Conservatory, in the course of which he played the complete works of Bach by memory, a monumental event. But of course he completely neglected the pre-Bach repertory. At this time, in 1927, only Marchal was known to have made stylistic distinctions. So Dupré was completely of his time.

Litaize then goes into detail about the improvisation class:

As for the improvised fugue, in Gigout’s time students could retain or drop the counter-subject, but Dupré was much stricter: he required that the counter-subject be retained with every restatement of the subject—which was not easy! As a corollary, he wanted us to introduce the subject in the middle voices. He never let us do a bass fugue, which would have been much easier, saying “The bass fugue would be nice, but I’m not sure one is allowed to do it.”

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

He never wanted to make such a pedagogical change without having consulted the director, who at that time was Henri Rabaud.

We improvised a fugue in the same style as written fugue, with a couple of liberties that are idiomatic on the organ, such as making the second episode in three voices without pedal. Dupré invoked the example of Bach in this case.

The plainchant study happened once per week, at the end of one of the three weekly classes, as long as there was some time left over. Dupré liked to say, as a wisecrack, “Plainchant is something you can learn in forty minutes!”

In fact, he wanted us—following the Conservatory traditions put in place by his predecessors—to harmonize Gregorian chants in four voices, on the model of the Bach chorales: polyphonic, ornamented, contrapuntal, canonic.

Today, homogenizing German chorales and plainchant seems totally illogical, but at the time it wasn’t jarring. The rhythms of Classic French music were treated with the same casualness as the modality of Gregorian chant. The chosen text would be relatively short, in order to allow us to make the contrapuntal chorale, so Dupré generally chose a tune, always in seventh or eighth mode (in G), and one didn’t depart from this formula.<sup>35</sup>

But the crown jewel of improvisation, which allowed the student to shine as an artistic personality, was the free theme, and Dupré had the privilege of guiding a whole generation of prestigious organists, from Messiaen to Alain, with the likes of Langlais and Litaize along the way. Rachel Brunswig, an auditor in Dupré’s 1928 class, provides precious testimony about the musical personalities of her fellow students, and the way that Dupré fostered each:

Dupré was very sensitive to the personality of each of his students, seeking to push them along their own routes. Nothing escaped his attention.

Messiaen was already greatly interested in modes (he kept little numbered scraps of paper in his pocket on which he wrote harmonic formulas, modal characteristics, and progressions some of which he collected from the works of Debussy), and Dupré had him improvise on Greek rhythms.

Characteristic of Langlais was distinctiveness in the free theme, with a little bit of humor. His music had a lot of counterpoint, and a little archaism mixed with modernism, just the opposite, for example, of Henri Cabié’s seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords.<sup>36</sup>

To enter the end-of-year competition in June of 1928, the students had to pass a qualifying examination. Langlais failed. As for Litaize, he made it through, but got no prize in the competition, which was awarded that year to Noëlie Pierront; Joseph Gilles and René Malherbe shared second prize, and Messiaen shared in the honors, receiving an honorable mention (*premier accessit*).

And so our two friends from the Institute for the Young Blind were crestfallen at the end of their first year at the Conservatory. They got a little balm from the examinations at the Institute where they were both in the supplemental division (which is to say their last year); Langlais was awarded a first prize in composition for his *Prelude and fugue* in A-flat Major for organ, the first opus to be completed by this 20 year-old composer still steeped in academicism. There was nothing revolutionary in these pages, which didn’t prevent the president of the jury, Henri Dallier, organist at the Madeleine, from commenting to his table-

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<sup>35</sup> Litaize tapes, 1983.

<sup>36</sup> Brunswig tapes, 1986.

mate, Marcel Dupré, “You know, Marcel, I think we’ve been encouraging anarchy!”<sup>37</sup> This evaluation is perplexing, since the work merely juxtaposes various musical techniques that were very well-known at the time. In this first piece, Langlais proved that he already excelled in a sense of architecture. Harmonically, the young composer tried a variety of techniques without really showing a preference for one over another. The Prelude is resolutely modal, exploiting the whole-tone scale so dear to Debussy. The tonal fugue is the opposite, making ample use of chromaticism, signs of kaleidoscopic musical language that favored juxtaposing various systems—modal, tonal, chromatic—without giving dominance to one or another. But if he had set out on new paths in 1927, it was still cautiously, and this duality in him—respect for tradition and a certain nonconformity—co-existed throughout his compositional career. Langlais didn’t attach much importance to this *Prelude and fugue*, and it remained unpublished for more than 50 years; its eventual publication in 1982 was at the insistence of one of his students, the young Austrian organist-composer Thomas-Daniel Schlee, who arranged to have it brought out by Universal Edition in Vienna. Thus one had to wait 55 years to see the publication of the first work by Jean Langlais!

After this punishing first year in Dupré’s class, Langlais needed some rest at La Fontenelle. There he cut his teeth as a church organist, as he wittily recounted much later:

Thanks to a change of rector at La Fontenelle, I finally had the pleasure of becoming the substitute for the blacksmith, my old friend Jules, the official player of my childhood church’s harmonium. My access to this most hallowed of all instruments had always been impossible, my father having been a socialist municipal councilman and the rector a royalist (a chouan, as they said in the countryside), which is to say a devoted Catholic. The worthy Jules obviously didn’t know how to read music. In this era, one sang two of the masses by Du Mont, those in the sixth and second tones.<sup>38</sup> (For her whole life, my grandmother thought that these “du Mont” masses were from Mont Saint-Michel!) The first mass is in F major. I amused myself by accompanying it in F-sharp. Jules was both delighted and surprised: delighted because I used the black notes, and surprised because he couldn’t do it. “However,” he asserted, “I’m not a bone-head.” Indeed, my dear Jules! You habitually played the Mass in the Second Tone in E minor, and harmonized (if one can call it that) the final cadences with D-A-D-F / C-G-C-E. I tried everything to keep you from playing those parallel fifths and octaves, but in vain. In heaven, your true homeland, the angels have initiated you into the secrets of the G clef. I think it would have taken the intervention of the archangels to inculcate in you the F clef. From up-above, rest assured of my lasting friendship. You were modest. One can’t say that about all organists. And you also shod the horses so well!<sup>39</sup>

His failure with Dupré having pointed up his weakness in improvised fugue, Jean Langlais decided to take Noël Gallon’s fugue class at the Conservatory, on the advice of Marchal and Dupré.

Yes, but a serious obstacle presented itself: where would the money come from to pay for a copyist needed to transcribe my homework from Braille into regular notation? My friend René Malherbe resolved the problem. He already had five children, and would have five more later. One day, he asked me gruffly:

“Well, are you still interested in fugue?”

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<sup>37</sup> Langlais, “Souvenirs.”

<sup>38</sup> These were two of the five monophonic settings of the Ordinary published by Henry Du Mont in 1669. In a sort of modernized plainchant style, they remained staples in French churches until well into the XXth century.

<sup>39</sup> Jean Langlais. “Quelques Souvenirs d’un organiste d’église.” *L’Orgue* 137 (1971). 4-6.

“Yes of course, but you know perfectly well that I can’t take the class because I don’t have the money to pay a copyist.”

“All right, I’ll copy your fugues.”

And he did it, consistently. Thanks to his generosity, I could take the class like the sighted students. I was grateful to him for it my whole life.<sup>40</sup>

At the resumption of school in October of 1928, Langlais presented himself to Noël-Gallon and was admitted to his fugue class at the same time as the brothers Henri and René Challan, future pillars of theory pedagogy at the Paris Conservatory. This period also marks Langlais’ real debut as a church organist, which he recounted 43 years later:

From being harmonium substitute at La Fontenelle, I became official organist at Épinay-sur-Orge, in the suburbs of Paris. High Mass was at 10:00 am, and my train arrived at the station at 10:00. The unflappable parish priest said, “No problem: a boy from the choir will wait for you on the platform, and as for us, we’ll wait for you in the church.” Everything went perfectly except for one little thing: I earned 100 francs per month, but my travel cost 110. Alas, my means didn’t allow for being a benefactor; I lasted just one month.

Then everything suddenly changed: Count Christian de Bertier proposed that I substitute for him at the main organ at Saint-Antoine-des-Quinze-Vingts in Paris. That was the jackpot. After a month of substituting, the organist asked me how much he owed me. “About 500 francs,” I replied. And this wonderful man, a distinguished and excellent musician, issued a pronouncement that still rings in my ears: “Young man, in life one has to be more precise in accounts; I owe you 625 francs.”<sup>41</sup>

Still worried about augmenting his paltry finances, Langlais, along with Gaston Litaize, launched an unexpected career at the beginning of 1929: as music-hall musicians. The two friends accepted an offer from the owner of a brasserie near the Saint-Cloud bridge, to play there every Sunday for a modest fee. Litaize recounts the episode:

We would arrive at 4 pm and were supposed to play until midnight. Until six o’clock there weren’t many people, and we’d refine our program. Then, little by little, the customers arrived to eat oysters. The big rush was around nine o’clock and people listened to us as background music. We played light music (mostly transcriptions made by the violinist Fritz Kreisler), but also classical music, such as Mozart sonatas or even the first two movements of Franck’s Sonata, Jean playing violin, I piano. We made about 300 francs per evening, which was fine with us. But the customers came to eat, not to listen to us; at the end of a month, the owner realized that we were drawing in hardly anyone and that the trial run wasn’t convincing. And so that’s how we became brasserie musicians for a month.<sup>42</sup>

Gaston Litaize, who loved jokes, had a charming anecdote about Messiaen, his fellow student in Dupré’s class, as retold by his son, Alain Litaize:

One day Messiaen arrived a little late for class. He never did that, so it was very surprising. He sat down next to Gaston Litaize and put a package at his feet. As always, he turned towards the central aisle, closed his eyes, and with his chin in the palms of his hands, concentrated on listening to the classmate who was at the console.

“What’s in your package?” Litaize asked. “Don’t touch it, watch out: it pinches; it’s a lobster!” The warning seemed implausible. Curious as a cat, Gaston cautiously felt the

<sup>40</sup> Langlais, “Souvenirs.” These unpublished fugues remain in the private collection of the author.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Litaize tapes, 1983.



package, and quickly recognized the object. Without making any noise at all, he unwrapped it, picked it up, put it at Messiaen's feet and set it in motion.

Marcel Lanquetuit, who was substituting for Dupré that day, turned around, furious at Messiaen, and shouted, "Come on, Messiaen, now you need a metronome to follow your classmates? Stop it right now!" Shamefaced, Messiaen complied, grumbling "You think it's fun to make me look like a dimwit?" "You shouldn't have lied to me, taking me for an imbecile," Gaston replied.<sup>43</sup>

But the school boys were also hard workers and extremely talented. Jean Bouvard found some letters sent to his parents in which he talks about Langlais in Dupré's organ class:

Courbevoie, March 19, 1929

Because of a friend of mine in Paul Dukas' class, Olivier Messiaen, I attended several organ classes at the Conservatory. What a great class! The improvisations! I was really stunned in listening to a young blind man improvise, Jean Langlais.<sup>44</sup>

And from another letter:

Courbevoie, April 26, 1929

Wednesday afternoon I went to the organ class at the Conservatory. Marcel Dupré had written a lovely theme. I was filled with wonder to hear each of the students, one after the other. No one imitated the previous one. I particularly remembered the harmony and development in the last two measures improvised by the youngest in the class, the blind Jean Langlais.<sup>45</sup>

A photograph shows Marcel Dupré and his students in the 1928-29 class at the Conservatory:



**Dupré's 1928–1929 organ class**

**First row:** Joseph Gilles, Gaston Litaize, Olivier Messiaen, and MARCEL DUPRE at the far right;  
**Second row:** *Léon Levif, Tommy Desserre, Jean Langlais, Henri Cabié, Rachel Brunswig, Henriette Roget at the console* (*Italics indicate auditors*).

Figure 12. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

<sup>43</sup> Alain Litaize. *Fantaisie et fugue sur le nom de Gaston Litaize* (Sampzon: Delatour France, 2012). 36–37.

<sup>44</sup> Photocopies of these letters sent to the author (henceforth cited as "Bouvard letters"). Jean Bouvard was the grandfather of Michel Bouvard, currently the teacher of the organ class at the Paris Conservatory, along with Olivier Latry, since 20 years.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* Bouvard was wrong as Messiaen was one year younger than Langlais.

The number of prize-winners in the 1929 competition is a good indication of the high quality of Dupré's class:<sup>46</sup>

First Prizes: Olivier Messiaen, by unanimous vote  
Joseph Gilles  
Second Prizes: Jean Langlais  
Henriette Roget  
Honorable Mention1: Gaston Litaize  
Honorable Mention2: Henri Cabié.

And in a letter, Jean Bouvard noted:

I was with Charles Tournemire at the organ competition on May 31, 1929, and he said to me as we were leaving the Conservatory, "Langlais deserved a first prize, as well."<sup>47</sup>

A month later, Langlais finished the 1928–1929 school year in the very best way, in getting the Institute for the Young Blind's highest honor, the first prize in composition for his *Six Preludes* for organ, dedicated to one of his fellow students in Dupré's organ class. Langlais told this story about the work:

One day just after I had written my *Six Preludes*, Vierne (for whom I had great admiration) came to hear them at the Institute for a whole afternoon. The group of pieces only lasted twenty minutes, but Vierne prolonged the session with much advice. He told me in particular before leaving me, "My Darling (he always called us that), you'll see that in life, everything can leave you: health, happiness, money; but believe me, there's one thing that will never abandon you, and that's music." And he was right. I think that the most joyous times that I have had in my life were in writing music, alone at home, in spite of all the pain that it sometimes gave me!<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, Langlais learned that Adolphe Marty, the organ teacher at the Institute for the Young Blind, had announced his plan to retire. A competition was organized immediately to select his successor. Langlais turned out to be the only person to enter this competition because the requirements were so daunting that the other potential candidates withdrew. Candidates were judged on the following:

- Performance of a major organ work from the standard repertory (Langlais chose J.S. Bach's F Major *Tocatta*, BWV 540).
- Harmonization and improvisation based on a plainchant.
- Improvisation on a free theme.
- The writing of a scholastic fugue (*fugue d'école*)
- Piano examination.
- Violin examination.
- Demonstration lesson in improvisation to a blind student.

It has to be said that Adolphe Marty was himself a one-man orchestra, teacher of organ and improvisation, choral and orchestral conductor, and accompanist for the Institute's liturgies.

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<sup>46</sup> "Orgue et Improvisation," in *Conservatoire National de Musique et de Danse: Palmarès, 1928–1929*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1929. 48–49.

<sup>47</sup> Bouvard letters, 1929.

<sup>48</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

Aware that he was being presented with a unique opportunity to have long-term financial security, Langlais put all of his energy into preparing for the competition. Not wanting to spread himself too thin, he asked for and received a year's leave of absence from the fugue class at the Conservatory and set to work.

In order to be more competitive in the organ competition at the Conservatory in 1930, Langlais—always intent on moving ahead and hoping to improve his piano technique—used his connection with his old teacher Maurice Blazy, to ask for piano lessons with the great pianist Lazare Lévy.

And when the time came to present himself at the competition, on March 30, 1930, he was completely ready to face the difficulties of this formidable examination. Triumphant over all the hazards, he was named “aspirant-teacher in training” (*aspirant-professeur stagiaire*) in an official report on April 3, 1930.

He now had peace of mind in preparing for the organ competition at the Conservatory ; when the academic year began in October of 1929, Dupré had three new students in the organ class (Odette Vauthier, Denys Joly and Léon LeVif), making a total of seven students.

The photo of Dupré's 1929–1930 class shows the students and auditors side-by-side, surrounding their teacher :



**Dupré's 1929–1930 organ class**

**First row: Léon LeVif, Jean Langlais, Henriette Roget, Odette Vauthier, Gaston Litaize, *Tommy Desserre*;**

**Second row: Henri Cabié, *Théodore Besset*, MARCEL DUPRE, Denis Joly, *Jean Bouvard***

**(Italics indicate auditors)**

Figure 13. (photograph by Louis Roosen. Conservatoire national de musique. Paris. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

The final exam took place on June 6th. He had some very stressful moments that day, as he confides in his « Souvenirs.»

Paul Faucher's fugue theme didn't pose any major problems, but in the improvisation on a free theme in A minor, submitted by Alexandre Cellier, instead of making the usual modulation to the relative key—C major in this case—I decided to modulate to E minor, which seemed to me a better musical choice.

But this wasn't at all how we normally proceeded in the class.

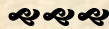
At the end of the examination, Dupré sought me out and said, "My poor little one, you've made me sick! What were you thinking in the free theme improvisation? I looked at the jury at that moment thinking that you were a goner. But those men didn't raise an eyebrow. Fortunately you saw it through well, or otherwise your chances of winning a first prize would have been over. I think that they're going to give it to you anyway."

Dupré had read the jury correctly; they awarded a first prize to the young candidate who hadn't hesitated to put music before theory. The group of awards was brilliant that year, as one can see:<sup>49</sup>

First Prizes:	Jean Langlais Henriette Roget
Second Prize:	Gaston Litaize, by unanimous vote
Honorable Mention 1:	Henri Cabié
Honorable Mention 2:	Denis Joly.

In addition, Langlais received the "Alexandre Guilmant Prize" of 500 francs for the winner of a first prize in organ. Holder of a first prize from the Paris Conservatory and aspirant-teacher at the National Institute for The Blind, Jean Langlais could certainly think that, at age 23, his education was complete.

But he had other ambitions, and above all, he knew that he still had much to learn.



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<sup>49</sup> "Orgue et Improvisation," in *Conservatoire National de Musique et de Danse: Palmarès, 1929–1930* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1936). 46

## CHAPTER 2

### *Years of Improvement (1930-1935)*

#### **The Amis de l'Orgue competition - Lessons with Tournemire**

Fresh from the Conservatory, 23 years old, Jean Langlais had no idea that he would participate in a great movement to renew the twentieth century French School of the organ. To be sure, the pioneers (Franck, Widor, Guilmant, Dupré, Vierne, Tournemire, Marchal) had fought to change a 19<sup>th</sup> century situation compromised by the mediocrity of its taste and its organ technique.

By the quality of their compositions, improvisations, and performances, these pioneers won over a public until then sparse and lukewarm, for whom the organ was too often synonymous with the noise at the end of the Mass. The main task remained: to release the organ from the circles in which it was confined, which meant first of all, from the closed circle of the church.

In 1930, the French School of the organ already shone and the young generation, that of Duruflé, Messiaen, Alain, Langlais, and Litaize, supported by their elders, was soon to play a leading role. This road to success was facilitated by the 1927 formation of the organization called “Les Amis de l'Orgue” (Friends of the Organ), founded by Count Bérenger de Miramon Fitz-James and the young organist-musicologist Norbert Dufourcq, with the encouragement and support of musicians such as Widor, d'Indy, Pierné, Vierne, Tournemire, Dupré, and Marchal.

Its goals were to bring together and assist organists, particularly the youngest ones. Already in 1924, the musicologist Jean Huré, who had started a monthly journal named *L'Orgue et les organistes*, was complaining both about the public and musicians in fairly strong language:

The organ is little known by our composers; it is little known to the musical public. One rarely hears it except in church. The organist is generally ignored by the masses unless he was fortunate enough to call attention to himself with theatrical works or symphonic ones. César Franck is thus better known for his *Symphony* for orchestra than for his admirable organ works, unfamiliar to many musicians. It wasn't always like this. From the end of the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth, every composer was an organist, and it was above all by his talent for improvisation that he was judged by his

colleagues and the public. A competition for the position for a parish organ post had more impact than a boxing match does today.<sup>1</sup>

But because of insufficient funds, *L'Orgue et les organistes* ceased publication two years later, in 1926, after 33 issues.<sup>2</sup> The idea of a journal was taken up a little later by Bérenger de Miramon Fitz-James and Norbert Dufourcq. In June 1929 the first issue of the *Bulletin semestriel des Amis de l'Orgue* appeared: four pages devoted to the world of the organ in France. In December of 1930, it went from being biannual to quarterly and increased from four to eight pages, and this time it included articles, a format intended to make it of comparable importance as Jean Huré's defunct journal. But very soon the "Amis de l'Orgue" added other activities, to support the organ and its players, such as organizing organ recitals, organ crawls, and competitions in performance, improvisation, and composition which revived the taste for the celebrated organ jousts of Bach's time.

Today, we're used to the proliferation of organ competitions, national and international, but in 1930 it was truly a new idea, allowing young artists to prove their mettle and gain a reputation.

The organizers wisely decided to alternate competitions for performance and improvisation with those for composition. Maurice Duruflé was the first double winner of this modern tournament, taking the prize for performance and improvisation in 1929, and for composition in 1930 with his triptych *Prélude, Adagio et Choral varié sur le thème du "Veni Creator,"* destined to become a classic of the organ literature.

Once he received his first prize in organ at the Conservatory in June 1930, Jean Langlais decided to try the adventure of this competition, which was next scheduled for June 21, 1931 in the category of performance and improvisation. Bernard Gavoty describes the details:

The competition in performance and improvisation created by the Society of the Amis de l'Orgue is based on a model similar to the one at the Conservatory but it involves still greater difficulties. That is to say that it is open only to those who have completed Conservatory. The competition includes:

1. Improvisation of a chorale on a plainchant theme, then a more developed symphonic paraphrase on the same theme.
2. Improvisation of a prelude and fugue on a submitted theme.
3. Improvisation of a true symphonic allegro on two submitted themes.
4. Performance, by memory, of four required works from various eras and in various styles.
5. Performance of three modern works, one by memory, chosen by the jury.

One can easily imagine the talent and technique needed to attempt a competition so perilous. We hasten to say that *in no foreign country* does organ instruction involve such tests, and it is France's privilege to produce organists who can lay claim to such a comprehensive and high level training.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Huré, "Essai sur l'art de l'orgue," in *L'Orgue et les organistes* n°3, 1<sup>ère</sup> année, 15 juin 1924, p.29.

<sup>2</sup> It published from April 1924 to December 15, 1926. See *Les Amis de l'Orgue* [François Sabatier], "Préambule," *L'Orgue* 300 (2012:4). 3.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Gavoty, "La Jeune École d'Orgue Française," in "Dix Années au service de l'orgue français (1927-1937)," *Bulletin trimestriel des Amis de l'Orgue* 30/31 (June-Sept., 1937). 114.

As capable as he was, Jean Langlais didn't judge himself ready to confront such tests. To be sure, he had studied improvisation on a free theme and fugue with André Marchal and Marcel Dupré. He was less familiar with the symphonic allegro, but his biggest weakness was the paraphrase on a plainchant, the first test on the competition's agenda, and he absolutely had to have a master teacher to guide him.

With no hesitation he chose Charles Tournemire, at the time working on his life-work, *L'Orgue Mystique*, composed between 1927 and 1932, consisting of more than 1,000 pages freely paraphrasing Gregorian Chant in 51 volumes covering the whole liturgical year. Tournemire was an exceptional improviser, as the composer-organist Daniel-Lesur relates:

Having been, over the years, the constant witness to what Tournemire called his "chats" that is, his incomparable improvisations, I can attest that serene or not, they were always inspired, always exultant.

He himself described the trajectory of his thought during spontaneous musical creation: "All preparation is the opposite of this art," he said. "In a person with this strength, from the moment when the sensitivity awakens, the creative element gradually develops with logic and fantasy at the same time, to the point of giving the illusion of something written along with, in the sublime moments, the 'lightening flashes'... Thus you have the singular impression of listening to someone other than yourself. The subconscious takes over..."

And he acknowledged that being able to play with the technical prowess that is required by a written work at the same time that he was improvising, had demanded a lot of work.

The "*Cinq Improvisations*" that he recorded on 78 rpm disks in 1930 and 1931 on the organ at Ste Clotilde are vivid testimony to Tournemire's inspiration and virtuosity.<sup>4</sup>

Daniel-Lesur, who was present for these recordings, recalls them:

One night in the darkness of the organ loft overlooking the deserted church, I was privileged to attend this recording session. In that era recordings were made on enormous circular wax discs, and only four minutes at a time.

Tournemire was on his organ bench, concentrating, withdrawn into himself, waiting until the fateful clock had prayed its Rosary with its clangs, peals, and grinding.

For the improvisations which, because they were more developed, would have to be reproduced on two sides of a record, he knew that he would have to interrupt himself for the time needed to change and warm the wax.

Not to mention a police patrol who, seeing the light in the church at such an hour and thinking to have discovered burglars, questioned the technicians who were moving their equipment.

I was worried, knowing the nervousness and impatience of the master. In these conditions would he find the spontaneity, the prodigious presence of reflexes that stirred our enthusiasm every Sunday?

I was wrong to doubt. At the signal, the flow was immediate, and none of the constraints that were imposed could contain the freedom, the continuity, and the splendor of the musical discourse.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Recorded by Polydor (Polydor 561048, 561050, 561058, 566058, 566060) at Sainte-Clotilde on April 30, 1930 (*Cantilène, Choral- Improvisation sur le « Victimae Paschali », Fantaisie sur « Ave maris stella »*) ; in March 1931 (*Improvisation sur le « Te Deum »*) and in November 1931 (*Petite Rhapsodie*).

<sup>5</sup> Daniel-Lesur, "Une tribune d'orgue Franco-Belge," *Bulletin de la classe des Beaux-Arts*, 5<sup>e</sup> série, tome 66, Bruxelles, 1984.



**Charles Tournemire improvising on plainchant at the console of Sainte-Clotilde**

Figure 14. (photograph in the collection of Odile Weber)

It was during this time that Jean Langlais went to ask Tournemire for lessons in improvisation. Tournemire had few private students at the time since he was very particular about the quality of his acolytes and only accepted students already equipped with well established artistry, such as Maurice Duruflé, Daniel-Lesur, Henriette Roget and Gaston Litaize.

Langlais remembered:

Throughout the year I worked on modal improvisation, which is to say Gregorian improvisation, with Tournemire. Generally, he gave his lessons at his home on rue Milne-Edwards in the evening, and they might last more than an hour, but what an hour! Instead of giving you technical advice, he said things like this: When you want to do a Gregorian paraphrase, these should be your preoccupations: first, create an atmosphere; second, impose it on your audience. You get it? Go ahead!

I went to the organ. At the end of 30 seconds, he pushed me over to take my place on the bench and showed me an example on the manuals. When he did this, since I had a pile of Bach's organ works on my right, the scores fell off. I picked them up and put them back next to me; the lesson resumed, and once again Tournemire—losing complete control of himself—jumped up to push me, and the scores fell down again without him even noticing...

“You didn't understand a thing,” he told me. “Impose your ambiance, so that your center is rich. Rise, rise, your audience will follow you. It started to pant, could no longer breathe. Then, play them two brief dissonant chords on full organ... leave a long silence... the audience is dead... then open the heavens to them with a poetic conclusion on an eight-foot bourdon and a voix celeste... Believe me, they deserved it!”



But this was an eminent artist and a great pedagogue, and when he taught he was inspired, and it was extraordinary.

One day he said this to me, “All music that doesn’t have the glorification of God as its basis is useless!” I responded, “Well then, what do you do about Debussy, Stravinsky, Bartok, Ravel?” And he responded coldly, “USELESS!” Which is obviously debatable.

I left these lessons exhausted, drained, sometimes discouraged. I was wrong, however, since after manhandling me a bit during the course, he always left me on his doorstep with these words, “It was very good this evening, my young friend, you are making progress!”<sup>6</sup>

On June 21, 1931, after several months of this incomparable teaching, Langlais faced the competition of the Amis de l’Orgue, finding himself competing against a single candidate, the blind organist Gustave Noël.

The tests took place on the organ of the Eglise Réformée de l’Etoile, a protestant church, before a jury impressive in both in size and quality, presided over by Vincent d’Indy. The other members were Bonnet, Bret, Noël-Gallon, Jacob, de La Presle, Letocart, Marchal, Sergent, Tournemire, and Vierne.

Several newspaper articles at the time reviewed this musical event. Here are some typical passages:

Identified by numbers, the candidates are invisible to the jury and to the audience. They were given all the guarantees of scrupulous impartiality.

When the unanimous prize was decided for No. 2, we saw a young man escorted to the table, whose name we learned, Mr. Jean Langlais, along with his credentials: first prize in organ at the Conservatory last year, and teacher at the National Institute for the Young Blind.

It is moving to think that this is an artist whose eyes are closed, someone whose playing and whose improvisations testify so lively and delicate a sense of sonic color. From the first measures of his paraphrase on the beautiful liturgical theme of “Ave maris stella,” Mr. Jean Langlais showed a rare musical personality. In him, a clear, even joyful imagination is harmoniously combined with a serene gravity that is, at least to us, the right temperament for an organist....

—Gustave Bret<sup>7</sup>

Another more detailed newspaper excerpt:

The second competition in performance and improvisation took place on the 21st of June in front of a jury headed by Mr. Vincent d’Indy. To assess the difficulty of this tournament: the improvisation test included: a contrapuntal chorale on “Ave maris stella” followed by a symphonic paraphrase on the same theme; a prelude and fugue on a theme by Mr. Noël-Gallon, and a sonata movement on two themes by Mr. Vincent d’Indy.

For performance, they required the *Prelude and Fugue in D Major* by Bach [BWV 532], the *choral prelude* “O Lamm Gottes” by the same composer [BWV 656], one of the Three *Chorals* by Franck, the organist’s choice, and finally a modern work chosen from a list of three pieces offered by the contestant.

This is far from those competitions in which a single piece, all too often more pianistic than organistic, makes it impossible to judge the complex aspects of the technique and style needed for the organ! Here, the dominant role given to Bach works, the master of

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<sup>6</sup> Langlais, “Souvenirs.”

<sup>7</sup> *L’Intransigent*, July 28, 1931. Review in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais.

masters, the choice of the chorale-prelude “O Lamm Gottes,” whose polyphony shows up the organist’s legato and phrasing (a quality so rare and so important), and the obligatory performance of a *Choral* by Franck, touchstone for an understanding and sensitive performer, taken together fully illuminated the strengths or weaknesses of the player.

Just two contestants faced these formidable tests: Messrs. Noël and Langlais.

Mr. Jean Langlais triumphed easily, in great measure because of his delicious paraphrase of “Ave maris stella.” From the first notes of this successful improvisation, the jury and the audience were conquered, and the spell was not broken until the last chord. The prelude of his fugue was also very appealing. The performance of the Fugue in D and of the finale of the Fourth Symphony by Mr. Vierne revealed a crisp and incisive touch and an excellent sense of rhythm....

The jury has unanimously awarded the “Prix des Amis de l’Orgue” to Mr. Jean Langlais.

—Maurice Sergent<sup>8</sup>

Jean Langlais remembers that day:

At the end of the contest, the president of the jury, Vincent d’Indy, announced: “We would like to see Number 2.”

It was me, the Number 2. I was absolutely convinced that they had criticisms of me.

I very timidly approached, and Vincent d’Indy said:

“The jury has unanimously awarded you the Prize for Les Amis d’Orgue competition.”

This happened at the organ of Alexandre Cellier, a charming man, who was organist at the Étoile protestant church; my students came, grabbed me and carried me in triumph along the Avenue de la Grande Armée, but before doing that, Tournemire came to embrace me and said: “I’m happy for you. You were wonderful, marvelous ...”

And I said to him what I was thinking: “My dear Master, I know to WHOM I owe this prize!”

He understood perfectly that I was referring to him and afterwards he repeated to anyone who would listen: “I have given lessons to all these ungrateful students but one. This one has publicly acknowledged what I have done for him.

The audience that day was struck by the impressive manner in which Jean Langlais managed his Gregorian improvisation on the theme of “Ave Maris Stella,” the determining factor in his ultimate success. We see the stamp of Tournemire, who knew how to complete the pedagogical work of his predecessors; Marchal had instilled in Jean Langlais the taste for color and poetry of the organ as well as a very “French” elegance; and Dupré had then given the young man an assured technique. It was Tournemire, however, with his powerful originality, who could develop his student in the infinitely rich and varied domain of the “Gregorian paraphrase,” a genre that Jean Langlais was to cultivate with joy his whole life.

To get an idea of the personality of the young composer at the threshold of his adult life, we turn to the poet Anatole Le Braz’s comments about Bretons in general:

Above all, the Breton is testy and impressionable. His proverbial stubbornness ... makes him seem willful, but his dominant characteristic is sensitivity—a Celtic sensitivity, trembling, worried, overcast, and which overstimulates a tireless imagination that is always at work. It is rare that he doesn’t let himself be guided by it and usually he is at its mercy. Curious about the new, avid about change, open to the call of adventure, no one is more respectful of rules, no one is more impatient.

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<sup>8</sup> “Le Concours des Amis de l’Orgue,” *Le Courrier musical*, July 13, 1931. 436.

Yesterday a royalist, tomorrow an anarchist, endlessly in violent reaction to something or someone... He would not be able to give up believing any more than breathing. Even the features of the countryside seem to have contributed to keeping the Bretons in a certain mental state... It is undeniable that there is a gravity, a melancholy indigenous to this region. The indecisiveness of the light, the frequency of fog, the often singular distortions to which objects are subjected, the phantom-like and mysterious silhouettes that they lend, for example, to rocks or tree trunks, the wail of the wind that reigns here as master, ... all contribute to the innate penchant of the Breton imagination for the fantastic and supernatural.<sup>9</sup>

It seems to us that every aspect of this description applies to Jean Langlais, who in spite of his ten years at the National Institute for the Young Blind, remained deeply marked by his Celtic roots. For in him, as with his compatriots, sensitivity, imagination, and nonconformity coexisted with melancholy and a taste for the supernatural. Guided by a rock solid faith, he did not know doubt, and his work ethic had its source in the ancestral tenacity that his family always demonstrated in order to survive the hardships of life.

### **Marriage - First concerts - Early teaching career**

In 1929, when he had completed his studies in Dupré's class, Jean Langlais began to give private lessons on a little nine-stop Mutin organ made available to him by the Valentin Haüy Association. One of Dupré's students from outside Paris, Théodore Besset, a regular auditor of Dupré's organ classes at the Conservatory, asked Jean Langlais to come down to his native Toulouse to give a concert. The young man accepted and played one of the first recitals of his long career as a concert organist on August 10, 1930 at the Church of the Sacred Heart. On this occasion he met Jeanne Sartre, his student's neighbor and like him originally from Escalquens, a little village of 300 inhabitants about twelve miles from Toulouse.

The two young people took to each other very quickly. Clever, intelligent, and artistic, Jeanne Sartre had a genuine talent for painting. Her father, who moved to work in the Parisian postal system, lived with his wife and daughter in a little suburban house in Maisons-Alfort, near Paris; Jean Langlais soon became a regular visitor, and eventually a marriage was agreed upon. The date was set for December 3, 1931 in the church at Maisons-Alfort. Olivier Messiaen attended, as well as André Marchal, who played the organ for the occasion, playing, while they exited the "Chant héraldique," the last of Langlais' *Six Preludes*, dedicated to Gaston Litaize.

The day after the wedding, the couple moved into 160 rue de la Convention, and, shortly after, to 22 rue Duroc, the same building where André Marchal lived and just a few hundred yards from the Institute for the Young Blind. From then on, aside from moving from 22 to 26 rue Duroc in 1936, a move necessitated by the arrival of little Janine, Jean Langlais was never to leave this address in the shadow of the Invalides dome.

His appointment as aspiring-teacher of organ at the Institute for the Young Blind in April of 1930 came at just the right moment to allow the young couple to look to the future with tranquility, but on the other hand it involved a major time commitment. In addition to

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<sup>9</sup> Anatole le Braz, *La Bretagne : choix de textes précédés d'une étude* (Paris Renouard-Laurens, 1948. 49-51).

teaching organ, he was charged with the direction of the choir inherited from Marty, which on top of the rehearsals hour Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, meant providing the music for the chapel Masses (at 8:30 am Thursdays and Sundays) and at Vespers (at 1:30 pm).

The composer remembers his life as choirmaster:

At the time of Marty's retirement, the mixed choir was large, and I was only 24 years old. Well, specifically I was supposed to conduct the girls who were about the same age as I. Marty forewarned me: "You'll run into formidable opposition." And in fact, one of the supervisors of the girls, who was part of the choir, decreed that she didn't "want to be directed by a kid." To which Marchal remarked, "A kid, maybe, but a kid who knows a lot." Fortunately, it worked out, and soon I found the work enthralling.

I began by having them sing two or three choruses by Debussy, "Dieu qu'il fait bon regarder" and "Yver, vous n'êtes qu'un villain," and suddenly my 59 choristers became enthusiastic... Together we prepared great works from the Renaissance, like the *Mass "Le Bien que j'ay"* by Guillaume Dufay, the six-voiced *Pope Marcellus Mass* by Palestrina, and excerpts of Bach's *Actus tragicus*. That taught me a lot about vocal writing.

Moreover, it was for my choir that I composed my first work for four-part mixed voices, *Deux Chansons de Clément Marot* ("Je suis aymé de la plus belle" and "Aux damoyelles paresseuses d'écrire à leurs amis") premiered under my direction on June 10, 1931 at the National Institute for the Young Blind.

This became my first published work in 1933. That's why I called it "opus 1." In addition to works from the choral repertory, I also rehearsed my choristers in plainchant in view of the religious services in the chapel. Exciting work, especially since I had studied fairly seriously at the Gregorian Institute in Paris, on the advice of Blazy and Tournemire.

For Easter of 1931, the chaplain of the Institute asked me to compose a motet for the Blessed Virgin, which I did with pleasure. I wrote a short piece for two voices and organ, very simple, that I titled *Ave mundi gloria*, and which was published in 1933 by Hérelle. My career as choirmaster was for me, for 34 years, a way of perfecting the art of writing for voices, and the students always attended, even when we had to have extra rehearsals, something that happened often!<sup>10</sup>

But the centerpiece of his work at the Institute was of course organ instruction, six hours a day, to students (often at the beginning, old friends of his own age or even older) who immediately pledged him affection and admiration. They proved it to him by carrying him in triumph the whole length of the avenue de la Grande Armée after his victory at the competition of the "Amis de l'Orgue" in June of 1931.

Aside from these principal activities, the young teacher substituted regularly in the major Parisian churches (Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Saint-Antoine-des-Quinze-Vingts, Saint-Étienne-du-Mont), feeling too busy to accept an organ post of his own. That is why he refused an offer from his friend Malherbe to take over the loft at Notre-Dame-de-la-Croix in Ménilmontant (in the 20th arrondissement) where he himself was choirmaster; Langlais suggested his friend Gaston Litaize instead.

Since finishing at the Conservatory in 1930, Jean Langlais made it a point of honor to play the works of his friends in concerts.

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<sup>10</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

Thus on December 28, 1930, he gave the second performance (the premiere having been by the composer himself) of Messiaen's newly composed *Diptyque* in a recital held at Saint-Antoine-des-Quinze-Vingts and sponsored by the "Amis de l'Orgue" for the first prize awarded in the organ class of the Conservatory.

He was therefore extremely surprised to receive the following note from Olivier Messiaen:<sup>11</sup>

Fuligny, July 22, 1931

Dear Friend,

Since poor Mr. Quef has died, the organ post at La Trinité is vacant. You know that for two years I was the only substitute for Mr. Quef. Therefore I applied for the position. They told me that you were one of the candidates for this post.

I don't blame you at all, but that really surprises me.

I congratulate you on the prize at the Amis de l'Orgue.

Trust in my unwavering friendship,

Olivier Messiaen

Jean Langlais' response to Messiaen must have been vehement, judging by the following:

Fuligny, August 3, 1931

My Dear Friend,

Thank you for your letter, which moved me. I have changed a lot and I have buried the few illusions about men that I still had. If I had doubted your friendship, I would not have written to you.

Your sweet fury against my lack of trust delights me, and I see to what extent you are a loyal friend. Friendship is a very pure song that should not be tarnished by dissonances. I will not forget you and I know you will do the same for me. You wrote so frankly and so kindly that I would embrace you if I saw you.

Thank you for sending your consolation about the competition in Rome without sharing your opinion. My cantata was good music and less good theater: the judgment was very fair. As for La Trinité, I wait, I would like it a little, but I don't have much hope. The future seems to me funereal. Is this an effect of my fanciful and vexatious temperament, because, in fact, the sun is shining and there are flowers?

Goodbye dear friend, trust in my affectionately devoted feelings.

Olivier Messiaen

A month later, Messiaen informed Langlais of his appointment as official organist at La Trinité, becoming—at the age of 23—the youngest organist to hold such a post in France:

Fuligny, September 17, 1931

Dear Friend,

I have been appointed organist at La Trinité. I'm telling you this good news immediately. I remember your extreme kindness in this matter: you are a faithful friend, really too faithful and I fear being unworthy of you.

During the course of next year, come to my place from time to time if you aren't too busy; I'd be very happy to spend some evenings with you.

I'm composing, I'm playing the organ. At the organ, the realization happens so fast that the concept doesn't have time to be idealized.

But in composition, what a difference between the sublime heights of one and the lamentable platitudes of another! The more I work on music, the more I am indignant at my nothingness before that elusive ideal.

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<sup>11</sup> This letter, as the followings, is part of a collection of 65 letters sent by Olivier Messiaen to Jean Langlais between 1931 and 1990 (collection Marie-Louise Langlais).

Thank you again, dear friend, for your good, faithful, and certain friendship. Until next time.

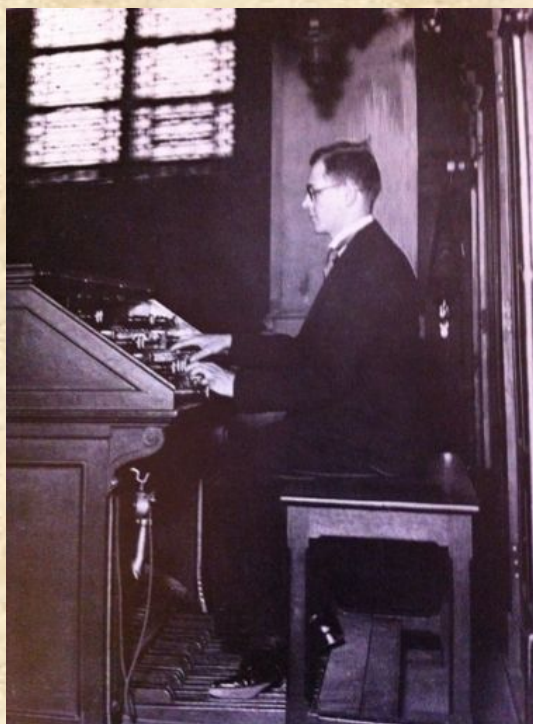
I warmly shake your hand.

Olivier Messiaen



Original letter from Olivier Messiaen to Jean Langlais, September 17, 1931

Figure 15. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)



First photograph of Messiaen at the organ of La Trinité, Paris, 1931

Figure 16. (photo Roger Viollet)

For his part, Messiaen invited Jean Langlais regularly to the premieres of his works, evidenced by the following excerpt from a letter written two months after his appointment to the organ post at La Trinité:

Paris, November 29, 1931

Dear Friend,

They're playing my symphonic poem *Les Offrandes oubliées* on Sunday, December 6, at three o'clock at the Société des Concerts.

There's an open rehearsal (10 francs for all the seats) Saturday, December 5, at 9 am.

The rehearsal is more important than the concert. It would give me great pleasure if you could come.

Thanks in advance! Excuse me for not sending you an invitation. There is none.

Your old friend,

Olivier Messiaen

## The Amis de l'Orgue Composition Competition - The *Poèmes évangéliques* (1932)

His many activities didn't deter Jean Langlais, however, from trying to achieve a goal he had set for himself the day after his success at the performance and improvisation competition sponsored by the "Amis de l'Orgue" in 1931: to win, as well, that organization's composition competition in May of 1932, and in so doing to equal the remarkable record of Duruflé, who, let us remember, won the successive competitions in 1929 (performance and improvisation) and 1930 (composition).

In an interesting and quite unknown document<sup>12</sup>, Maurice Duruflé confided his desire also to participate in this contest, before giving it up out of caution:

Paris, May 3, 1932

Dear Master,

I saw Monsieur de Miramon who told me that according to the rules of the competition, I had every right to participate again, and that in these conditions it was difficult for him to give me personal advice.

Despite the fact that my three pieces are finished<sup>13</sup>, I prefer not to be a candidate again, having already won the prize two years ago; this could certainly prejudice them against me.

Who knows? If he had presented this now famous *Suite*, Duruflé would probably have won the competition again ...

The rules in 1932 called for the composition of a suite for organ comprised of three movements, the whole not to exceed 15 minutes. Jean Langlais set to work at the beginning of 1932 and finished very quickly (with rare exceptions, he always composed quickly) a triptych titled *Poèmes évangéliques d'après les textes sacrés*: "L'Annonciation," "La Nativité," and "Les Rameaux." The composer chose the form stipulated by the competition, with religious inspiration derived from reading the Gospels in the New Testament. The central figure is Jesus Christ, but with him is his mother Mary, one of principal sources of inspiration for Jean Langlais. That is why the Annunciation and Christmas are the subjects of two of the three movements.

### 1. "L'Annonciation"

As a preface, Langlais paraphrases Luke 1:30–31, 29, 38, and 46–55:

The angel Gabriel, messenger from God, having respectfully greeted the Virgin Mary, spoke to her in these words: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God, and you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." Mary's heart was greatly troubled, then said to the angel, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be according to your word..." And in serene joy, the Virgin enunciated her "Magnificat."

This text, placed under the title of the work, serves as the point of departure, featuring three "people" who will be commented on in three distinct sections:

<sup>12</sup> Handwritten letter from Maurice Duruflé to Charles Tournemire, manuscript to the National Library, NLA-337 (11)

<sup>13</sup> This is the *Suite* opus 5 (Prélude, Sicilienne, Toccata).

*l'Ange* (the angel), *la Vierge* (the Virgin), and *le Cœur de la Vierge* (the Virgin's heart.)

The first section, the angel, enters unequivocally in Messiaen's world when it borrows the scale of the "second mode of limited transposition" for its theme (for convenience we shall refer to this as "second mode"), which alternates steps and half-steps regularly.

The borrowing is fleeting, since from the second measure of the theme, the initial mode is altered with an augmented interval (G sharp-F), then with the whole-tone scale familiar from the works of Debussy.

With this mode established, more instinctively than intentionally, with the juxtaposition of elements lacking real connections to each other, Langlais displays his characteristic independence, as we shall verify later.

Another procedure that he uses here willingly is the alternation of counterpoint and harmony, which follows the first section (the angel), written in two- and then three-voiced counterpoint; a second section (the Virgin) that is completely harmonic, where a series of seventh, ninth, and eleventh chords support the theme of the Virgin—using tritones, very characteristic of the melodic language of Messiaen.

In the third section (the Virgin's heart), the composer uses one of his favorite improvisational techniques, very Franck-like, in which an ostinato motive harmonized with modulations grows increasingly tight, generally ascending, here reflecting the Virgin Mary's growing anxiety following the angel's revelations.

At the end of the piece, after a trio section with the Gregorian Magnificat in long pedal notes, a series of fourth and sixth chords unfold, recalling the atmosphere of Messiaen's first pages.

In short, a religious program music influenced by Messiaen, about which Langlais would later say, "I had great difficulty separating myself from his influence, especially in my first steps as a composer."<sup>14</sup>

## 2. "*La Nativité*"

This second component of the *Poèmes évangéliques* was programmed by André Marchal in his American concert tour in 1938, thus popularizing the name and work of Langlais on the other side of the Atlantic before the Second World War. It begins with another verbal introduction by the composer:

In a humble manger, on a calm night, Mary and Joseph await the birth of Christ the Lord. After the baby is born, the celestial guardians, in a gracious apparition, announce the event in Bethlehem to the shepherds. Coming to the crèche, they offer their tender melodies to the infant Jesus as a symbol of adoration. Then the holy family finds calmness in the Peace of the Lord.

Rather than quoting or paraphrasing one of the Gospels, as in the preceding "*L'Annonciation*," Langlais offers a summary, and "sets the stage" for the four images that he will successively describe in music: the manger, *les Anges* (the angels), *les Bergers* (the shepherds), and *la Sainte Famille* (the holy family). Some of the characteristics of "*L'Annonciation*" reappear in "*La Nativité*," such as the conciseness of the descriptions (15 measures for the manger, 14 for the shepherds) and the modality, here on G, then A. But in the "*Bergers*," we see as well a technique new to Langlais: accompanying a modal melody (the

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<sup>14</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."



old Breton song “Salut, ô sainte crèche”) with chromatic harmonies. Finally, for the holy family, one admires the combination of the previous sections with a registration that would become characteristic of Langlais’ music: gamba and voix céleste in the manuals and four-foot flute in the pedals for the melody. With this architectural language, never chatty but instead whittled down and concise—or “complex more than complicated” as Paul Dukas advised his composition students, Jean Langlais moves with ease and makes a natural mixture of such opposing systems as modality and chromaticism, counterpoint and harmony.

### 3. “*Les Rameaux*”

The third and final section of the *Poèmes évangéliques* departs entirely from the two preceding ones. While they were in short contrasting sections, this one adopts a totally unified construction and ambiance, concentrating on a central theme: JOY.

Jean Langlais explained:

It’s the only episode in Christ’s life that was joyful and triumphant, and I just had to use it to conclude this triptych, evoking the rare happy moments in Christ’s life. Therefore I captioned “*Les Rameaux*” with these words: “Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem,” and I added in the score: Jesus, in all his majesty, returns to Jerusalem, where the enthusiastic crowds welcomed him, crying “Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the king of Israel! Hosanna in the highest.”<sup>15</sup>

The genre chosen here is that of a big toccata based on the Palm Sunday antiphon, “Hosanna filio David.” The entries of the voices follow the classic pattern of the scholastic fugue (*fugue d’école*), with an exposition of the principal motive in the order of soprano-alto-tenor-bass in short note values, while the same theme makes a majestic entry, fortissimo, in the pedals in long notes. This was an exercise that was much practiced in Marcel Dupré’s improvisation class, and undoubtedly Langlais remembered it at just this moment. Then the composer uses multiple techniques: superimposition of motives, strettos more or less tight, modulations, movement of the theme from one voice to another, making contrapuntal fireworks that give way to a powerful coda with sixteenth-note octaves between the manuals and pedals, a style frequently used by French improvisers since Widor. It concludes over a long pedal tone in C major with the ostinato presence of F-sharp (a tritone), once again one of the signatures dear to Messiaen.

As much as one could label his first works (*Prelude and Fugue, Six Preludes*) as youthful works, or school assignments, here in the *Poèmes évangéliques* we can equally see the composer demonstrating a masterful personal style, technique, and aesthetic. Jean Langlais, though influenced by Messiaen, has found his language; when you hear this music, you say, “That’s by Langlais.”

Having perfectly assimilated the characteristics of the composers who preceded him, he had already chosen his path, refusing simple tonality as well as atonality, preferring modality, Gregorian or not, which would become his favored language, often accompanied by

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

chromaticism, a marvelous expressive tool in his understanding of it. Further, his predilections were for religious music, especially that which was Marian inspired, and the powerful heritage of his childhood in La Fontenelle.

It was, then, with peace of mind that in 1932 he presented his *Poèmes évangéliques* to the jury of the Amis de l'Orgue, chaired by Gabriel Pierné and including the following members: Alexandre Cellier, Chanoine Mathias, Maurice Emmanuel, Arthur Honegger, Paul Le Flem, Henri Mulet, Henri Nibelle, Achille Philip, Gustave Samazeuilh, Florent Schmitt, a mixture of composers, organists and musicologists, a jury whose number, quality, and diversity guaranteed complete fairness.

Alas, the disappointment was as great as his hopes had been: the *Poèmes évangéliques* were eliminated in the first round of the competition along with Litaize's *Lied, intermezzo pastoral et final*, later published by Leduc. Three candidates remained for the final round: Joseph Ermend-Bonnal, first prize for his *Symphonie sur le repons "Media vita"*; André Fleury, first mention for *Prélude, andante et toccata*; and Daniel-Lesur, honorable mention for *La Vie intérieure*.

It should be noted in any case that this competition took place in conditions that were at least odd, since the contestants' works were played by Georges Ibos, not on the organ but on a piano! Obviously the variety of sonic plans and the contrast of timbres required for the organ were lost.

This setback, fortunately, didn't discourage the young composer, especially since his former teacher, Marcel Dupré, wrote (at his request) the following letter to the publisher Hérelle:

Meudon, July 8, 1932

Dear Sir,

My excellent student, Mr. Jean Langlais, brilliant first-prize winner in organ at the Conservatory, organ teacher at the Institute for the Young Blind, and organist at Saint-Antoine church, asked me for a letter of introduction to you to have you hear a new work which he has just composed and which is titled *Poèmes évangéliques* (l'Annonciation, la Nativité, les Rameaux).

I present Mr. Langlais to you with so much pleasure because he came to play his work for me, and it greatly pleased me. These pieces have a poetry and charming new style, brilliant without being difficult, and I think they are destined for success. That is why I permit myself with this letter to ask you to accept Mr. Langlais' request for an appointment.

Thanking you warmly in advance for what you are able to do for him, I ask you, dear sir, to accept my best wishes,

All the best,

Marcel Dupré<sup>16</sup>

This was a very important letter for the future of the young composer, not only because Henri Hérelle met with Jean Langlais, but also because he agreed to publish, in addition to the *Poèmes évangéliques*, the *Deux Chansons de Clément Marot*, composed for his mixed choir at the Institute for the Young Blind, and the motet *Ave mundi gloria* for equal voices

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<sup>16</sup> Copy of the original typed letter in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais.

and organ—that is, almost everything he had written in 1931–1932. Sweet revenge for the jury’s decision at the Amis de l’Orgue!

Henri Hérelle had his shop at 16 rue de l’Odéon, in the middle of the Latin Quarter in Paris, under the sign “Librairie Musicale et Religieuse” (Musical and Religious Bookstore). Pierre Denis was a young pharmacist and a brilliant private student of Jean Langlais who would later become his regular substitute at Sainte-Clotilde (1945–1975) and also become his first biographer. He gives this portrait of the music publisher:

He was a character, with his little goatee, his beret, and his big grey shirt. Very idiosyncratic, he wasn’t completely uneducated in music, although most of what he published was the most banal church music of the era. He published numerous magazines, all dedicated to the organ or religious vocal music, and no doubt the sacred aesthetic of Langlais’ works could only captivate him.<sup>17</sup>

On June 22, 1932, Jean Langlais attended the wedding of his friend Messiaen to the violinist Claire Delbos, daughter of the Sorbonne professor Victor Delbos. But a personal drama cast a shadow on this period of his life: at the beginning of July Jeanne Langlais suffered a still-birth in the most difficult of circumstances. She owed her own life to the enlightened care of her physician, Dr. Ravina, to whom Jean Langlais dedicated his *Poèmes évangéliques* in the version published by Hérelle in 1936. The composer came out of this ordeal battered, and for the summer vacation period of 1932 he decided to take his wife for an extended visit with her family in Escalquens. There he found, in addition to the gentle climate, the extremely warm simplicity of his new inlaws. Although he didn’t understand much of the patois commonly spoken in this part of southern France, he felt with gratitude the kindness and gentleness that they showed him.

### **Concerts in Paris - Organ appointment at Saint-Pierre-de-Montrouge**

In early 1932, Jean Langlais and his friends in the “1930’s generation” shared an historic moment in the history of French organ concerts, a collective recital to present excerpts from Charles Tournemire’s *L’Orgue Mystique*. Tournemire had completed this work on February 5, 1932 with the composition of number 51 for the twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost. It was Daniel-Lesur who had the idea for this concert, as we see in the following letter from Tournemire to Langlais:

January 5, 1932

My dear friend, Daniel-Lesur, told me that he had thought of gathering a few of the best organists under 30 (you’re nowhere near 30!) to perform pieces from *L’Orgue Mystique*. He’s told me of your warm acceptance. Believe me that I am absolutely delighted since I know that you interpret me divinely. Thank you, my dear friend, you are so kind and this brings me great joy. Let me know what you choose: an offertory and a big piece are needed. (Perhaps the two pieces from the Epiphany?)

Trust in my deep friendship and my affectionate devotion,

Charles Tournemire<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Conversation with Pierre Denis recorded on tape by the author in 1988.

<sup>18</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais

This collective concert took place on April 25, 1932, and it featured seven young organist-composers in the following order: Daniel-Lesur, Gaston Litaize, Jean Langlais, Olivier Messiaen, Noëlie Pierront, Maurice Duruflé, and André Fleury. Each played an Offertory and a concluding movement from the various Feasts (*Epiphany* for Langlais, following Tournemire's wishes) on the Sainte-Clotilde organ. The concert lasted about an hour and 45 minutes! A weighty program for an organ that was on its last legs, and whose restoration was to begin almost immediately after the concert, at the beginning of summer 1932. At this time, Jean Langlais participated actively in Parisian musical life, attending many concerts, and responding in particular to this comical invitation that Olivier Messiaen sent him:

Paris, November 20, 1932

Dear Friend,

Inserted into the program on 22 November, after no. 4 (*Cinq Mélodies* by Claude Arrieu), I will play, with my wife, as a premiere, my *Thème et variations* for violin and piano.

Please be kind enough to make a lot of noise and make us repeat this work, which is one of my best, unless you prefer to boo, which would also make a lot of noise.

Thank you in either case, and trust in my best friendship,

Olivier Messiaen<sup>19</sup>

In this era, organ recitals were still rare. Some concert halls had organs, such as the Trocadéro or the Pleyel and Gaveau halls, but often in poor condition. On the other hand, there were many organs in the homes of rich patrons (Mmes Dujarric de la Rivière, Schildge-Bianchini, Flersheim, and the count de Bertier), and they were happy to sponsor concerts at their homes for an invited audience. Thus it was that Jean Langlais closed a recital by the students of André Marchal on the organ in the home of Mme Flersheim, by performing two of his three *Poèmes évangéliques*, “La Nativité” and “Les Rameaux”.



**Concert at the home of Suzanne Flersheim, June 29, 1933**

**First row:** Jean Langlais, Jean-Pierre Hennebains, Madeleine Lasalle, Elisabeth de Véricourt, Marianne Dreyfus, Marie-Thérèse Genu.

**Second row:** Michel Blin, Noëlie Pierront, André Marchal, Suzanne Flersheim, Xavier Mayaud.

Figure 17. (photograph by Studio Waroline. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

For its part, the Amis de l'Orgue sponsored five recitals annually in various Parisian churches, and some parishes gave permissions to their organists to perform after the sacred services, which allowed Jean Langlais, as substitute organist for the count de Bertier at Saint-Antoine-des-Quinze-Vingts, to play four services followed by organ recitals on the four Sundays in May. In the last one (May 29, 1933), which was dedicated to works by young composers, he played the public premiere of his *Poèmes évangéliques* as well as certain recent pieces by his colleagues: *Intermezzo pastoral* by Litaize, *L'Apparition de l'église éternelle* by Messiaen, and the *Scherzo* by Duruflé. During the preceding service the parish choir sang his *Ave mundi gloria*.

Three months later, he received a letter from Messiaen that included the following comments:

August 1933

My dear friend,

... I worked during my short vacation. A lot, in fact. I've undertaken my longest work, *L'Ascension* for orchestra. It will obviously be superior to the others (in length). But religious music is a difficult art.

I feel myself hopelessly little and incapable. The decision not to compose any more came to me—then it left. This piece will be finished in a month, which is not my doing: I'm leaving for the army. This forces me to do endless errands, and it's unimaginably annoying. In addition, I'm playing both the main and choir organs at La Trinité....

I shake your hand affectionately,

Olivier Messiaen.

PS: I am adding a word to tell you how much I liked your concert at Saint-Antoine. Impeccable playing, exquisite registrations, well paced, inventive. Wonderful improvisation, breathtaking. I won't repeat myself about your works; you know how much I like your *Poèmes évangéliques* and your motet *Ave mundi gloria*: it is real music. I don't think one can give a greater compliment<sup>20</sup>.

At the same time, Gaston Litaize accepted an appointment in Nancy, leaving vacant his position in Paris at Notre-Dame-de-la-Croix de Ménilmontant. In this case, René Malherbe knew how to be persuasive in convincing Langlais to succeed Litaize.

Thus for the first time in his life, Jean Langlais became, at age 26, the official organist (*titulaire*) of the main organ at a church in Paris. He remembers this period with much pleasure:

Notre-Dame-de-la-Croix de Ménilmontant, where I had the joy of being appointed organist in 1933, was entrusted to a highly worthy priest, Canon Touzard. He was a very cultured man, having written a Hebrew grammar book. This parish had 84,000 souls! The organ, never completed, had foundation and reed stops of great beauty. In this typically Parisian milieu, you enriched your soul through contact with the parishioners, some of whom were very picturesque... There was joy in hearing some of the sermons. For example, "Spiritualism doesn't exist, my brothers, because the church condemns it," or better, "The parish has to return to the hilltop so that one no longer hears children say in catechism, "Last night, Father, mommy had three different daddies."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

At the end of 1933, the young artist performed, as part of a recital he was to give on December 17 at Notre-Dame-de-la-Croix, one of the *Sei Fioretti* that Charles Tournemire had dedicated to him, getting the following immediate reaction in the mail:

Paris, October 15, 1933

Ah, little bandit!

You're playing my "Petite Fleur" n° 2 on Sunday, December 17 at ND-de-la-Croix. I thought I would be the first to display my six little children the 19th of the same month at Sainte-Clotilde.

But you've done the right thing, and I am very aware of that. Enclosed are two invitations to my concert. Next year, I'll ask you to play a solo recital at Sainte-Clotilde.

All the best,

Charles Tournemire<sup>22</sup>

At this time one can see a strong interest developing in the new organ music. The young played their own works, as well as those of their teachers and friends; and it wasn't unusual to hear, on the other hand, the teachers performing the music of their students, following the example of André Marchal, the first to introduce "La Nativité" by Jean Langlais to North America. A little before Christmas of 1933, just as Langlais was getting used to his new post at the organ in Ménilmontant, he learned of the tragic death of his first piano teacher, Maurice Blazy, who was hit by a truck on the very eve of his retirement while he was on his way to a concert at the Valentin Haüy Association. Organist at the main organ of Saint-Pierre de-Montrouge from 1901, he had succeeded another blind man, Albert Mahaut, Jean Langlais' beloved first teacher at the School for the Blind.

Out of respect for the continuing tradition of blind organists, Jean Langlais was appointed to this position at Ménilmontant, which he held for eleven years (1934–1945) before being named to the Sainte-Clotilde post. Langlais was very happy at the Montrouge church, savoring the neighborhood; he developed the habit of walking, alone, to the church, taking the boulevard Montparnasse and the avenue du Maine, which meant almost two miles each way! He enjoyed also the remarkable personality of his new priest, Canon Aubert:

Tactfulness is a rare thing, but it exists. I was assured of this manifold times at Saint-Pierre-de-Montrouge, parish of 64,000 souls; there, for eight years, I had as a priest a Hellenist, an historian, and also a big heart. "I don't understand anything about what you do, my young friend, but I have confidence in you," he had the habit of saying to me. One Sunday, I was improvising (just for myself) a long postlude after Vespers. The next Sunday I met my dear priest: "Ah, dear friend, last Sunday your Vespers postlude was interminable; I was waiting for you to finish so that I could have a meeting of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart in the Mary chapel. You would never finish. For the first five minutes, you annoyed me—and then I found the rest delicious.

How times have changed! When it was time for an evaluation, this dear man said to me, "I don't want you to do more since I think that you already do too much." My beloved priest, you published a very interesting book about the Saint-Pierre church. Naturally you mentioned your organ. Unfortunately, you misread the documents about the manual stops on the Great, and you wrote: Bourdon 16 notes, Salicional 8 notes, Prestant 4 notes, etc. It's only post mortem that I show you your mistake, because during your lifetime I would never have dared to do it!<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

When Jean Langlais was appointed to Saint-Pierre-de-Montrouge in 1934, the 1868 Barker-Merklin organ (36 stops, 56-note manuals, and 30-note pedal), the second organ in Paris (after Saint-Augustin) to have electric action, was in such bad condition that it needed a complete reworking immediately, a redoing of the action and wind supply.



**The Barker-Merklin Organ at Saint-Pierre-de-Montrouge**  
Figure 18. (photograph Sylvie Mallet, collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

Since the company selected, Guttschenritter, needed an entire year of work to complete the task, Jean Langlais--an organist without organ-- had the time to make a crucial connexion, one that would be important to the rest of his career: Paul Dukas, composer of the famous *L'Apprenti sorcier*, but also professor of composition at the Paris Conservatory.

### **Paul Dukas' composition class at the Paris Conservatory -*Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes* - The 1934 Amis de l'Orgue Composition Competition**

At this stage in his life, Jean Langlais really had no need to return to study at the Conservatory. He was armed with enough diplomas, was the official organist of a main organ in Paris, and taught at the National Institute for the Young Blind. Nevertheless, his failure at the Amis de l'Orgue's composition competition in 1932 had disappointed him, and he wanted to try his luck again with this competition, which was to be held next in May 1934. The assignment, a triptych based on three important liturgical moments, was particularly well suited to him. The candidates were to compose:

- A prelude or postlude inspired by the Requiem Mass
- A slow movement or antiphon appropriate for the Feast of the Virgin Mary
- A concluding piece inspired by the Te Deum

This triptych came to him very easily between the end of 1933 and the beginning of 1934. He began with the piece inspired by the Requiem Mass and composed “Mors et resurrectio” then he built the second piece on two Gregorian themes in praise of the Virgin Mary, the antiphon “Ave Maria” and the hymn “Ave maris stella”; finally he concluded by affirming the praise of God with his “Hymne d’action de grâces, Te Deum.”

To have an even stronger position, Jean Langlais decided to return to the Conservatory as an auditor to get the advice of one of the most prestigious composers in the French school, Paul Dukas, especially since he had received a commission for a piece for choir, soprano, and orchestra which he was to premiere at Saint-Germain in Rennes on November 15, 1934.

This ten-minute work was his first for orchestra, and he conceived it for strings, woodwinds, trumpets, four-voiced mixed chorus, and solo soprano.<sup>24</sup> He wanted, however, to assure himself that he was on the right track by asking the opinion of Dukas, known as a great orchestrator. The details of his first interview remained forever engraved on his memory:

Dupré had given me a letter of introduction for Paul Dukas. My plan was not to attend the class as a student, but just to audit it. I was presented to Dukas, who asked me, “Do you have something to show me?”

I complied and gave him the manuscript of my new organ piece, “Mors et resurrectio” which we played together on the piano. When we had finished, he said, “You are a born composer! I have nothing to teach you except orchestration. But just come to class the day after the examination of admittance.”

I replied “It doesn’t matter, dear master, as I have no need to be a student. The one thing I ask of you is the permission to attend your class as an auditor.”

To which he said, “One more diploma would not hurt you.” And he went immediately to the Director to explain my situation. He returned to me saying, “My friend, from this moment you are enrolled in the composition class.”<sup>25</sup>

For Jean Langlais, this statement marked the beginning of unforgettable years spent in Paul Dukas’s class, from January 1934 to May 17, 1935, the day of the sudden death of the composer, felled by a heart attack.

In Dukas’ class, Langlais’ main concern was orchestration, and in February and March he worked hard on the score of his hymn *La Voix du vent*, slated for a premiere in Rennes in the fall. Dukas said he was satisfied. A newspaper review published on November 15, 1934, right after the concert, indicates the public’s reaction to this new score:

A first-rate performer, Jean Langlais is also a composer already well known. Recently he had a musical poem performed in Rennes which so enthused the audience that it was repeated. He himself conducted the orchestra, solo soprano and chorus (an ensemble of 80 musicians), something obviously difficult for a blind person.

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<sup>24</sup> Unpublished, 24 pages in manuscript (collection Marie-Louise Langlais). Starting with his marriage in 1931, Jean Langlais always dictated his music, note by note, to his wife, an extremely difficult process, especially for orchestra scores and parts. The manuscripts from this period are therefore all in the hand of Jeannette Langlais.

<sup>25</sup> Langlais, “Souvenirs.”



After the piece's premiere, still as part of this sacred concert in Rennes, he gave an organ recital which had such a full house that the artist's father and uncle, who had arrived separately, couldn't find each other at its conclusion.<sup>26</sup>

Pushed by Dukas to start a new work, Jean Langlais came up with the idea of taking his "Te Deum" for organ, composed for the Amis de l'Orgue competition, and making a version for full orchestra and organ.

He remembers:

Each measure had 24 staves; I even used contrabassoon in my orchestra. Dukas didn't leave a line, not even half a measure, untouched. Everything was demolished with solid explanations.

On the subject of contrabassoon, he said, "You don't hear it in such a powerful orchestra. You wouldn't even know if it's playing or not!"

As a result, I started again from the beginning with the orchestration of the "Te Deum," but also of "La Nativité" from the *Poèmes évangéliques*, which I retitled *Essai sur l'Évangile de Noël* for the version for full orchestra and organ; and I brought Dukas only four measures of orchestrated music each week. He took forever to read them, looking for the slightest weakness.

But he didn't change anything further, as I had understood what he wanted. Once completed, these two pieces for orchestra and organ have remained in manuscript: I have never tried to publish them.<sup>27</sup>



**Paul Dukas' composition class, 1934**

**Jean Langlais and Jehan Alain are in the second row, second and fourth from the left**

Figure 19. (photograph by Louis Roosen. Conservatoire national de musique. Paris. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

<sup>26</sup> M. Dehillotte, "L'Activité d'un Jeune," *Le Valentin Haüy* 1935:1 (March-April, 1935), 38–39.

<sup>27</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs." In fact these two pieces for orchestra and organ are just to be published in 2016 by edition Bon(n)orgue, n°15.102 and 16.104 (Germany), due to the interest of German organist and publisher Otto Depenheuer.

In Dukas' class, he met another organist, Jehan Alain, who had written an *Intermezzo* for two pianos and bassoon for the composition competition at the Conservatory in June 1934, and Langlais recalled this anecdote:

When Paul Dukas heard this piece in class, he said to Alain, "Your piece is too long, Alain, extend it."

And since no one understood what he was trying to say, he explained, "The piece is unbalanced, but as music it is excellent; extend it so that it has good proportions."

That was Dukas's flamboyant spirit. Outside the class, Jehan Alain immediately transcribed his *Intermezzo* for solo organ, and it's a superb piece.

Another anecdote comes back to me: I showed him the first edition of "Mors et resurrectio" for organ, published by Hérelle in 1935 in the series "Le Grand Orgue,"<sup>28</sup> and as the two of us played it on the piano, he pointed out a typographical error. "Thank you for calling it to my attention," I said, "I'll have it corrected in the second edition."

And he, who was very sarcastic, said "What? A second edition of organ music? My dear friend, that's unheard of!"

Let us look more closely now at the *Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes* at the time when Jean Langlais was preparing to enter them in the Amis de l'Orgue competition:

### 1. "*Mors et resurrectio*"<sup>29</sup>

Langlais himself offered a brief analysis of the piece in a letter to his friend and colleague, Henri Cabié, dedicatee of the work:

Paris, January 25, 1939

Dear Friend,

A thousand thanks for playing my piece; when will it be heard and where?

This work very closely follows its title: two themes are used, first, Life is introduced by a theme of my own, then Death, using as a theme the first part of the gradual from the Requiem Mass.

After the development of these two ideas, the theme for Life takes over with radiance and thus symbolizes that in Death there is the true Life.

Do as you wish, I trust your skill.

Faithfully as always,

Jean Langlais<sup>30</sup>

It is noteworthy that Henri Cabié is the only dedicatee in the *Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes*, the other two movements being undedicated.

But even more interesting is the fact that, when one looks at Langlais' *Six Preludes* (1929),<sup>31</sup> one finds that each was dedicated to one of his friends in Dupré's class (Henriette Roget, Rachel Brunswig, Olivier Messiaen, Gaston Litaize, Henri Cabié, and Joseph Gilles). In composing *Mors et resurrectio* in 1932, Langlais reused (note for note) all of the first 23 measures of the Fifth Prelude ("Lamentation"), dedicated to Joseph Gilles. The composition diverges from the original with the introduction of the Gregorian Requiem.

<sup>28</sup> A collection of modern music comprised of works published in the quarterly *Le Grand Orgue* and published as offprints.

<sup>29</sup> Number 51 in the collection "Le Grand Orgue," published by Hérelle in 1935

<sup>30</sup> Letter returned to Jean Langlais by Cabié's widow (collection Marie-Louise Langlais).

<sup>31</sup> Unpublished, at Jean Langlais' request. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

Thus, a work dating from 1929 and dedicated to Gilles becomes the point of departure for a new work from 1934 dedicated to Cabié!

To return to the work itself: under the title is an epigraph from a letter from Saint Paul to the Corinthians, “Ubi est mors victoria tua?” (Death, where is thy victory?)<sup>32</sup> Langlais considers this enigmatic question and gives it a strong Christian answer in music: Death isn't the end of Life, Death is Eternal Life.

For the composer, Life, the first section of the piece, is darkly colored, using a two-to-five-voiced fugato with entries staggered at regular four-measure intervals, from low to high, in a chromatic and dramatic harmonization. In contrast, Eternal Life, which makes its appearance in enunciating the gradual from the Requiem Mass monophonically on the positive trumpet, leads the listener towards the limbo of Eternal Life. After reintroducing the first theme at the interval of a second, Langlais delivers a superimposition of the themes, particularly emphasizing the first four notes of the gradual from the Requiem Mass, repeated in the style of an ostinato in a gradual crescendo with foundation and reed stops; then, he closes with full organ: yes, Eternal Life vanquished Death.

## 2. *Ave Maria, Ave maris stella*

This is the slow movement or antiphon fitting for the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary stipulated as the second piece for the Amis de l'Orgue's competition.

Here is Olivier Messiaen's analysis:

The “Ave Maria, Ave maris stella” by Jean Langlais (published by Hérelle) is based on an antiphon and a chant-like hymn for the Feasts of the Blessed Virgin, as its title suggests. After a polytonal augmentation canon on the antiphon's theme, comes a modal passage in 5/8 that has a Hindu-like harmonization of the litanies of the Virgin, and is combined with the theme of the hymn. A stretto episode brings us with no conflict to the very calm conclusion, where “Pourquoi tremblez-vous?” from *Ariane* floats.<sup>33</sup> This is a very pretty organ piece, very poetic, well written for the instrument, and easy to play; it should take its place in the repertory of all organists.<sup>34</sup>

For his part, Langlais analyzes the piece a little differently, less technically, in a manuscript note for the program of the premiere that he gave it on June 29, 1934, at the organ in the home of Mme Flersheim:

“Ave Maria, Ave maris stella”: this work is built on themes borrowed from the Office of the Holy Virgin. The first theme, “Ave Maria,” is introduced in F-sharp in the hands and simultaneously in the pedals in A in long note values. This “Ave Maria” symbolizes the angelic greeting. The middle section brings the “Sancta Maria,” a tormented and variable prayer from humankind (the “Sancta Maria” is the second part of the antiphon “Ave Maria”). In the middle of this human prayer appears, as if it were a granted wish, the “Ave maris stella,” which brings a conclusion full of peace and confidence to this short mystical poem.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> First Corinthians 15 :55.

<sup>33</sup> A reference to the opera *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* by Paul Dukas, premiered in 1907 and revived in 1935 at the Paris Opera.

<sup>34</sup> Olivier Messiaen, “L'Orgue,” *Le Monde musical*, 31 March 1938, p. 84.

<sup>35</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

### 3. *Hymne d'action de grâces, «Te Deum»*<sup>36</sup>

This concluding piece in the triptych became the “star” of *Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes* and undoubtedly the composer’s most famous piece. The rules of the Amis de l’Orgue’s competition required a piece inspired by the Te Deum. Jean Langlais followed this rule scrupulously.

The chosen hymn melody in all its simplicity is one of the most solemn in all plain chant, the composer chose several fragments from it. It is in his manner of setting these fragments that he shows himself to be the most innovative: dispensing with a classic chorale-like setting, he immediately contrasts short unaccompanied Gregorian fragments in octaves in the manuals, with direct commentary in heavy clusters of fortissimo seventh and ninth chords resolving into great consonant chords.

In the second part of the piece, the composer, radically changing his approach, replaces the contrasts between horizontal modality and vertical tonality with a chromatic and modulatory treatment that develops the last phrase of the hymn, “in te Domine speravi” (Lord, in thee have I trusted). This phrase inspired him to create a section with rising modulations by thirds paired with a sonorous crescendo that ends with a consonant chord on A for full organ.

The third section returns to the vocabulary of the first, with its contrasting components, and after some virtuosic gestures concludes once again with an A-major chord, very distant from the third mode of the Gregorian Te Deum. Once again, Jean Langlais mixes modality, tonality, and chromaticism in a sort of kaleidoscope of languages that will be embedded in his works.

Confident of the originality and strength of his *Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes*, Jean Langlais presented the triptych to the Amis de l’Orgue competition.

The elimination round took place on May 6, 1934 at the home of count Miramon-Fitz-James, the organization’s president. The jury consisted of Guy Ropartz (president) and some very notable musicians, such as Nadia Boulanger, Paul Le Flem, Louis Vierne, Achille Philip, and Joseph Bonnet. The presence of two Bretons in the jury (Guy Ropartz and Paul Le Flem) seemed to augur well for Jean Langlais. Nothing could have been further from the truth: the jury rejected all of scores and the competition was annulled! This was an unbelievable decision that had no precedent.

Clearly Jean Langlais had expected a better outcome for his *Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes*. The publisher Hérelle offered a fine consolation by publishing the three pieces separately the next year, 1935, in his series “Le Grand Orgue” then in a collection with the triptych’s original title in 1938.

In 1934, the end-of-year competition in the Conservatory’s composition class provided some balm for his spirit. He was awarded a second prize, the only prize given in the class that year (no first prize was awarded), for his *Évangile de Noël* (the Christmas Gospel) and

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<sup>36</sup> In the first edition by Hérelle (Febr.1935), it appears as “actions de grâces,” but in Philippo-Combre reprint (1957) it is written: “action de grâce”.

*Hymne d'action de grâces, Te Deum* for orchestra and organ, played by the composer and Gaston Litaize in a version for two pianos. In addition, he offered a required vocal piece, a song with piano accompaniment, *Une Dentelle s'abolit* (A Lace Vanishes), composed in June 1934 on a poem by Stéphane Mallarmé.<sup>37</sup> Langlais later commented, "I remember that the singer, whose name I intentionally forget, sang my song as if it were by Massenet!"

Jehan Alain, who didn't win any prize in this same competition, acknowledged that he didn't know about the requirement for a vocal work.<sup>38</sup>

At this time, Jean Langlais was overflowing with projects, as one reads in two lovely and long letters that Paul Dukas wrote to him in the summer of 1934:

Paris, July 23, 1934

My Dear Friend,

I am happy to know that you are getting some respite and are breathing the air of your birthplace, which should repair the effects of overworking in the winter: weddings, burials, lessons, etc.

And I hope that Madame Langlais, to whom you should give my best wishes, is -- as well as yourself -- in excellent health.

While waiting to go to the Midi and the monastic life that you told me about, take full advantage of a complete vacation, which you richly deserve. Such pauses are necessary. Soon enough, you'll be back with the flutes, oboes, bassoons, cornets, and trumpets !

*L'Annonce faite à Marie*<sup>39</sup> seems to me a more important project which demands much meditation, but the subject seems absolutely perfect for you, and I entirely agree with you that you should undertake this project, albeit difficult, with the conviction that you will find in it great themes of musical exaltation.

Trust in my affectionate best wishes,

Paul Dukas<sup>40</sup>

In the end, Jean Langlais never worked on this project, which was undoubtedly too ambitious. Paul Dukas sent the second letter from his summer home:

Royan, September 7, 1934

My Dear Friend,

I am touched by the misgivings that you show in writing to me, but rest assured, and put them aside! 24 pieces for harmonium! That seems an inalterable number, like a dozen oysters. Not 22, nor 25, nor 23 or the whole edifice will collapse. Franck already covered this territory, admittedly a bit on the fly. You'll reach the finish line, dear friend, and I hope brilliantly, in terms of royalties that could, in my opinion, inspire composing from the heart and spirit for this bizarre instrument whose prolonged timbre could have strange repercussions for the spinal column. I'm sure you'll find a way to ennoble it to the extent that it's possible given its too easy mysticism...

It goes without saying that I share your unbounded admiration for Bach's organ partitas. This prodigious man has a unique way of endlessly renewing what was thought to be well known... The Bach that we loved at twenty is different from the one we admire at thirty, at forty, at fifty, etc.... And if one were to live to be a hundred, I

<sup>37</sup> Unpublished; collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>38</sup> He wrote in a letter to Denise Billard, July 2, 1934, "You may have noticed that I didn't win anything in composition. In addition to everything else I didn't enter a vocal work, being ill-informed." Quoted by Aurélie Decourt in *Jehan Alain: biographie, correspondance, dessins, essais* (Chambéry: Comp'Act, 2005). 167.

<sup>39</sup> This was a "Mystery" in a prologue and four acts, an emblematic work by the French poet Paul Claudel, premiered on December 22, 1912. The title refers to the Annunciation.

<sup>40</sup> Manuscript letter in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais.

think that in performing him for the thousandth time, one would find yet more astonishing themes and make new discoveries.

*Le Diable dans le beffroi* (The Devil in the Belfry), I think so!<sup>41</sup>

I thought of making a symphonic poem from it. But this was after *L'Apprenti sorcier*, and I was worried that a second humorous explosion, too similar to the first, wouldn't be worth much. I therefore suggested it to Debussy who wanted to write a ballet, for which he wrote...only the libretto.

After all that, Ingelbrecht was unafraid to take up the idea of a ballet, which he composed and which was danced. But the symphonic poem genre, which is better in my opinion, is open. If you think you're up to it, go right ahead! But I think to really succeed, there has to be really virtuosic orchestration... We'll see that you more fully acquire it this winter, which we were not able to in these few months. But you can always sketch out the music if it comes in the meantime.<sup>42</sup>

Please give my best wishes to Madame Langlais.

Happy end of vacation to both of you, and trust, dear friend, in my affection for you.

Paul Dukas<sup>43</sup>

Of all the projects mentioned in these two letters from Paul Dukas, only one was realized: the *Vingt-Quatre Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue*, obviously easier to accomplish than the others. Even so, completing it took over five years, from 1934 to 1939. Returning from summer vacation in 1934, as he was about to start back in Dukas's class, Jean Langlais asked his friend Olivier Messiaen for some help:

I want to give great homage to my friend Messiaen. I didn't have braille versions of all the scores I needed to study orchestration. When Messiaen found out, he invited me to his home at 77 rue des Plantes every Wednesday from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. There, he read me scores, from the piccolo to the double bass. But during the summer, in 1934, while he was doing military service, he had already given me helpful information by letter. And recently, 50 years later, he said to me sincerely, "If you want we can start up again!"<sup>44</sup>

At about the same time, now that the Sainte-Clotilde organ had been completely renovated and inaugurated on June 30, 1933, Tournemire thought about organizing a series of concerts, largely joint recitals to showcase young talents, a cause that he himself chose. Thus he wrote to Jean Langlais:

Paris, September 30, 1934

My Dear Friend,

I have to get busy right away with planning my series for the winter and next spring at Sainte-Clotilde. I've decided to put you down for the concert in April 1935.

I assume that you will play your own music. I need 18 to 20 minutes of music. Since, to my great satisfaction, you are drawn to sacred music, the only true music...

I am not worried about you. The big piece published by Hérelle would be wonderful. If you want, you could add another of your pieces, but also religious in spirit. Please be kind enough to send me the precise titles of these two pieces. It would be kind of you also to send me Litaize's address; I wrote to him at Saint-Cloud several weeks ago, but he has not replied, the rascal. I want to know if he can take part as well. Also give me the address of Joly, the recent first prize winner in organ.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> A short novel by Edgar Allen Poe.

<sup>42</sup> Just as with *L'Annonce faite à Marie*, Jean Langlais didn't follow-up with this project.

<sup>43</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>44</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

<sup>45</sup> Denis Joly, who had won a first prize in Dupré's Conservatory class in 1934.

Trust in my sympathy and friendship for you.  
Charles Tournemire<sup>46</sup>

For this concert, on Thursday, April 4, 1935, in addition to Langlais and Litaize, he invited Alexandre Cellier and Olivier Messiaen to perform. Following Tournemire's suggestions, Jean Langlais played his "Annonciation" from the *Poèmes évangéliques* as well as his new *Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes*. As for Messiaen, he played all of his *Ascension*.

To show Jean Langlais his friendship and gratitude, in May 1935, Tournemire gave him a picture of himself with this nice handwritten dedication: "A small friendly souvenir to my friend Jean Langlais".



**Photograph of Charles Tournemire dedicated to Jean Langlais, May 1935**

Figure 20 (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

Getting back to Paul Dukas' teaching at the Conservatory, Jean Langlais recalled Dukas's instruction in 1934–1935:

For us, his excellent teaching was the source of unceasing wonderment, and we went to his class as if it were a sanctuary. As a humanist, he was broadly cultured, and he was also a lively man, as evidenced by the following witticisms:

To a classmate who used a lot of major seconds, he said, "These are embroideries made of iron wire."

The same day, "Sometimes it's a good thing for a composer to 'belie' his reputation."

To a beginner, "You do Uniprix orchestration."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais

Regarding the literary authors of the cantatas for the Prix de Rome “They are people who abuse the right not have talent.”

To one of our classmates, “You have a telephone?” “Yes, Master.” “One hears it in your triangle part!”<sup>48</sup>

The year 1935 looked good. The reworking of his organ at Saint-Pierre-de-Montrouge being complete, Jean Langlais planned his first recital in this loft for Wednesday, March 6, 1935. The program consisted largely of modern French music, and it drew a response from Messiaen the next day:

Paris, Thursday March 7, 1935

My dear Friend,

Just a couple of words. I am almost filled with remorse for not having congratulated you last night. You played wonderfully. The registrations were very clean and the program well balanced. I was delighted by the Bach chorale-prelude, by Dupré’s “Fileuse,” and Tournemire’s “Fioretta.” The “Fileuse” was particularly well played.

Thank you for my *Banquet celeste*. It was very good.

To speak a little bit about your new pieces: I won’t repeat what I think of the “Te Deum,” which I had read with pleasure several days before the concert. You know that I like it a lot, as I do the delicious and fine “Annonciation.” Especially towards the end of your work on the Letter to the Corinthians, “Mors et resurrectio,” there are truly noble and grand gestures. The great St. Paul’s serene challenge, this almost visual certainty of the resurrection: you captured them, bravo! You are in the middle of a stylistic evolution. Your new pieces, ornamented by the Scherzetto<sup>49</sup> constitute two very different genres that are opposing, well executed, and each well established.

A thousand greetings to you and your wife,

Olivier Messiaen<sup>50</sup>

The young organist could now calmly prepare for the Conservatory’s composition competition, for which he thought he was virtually promised a first prize. But a dramatic event intervened: Paul Dukas died suddenly of a heart attack on May 17, 1935. Langlais remembers:

His last class took place at the Conservatory on May 15, 1935, and it was just as brilliant as the others. Two days later, Paul Dukas left us after a terrible choking fit. His death put everyone for whom music is a reason for being into the ranks of the most sad spiritual orphans.

Two blind pupils had the pleasure of working with him: Joaquin Rodrigo, a very fine Spanish musician who was his student at the École Normale de Musique, and myself. Dukas was especially interested in us, and he took great care in giving us his incomparable instruction in orchestration. Very proud of his library, he had lent me just a month previously a collection of Renaissance choral works so that I could rehearse them at the Institute.

Having written a lot, this great master published little; what an example! He was careful that nothing would become known that he didn’t feel was worthy of it. He found out that Debussy’s *Fantasy* for Piano and Orchestra was published posthumously, even though the composer hadn’t wished to publish it when he was

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<sup>47</sup> The reference is to a chain of inexpensive department stores.

<sup>48</sup> Langlais, “Souvenirs.”

<sup>49</sup> From the *Vingt-Quatre Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue*; Olivier Messiaen premiered it on 29 January 1935 at Saint-Antoine-des-Quinze-Vingts.

<sup>50</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.



alive; he said to us, “They won’t do that to me.” Thus he destroyed all of his unpublished manuscripts.

So it is to our memory of him and the affection which we will faithfully maintain for him that we must look to soften the profound sadness his death has caused us.<sup>51</sup>

This sudden death came just five weeks before the end-of-year competition in composition. Paul Dukas’s students were entrusted to his colleague in composition, Henri Büsser, who charged them with finding singers and instrumentalists to play their works at the competition. Motivated more by sentiment than reality, Jean Langlais programmed his *Voix du vent* for soprano, choir, and orchestra, and “Ave maris stella” (*Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes*), pieces that Paul Dukas particularly liked.

The jury found the selections unbalanced and awarded to Langlais the Georges Hue Prize for the best song, but not the first prize in composition, which went to Henri Challan.

To be sure, the young man could have competed again the following year to get the ultimate prize, but after attending two classes with Dukas’s successor, Roger-Ducasse, he preferred to quit the Conservatory for good, supported in his decision by Tournemire, who wrote:

Paris, June 26, 1935

My Dear Friend,

I just got news today of the results from the composition competition! I was surprised at your not winning, but keep in mind that competitions only have a relative value.

Already last year you deserved the supreme award. So?!

All my best,

Charles Tournemire<sup>52</sup>

An important chapter in Jean Langlais’ life, with its joys, sorrows, successes, failures, thus closed. At the age of 28, he now faced himself alone, with a fine list of prizes and about 20 works in his catalogue, some of them already published. He now had important choices:

To confine himself to sacred music, choral and instrumental, toward which his strong Christian convictions and his double role as organist and choral director might push him, or, strengthened by the education from Paul Dukas, to expand his horizons to symphonic music and secular music.



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<sup>51</sup> Langlais, “Souvenirs.”

<sup>52</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

## CHAPTER 3

### *The End of the Thirties (1935–1939)*

#### **Jean Langlais in 1935, upon leaving the Conservatory**

The period that had just come to a close was rich in professional successes for Jean Langlais: prizes in the organ class at the Conservatory and at the Amis de l'Orgue's performance and improvisation competition, appointment as a teacher at the Institute for the Young Blind, appointment to the organ position at the Saint-Pierre de Montrouge church, and Hérelle's publication of his first works. But the young composer had also seen darker moments: failure to get the first prize in the Conservatory's composition class, and twice in the Amis de l'Orgue's composition competition, and the sudden death of Paul Dukas.

Before moving ahead with this story, it would be useful to reflect for a moment on the Thirties, a glorious decade for the French School of the organ, which saw the rise and flourishing of a generation of great organists, improvisers, and composers. All these figures were born near the beginning of the 20th century (Duruflé, the oldest, was born in 1902; Alain and Grunenwald, the youngest, in 1911). All these artists had won first prizes in Marcel Dupré's organ class at the Conservatory, with the notable exception of Duruflé, who won it in Gigout's class. And all made a lasting mark on the history of organ music in the 20th century.

For them, having brilliantly finished their Conservatory studies, the Thirties represented the beginning of musical careers. In this, they were aided and propelled to the top by the very new young society, the "Amis de l'Orgue" and its young secretary, the musicologist Norbert Dufourcq (born in 1904).

And if one wants to make comparisons, it is surprising to note that, at the same time that these young people were publishing their first works, their elders—Vierne, Tournemire, Dupré—(all born in the 19th century) were composing some of their strongest works.

Here is a table of their works composed during the decade 1930-1939 (the listings of the young generation are in *italics*):

<b>1930</b>	Vierne	6 <sup>ème</sup> Symphonie	<b>Duruflé</b>	<i>Prélude, adagio et choral varié sur le Veni Creator</i>
	Tournemire	L'Orgue Mystique (10 feasts)	<b>Alain</b>	<i>Postlude pour l'office des Complies - Lamento Ballade en mode phrygien</i>
			<b>Litaize</b>	<i>12 Pièces (vol. 1), 1930-1934</i>
<b>1931</b>	Tournemire	L'Orgue Mystique (16 feasts)		
	Dupré	7 Pièces; 79 Chorales Le Chemin de la Croix		
<b>1932</b>	Tournemire	L'Orgue Mystique (3 feasts) Sei Fioretti	<b>Duruflé</b>	<i>Suite (Prélude-Sicilienne-Toccata)</i>
	Ermend-Bonnal	Symphonie "Media Vita"	<b>Langlais</b>	<i>Poèmes évangéliques</i>
			<b>Messiaen</b>	<i>Apparition de l'église éternelle</i>
			<b>Lesur</b>	<i>La Vie intérieure</i>
			<b>Alain</b>	<i>2 Danses à Agni Yavishta Variations sur Lucis Creator Grave - Climat</i>
<b>1933</b>			<b>Messiaen</b>	<i>L'Ascension</i>
			<b>Langlais</b>	<i>Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes, 1933-1934 Vingt-Quatre Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue, 1933-1939</i>
			<b>Lesur</b>	<i>In Paradisum</i>
			<b>Alain</b>	<i>1ère Fantaisie</i>
<b>1934</b>	Vierne	Messe basse pour les défunts	<b>Alain</b>	<i>Le Jardin suspendu Suite - Intermezzo</i>
			<b>Litaize</b>	<i>12 Pièces (vol.2), 1934-1937</i>
<b>1935</b>	Tournemire	Sept Chorals-poèmes pour les 7 paroles du Christ Symphonie-choral	<b>Fleury</b>	<i>Prélude, andante et toccata</i>
	Dupré	3 Elévations	<b>Messiaen</b>	<i>La Nativité du Seigneur</i>
			<b>Lesur</b>	<i>Hymnes</i>
			<b>Alain</b>	<i>Prelude et Fugue</i>
<b>1936</b>	Tournemire	Symphonie sacrée	<b>Fleury</b>	<i>Vingt-Quatre Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue</i>
	Dupré	Angelus	<b>Alain</b>	<i>2<sup>ème</sup> Fantaisie</i>
			<b>Grunenwald</b>	<i>Première Suite</i>
<b>1937</b>			<b>Alain</b>	<i>Litanies - Trois Danses Variations sur un thème de Clément Jannequin</i>
			<b>Grunenwald</b>	<i>Deuxième Suite</i>
<b>1938</b>	Tournemire	Suite Evocatrice	<b>Poulenc</b>	<i>Concerto pour Orgue, Cordes et Timbales</i>
	Dupré	3 Préludes et fugues, op. 36	<b>Alain</b>	<i>Aria</i>
<b>1939</b>			<b>Messiaen</b>	<i>Les Corps glorieux</i>

What an impressive list! Even skimming it one sees the best of what had developed in organ music in the Thirties and Jean Langlais is very much part of this list, with his two collections that were eliminated in the Amis de l'Orgue's competitions in 1932 and 1934.

After Paul Dukas's death in 1935, one of the busiest chapters in Langlais' life now begins, this time under the protective wing of his former teacher, Charles Tournemire.

Tournemire had been the successor to César Franck and Gabriel Pierné at the Sainte-Clotilde organ since 1898, and he had earned a reputation for being difficult. According to those who knew him, he could change in a flash from the calmest gentleness to vehement anger. Nevertheless, he knew how to show himself to be very affectionate for those whom he respected, and he soon had the occasion to prove the interest that he had in his young disciple in the best way possible: by asking him to be his substitute for services at Sainte-Clotilde.<sup>1</sup> The detailed instructions in a letter that Tournemire sent to Langlais are both amusing and informative:

Wednesday, June 19, 1935

My Dear Friend,

Thanks for your pneu.<sup>2</sup>

Thanks for June 30th. Mass at 8:40; if you want, mass at 11 without the "screamers" (the choir). At 4 pm, vespers and procession for the octave of Corpus Christi. Accompaniment for the Adoro te, the Credo by "Mister" Du Mont, and the Magnificat. At the Basilica it's a rule: the "screamers" always start everything. The gallery organ responds to everything. It's fun... and obligatory!!

I don't know which mass will be sung at 9. Since you have a memory like an elephant, you'll certainly know it.

Always leave the Amens to the "screamers." Make the psalm interludes short, and also the Magnificat verses. That's about it.

As for turning on the motor and the lights, you know my factory, and I am not worried. Don't forget to turn off the lights and motor, of course! There are two keys, the normal one and a security key (the door at the bottom of the stairs). I'll alert the sacristan, Mr. Jean. You should stop by at the sacristy at 8:45, and he'll give you the keys. You should return them to him after Vespers.

Many thanks for all of this.

Very affectionately yours,

Charles Tournemire<sup>3</sup>

But since Tournemire was a born worrier, he supplemented this letter with another, written a week later and full of a mass of precise details:

Paris, June 26, 1935

My Dear Friend,

For next Sunday, you should let all the « stuff » be given by the so-called choir. All you do is play in alternation. No preludes, neither at the Mass nor Vespers. During the procession last Sunday, this is what happened:

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<sup>1</sup> His opinion of Langlais is recorded in his *Memoires*, in his comments about his "three of a kind" students: *Langlais*: distinguished composer; excellent organist; charming improviser (typewritten document in the collection of his niece, Odile Weber, published in 2014 on Internet by "Marie-Louise Langlais: *Eclats de Mémoires*, ml-langlais.com. 45 ("Un breelan d'élèves").

<sup>2</sup> Paris had an extensive pneumatic system for sending written messages quickly among neighborhood post offices, a sort of predecessor to email. It was in use from the mid-nineteenth century until 1984.

<sup>3</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais

Big organ prelude (after the sermon) until the clergy arrived at the level of the high altar; then motet. Then, a few measures, until the first altar; during the procession from the 1st to 2nd altar, the singing of the Credo and Du Mont (the Royal Mass) in alternatim. Then improvisation until the procession arrives at the altar. Lastly, wait for the end of the chants at the altar outside. And improvise at length until the beginning of the blessing. To end, postlude ad libitum.

But then, your instinct is your best guide.

Give my best to your wife.

Very cordially to you, and thank you again

Charles Tournemire<sup>4</sup>

In the area of composition, Jean Langlais was currently concentrating on the *Vingt-Quatre Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue*, playable on either instrument in all major and minor keys, which the publisher Hérelle had commissioned and which Paul Dukas had found an excellent idea from all standpoints, including financial. But here Jean Langlais didn't get exactly what he had hoped, and complained to Hérelle ten years later in strong language:

Paris, May 3, 1946

Dear Mr. Hérelle,

I don't think I've been very demanding with you for the last fifteen years. I also don't think I've caused you to lose money. I would like to call your attention to my pieces for harmonium or organ.

I worked on composing them for more than five years. They appeared in your series separately, then as a collection. At the time you sold each book for fifteen francs, and you paid me one franc per volume. I told you that this contract, which didn't allow my royalties to exceed 2.000 francs, was truly minimal given the effort and number of hours I put in on my *Vingt-Quatre Pièces*. You freely admitted it.

Now you make me a lifetime offer of two francs per volume, but you sell the volumes for 40 francs each. That's four [actually five] percent for me. Don't you think my dear Mr. Hérelle, that in all good conscience it would be more equitable if I took a little more of the income from my works? You could counter that all I had to do was protect myself when you made the first contract. I respond by noting that I never argued with you, you have to agree with that. But given the initial surprise at the success of my modest creations, and facing (like everyone else) a difficult life, I present the problem in good faith; you'll find a solution that accords with your means and your sense of fairness. It's obvious that permanently fixing the royalty at two francs per volume, aside from being disgraceful, is apt to become negligible if, as is very likely, a new devaluation arrives. In this case, you have to admit that it would not have been worth to have worked so hard for virtually nothing.

I leave my thoughts in all good faith for your consideration, and I shall be happy to know your decisions as soon as possible. I'm sorry that this message is so long, and I'm also sorry to have discussed such an inartistic topic, but I hope to have been both precise and understanding of your interests.

With all my very best wishes, dear Mister Hérelle,

Very sincerely yours,

Jean Langlais<sup>5</sup>

This long plea underscores the work that was necessary to produce the *Vingt-Quatre Pièces*, whose success with the public seems to have astonished the young composer! Jean Langlais ran the risk of a certain dullness in these pieces when he chose not to avail himself

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

of the organ's richly sonorous palette of the organ, and especially its pedals; but if he felt this, he never let it show, to such an extent does an intensely fresh inspiration reign in these two books of a dozen pieces each. In spite of their modest size and despite the fact that they were conceived for harmonium, an instrument of limited possibilities,<sup>6</sup> these pages occupy a special place in the works of Jean Langlais; they are a veritable laboratory for ideas where he tried out all sorts of forms and styles.

Putting aside the grand Gregorian paraphrase, the composer displays a diversity of traditional musical structures, such as the prelude ("Prélude modal," "Prélude"), the fugue ("Fugue," "Fuguettes"), the ricercar ("Ricercare"), the toccata ("Toccatas"), variations on a theme ("Choral," "Noël avec variations"), the fantasy ("Fantaisie," "Fantaisie sur un thème norvégien"), the art song ("Prière," "Prière pour les morts"), the chorale ("Choral orné"), the Gregorian paraphrase ("Paraphrase sur le Salve Regina," "Homo quidam"), and forms borrowed from the sonata or symphony ("Arabesque," "Scherzetto," "Allegro," "Impromptu").

Once he chose the form, usually a classic one, the composer—though supposedly exploring the twelve major and minor tonalities—always actually takes a modal path. One has only to compare the key signatures with the music itself in, for example, the "Noël avec variations" (n° 6), in dorian mode, not D minor; or the "Choral" (n° 7), with its two flats in the signature, even though it is supposed to be in E-flat major; or the "Fantaisie" (n° 21) with no key signature but coming where the key should be B-flat major.

This apparent modality displays various characteristics, however, depending on whether the theme is Gregorian, folkloric, or free.

In effect, what Langlais seems to be exploring is multiplying the number of surprising effects and the unexpected juxtapositions: bathing in modality, he introduces the most tormented chromaticism; using particularly aggressive dissonances, it's better for the resolution to a triad, or more often an open sonority. "Hommage" (n° 2) summarizes these oppositions with its brief contrasting episodes.

In addition to the forms, the melodies, the modes, and the juxtapositions, Jean Langlais seems to have sometimes worked out some of the 24 pieces according to their dedicatee. Such is the case in "Hommage à Landino" (n° 12) constructed entirely with the harmonies typical of this fourteenth-century blind Italian composer (open fifths, parallel fourths, obvious modality). The same could be said for "Point d'orgue" (n° 23), dedicated to Erik Satie, with its long and virtuosic bass solo based on two descending fourths (B–F#–C#).

Some movements seem, in effect, to be small-scale models for forms that Langlais was to develop and expand in the coming decades. That is the case of the "Fantaisie" (n° 21), which adopts a cross section, alternating brilliant toccata fragments with slow meditation on a cornet solo, a cousin of Messiaen's "Le Verbe" in *La Nativité du Seigneur*, in which premiere Langlais would participate at La Trinité on February 27, 1936.

The musicologist Armand Machabey wasn't wrong when he wrote:

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<sup>6</sup> It should not be forgotten that Jean Langlais was something of a specialist in the harmonium, from the time that he did his harmony exercises for Albert Mahaut on the harmonium at the Institute for the Young Blind beginning in 1920.

It would be absurd to disparage large-scale works; but thirty substantial measures can create a more singular atmosphere than a symphony: that compressed miracle happens in the work of Mr. Langlais, and I'm thinking of the *Vingt-Quatre Pièces* for organ, every one of which reveals the author's doctrines at the same time as it reveals the particularities of his creativity. Among these, modality, which surreptitiously engages the listener, is the extension of the Gregorian discipline from Solesmes, to which the composer has long been indebted.<sup>7</sup>

The conception and execution of the *Vingt-Quatre Pièces* took more than five years, from 1934 to 1939, but that didn't prevent the composer from writing other works, unrelated to the organ and religious music in general: thus, after his wife read him *Noces*, a collection by the avant-garde poet Pierre-Jean Jouve,<sup>8</sup> Langlais was enthusiastic about it and confided in Paul Dukas (this was the year before he died) his wish to set some of these texts. Dukas, at first reticent and thrown off balance, hesitated, but upon reflection gave his unequivocal approval, even saying, "How I wish I were the author of these texts!"

After securing the poet's permission to set his texts, Jean Langlais went right to work, and in a single rush produced six songs for soprano and piano, comprising the collection *Humilis*, dedicated to the memory of Paul Dukas.

The composer faithfully maintained the restrained atmosphere of the poems, as in the second song, "Je t'aime," where the accompaniment is reduced to monophonic melody, which was certainly not the style of the day! Pierre-Jean Jouve later made a comment that absolutely delighted Jean Langlais: "It's Gregorian chant in two parts." In the Thirties, Jouve was little known, but Langlais did not care. Fascinated by the force of the free verse, as well as the recurring theme of blindness (poems 1, 2, 4, and 6), the composer applied himself to translate its concision, tragedy, and hermeticism by having a piano style that was very austere, often in one or two voices, three at the most (n° 1, 2, 5) or mingling fleeting modality, tonality, and chromaticism.

The work received its premiere on January 12, 1936 at the Société Nationale, performed by soprano Suzanne Marchal (André Marchal's wife) and Jean Langlais at the piano.<sup>9</sup> The audience demanded an encore of the cycle and the next day Messiaen sent his congratulations with this note:

Paris, 13 January 1936

Dear Friend,

Once again, "bravo" for your songs (*Humilis*). It's very beautiful. The 2nd and 3rd especially. My wife is very enthusiastic.

I embrace you

Messiaen

After these intimate songs, the young man felt the need to change his musical focus completely, and Father Capelle, curate of the Escalquens parish (South West of France, near Toulouse), where he spent his summer vacation in 1935 with his wife's family, gave him the

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<sup>7</sup> "Galerie de quelques jeunes musiciens parisiens (1): M. Langlais," *L'Information musicale* 77 (3 July 1942): 1009.

Armand Machabey (1886–1966) was a student of Vincent d'Indy and a specialist in the music of Guillaume de Machaut.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre-Jean Jouve (1887–1976) was a prolific French poet, writer and critic.

<sup>9</sup> The cycle remains unpublished, like most of Langlais's secular songs. Manuscript in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais; reproduced by Richard Powell in 2014, pdf available for free on Jean Langlais website.

occasion to do so. This priest, who was very much loved and respected by his parishioners (he stayed in the same post for 54 years), requested that Jean Langlais compose a mass for his choir. He had a number of stipulations: first, the work should be short, because he had to celebrate Mass on Sunday mornings at three different villages whose names are typical of the area: Belberaud, Pompertuzat, and Escalquens; Father Capelle was, therefore, always in a hurry. Secondly, the mass should be for equal voices and easy, the amateur choir of the parish being composed exclusively of men of modest musical abilities. None could read music. And finally, the composer had to settle for the harmonium for the accompaniment, since the Escalquens church lacked an organ.



**Church bell tower of Escalquens**

Figure 21. (photograph and collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

Langlais was so fond of this area and its inhabitants that he gracefully acceded to these conditions and, in a few days during that summer, wrote an untitled mass, later called *Messe d'Escalquens* for publication, a score of just ten pages, with a duration of approximately eight minutes, and written for two equal voices and harmonium.

The composer himself taught it to the choir, teaching each of the elements of the Latin Mass traditionally sung by the choir (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei) note-by-note. Except for the Sanctus, where the theme is given by the bells of the church (the four notes D-C-A-F#), he did not use any plainsong.



The dimensions of the work are indeed small: Kyrie, 21 measures; Gloria, the longest movement, 68; Sanctus/Benedictus, 39, and Agnus Dei, 26. Obviously Jean Langlais considered this to be a minor work, because as soon as he had written it and taught it to the choir, he forgot about it; it would be completely lost today if his faithful disciple, Pierre Denis—charmed by the naivety of the work—hadn't insist on copying the whole by hand and keeping the manuscript. Not realizing that it was in his own library, he found it again after Jean Langlais' death in 1991.

The work's apparent simplicity, with its harmonic language reminiscent of Fauré, doesn't hide a very structural thinking. An example is the Sanctus, built on a four-note ostinato that is drawn from the Escalquens church's bells—which the composer would re-use repeatedly much later in the 1980s *Offrande à une âme* for organ, in memory of his first wife, and in *Vitrail* for clarinet and piano.

This, then, is the first vocal mass (1935) by Jean Langlais, a prelude for the later *Messe Solennelle* (1949), as complex as the *Messe d'Escalquens* is simple, but it is well worth attentive listening.

The young composer had little time to waste because his colleague and friend, the organist Noëlie Pierront, looking for new pieces, commissioned him to write a quintet for strings and organ for her opening recital of the 1936 Amis de l'Orgue series. Remembering that before he was an organist he held a bow, Jean Langlais took to heart the challenge of marrying instruments so diametrically opposite as organ and strings—and Poulenc's *Concerto pour orgue, cordes et timbales* not yet been written.<sup>10</sup>

Thus the *Pièce en forme libre*, dedicated to Langlais' wife Jeannette, was born. It wasn't published until 1960 (25 years after its composition) by Gray of New-York as *Piece in Free Form*, and once that edition was out of print, it appeared in France in 1984, published by Combre under its original French title, *Pièce en forme libre*.

Approximately 13 minutes, this work, which Jean Langlais always affirmed was « one of my best », seamlessly connects the five parts: Adagio–Maestoso energico–Allegro molto–Più lento–Adagio, in which the central allegro is the powerful pinnacle of a pyramid and is flanked by two majestic and two slow symmetrical movements. At first, the organ is very discrete, leaving it to the strings to enunciate the chromatic theme. Little by little the quartet's fugal entries, tighter and tighter, from bottom to top, culminate in the middle of the work, the strings in high tessitura and the organ at fortissimo and with a rhythmically powerful sequence alternating between strings and organ. The work ends with a marvelously poetic adagio in which, the opposite of the introduction, the strings have extremely drawn-out held notes while the organ has modal arabesques on an eight-foot flute accompanied by the gamba and céleste.

The first performance was on Tuesday, January 28, 1936, at Saint-Pierre-du-Gros-Caillou, with Noëlie Pierront at the organ. Jean Langlais remembers:

What's important for a composer is to know what he wants to do before beginning. Well, there's one work that I wrote exactly as I wished, and that's my *Pièce en forme*

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<sup>10</sup> Poulenc finished his Concerto at the end of July 1938, and the premiere took place on July 21, 1939 in the Gaveau Hall.

*libre*. At the close of the premiere at Saint-Pierre-du-Gros-Cailou Messiaen was the last to remain with me and said to me verbatim, “The ghost of Dukas visited you. I won’t tell you that the piece is very good, as that would be too stupid!” I always took this remark as a great compliment.

Reciprocally, ten years later, after the premiere of his *Vingt Regards sur l’enfant Jésus* for piano, I was the last to congratulate him, and I told him, “No one since Liszt has written piano music as new as you have, and in sum no one in a long time has written music of any sort that is so new.” And Messiaen responded, “You know, there must have been three or four hundred people who came by to shake my hand, but no one said that. And it’s what I hoped someone would say.”<sup>11</sup>

There was a “second premiere” of the *Pièce en forme libre*, this time in a version for string quartet and piano, in the very official musical evening of new music at the Société Nationale de Musique on February 6, 1937. The critic Claude Altomont was highly laudatory about Jean Langlais. Note his emphasis on evoking the author’s blindness :

Many premieres, but which were the ones that, instead of giving this word simply a conventional and abstract feeling, in contrast gave it its fullest meaning? ...Happily, there was ... the *Fantaisie* for string quartet and piano by Mr. Jean Langlais;<sup>12</sup> and ... “premiere” found again its true significance... How to translate the emotion that came over us without indiscreetly indulging in overly real sorrow? Further—in the face of these accents that from the beginning convey the most profound and poignant resignation—how not to say that perhaps there never has been such a decisively heroic musical translation of the struggle of a soul—and its appeasement—before enlightenment refused? This discovering and creating, beyond any lament, another enlightenment. And arriving, through sound, at the creation of a *new reality* which, while visually impossible, surpasses in *visionary* surrealism. The author and with him the performers of these pages, Mme Primans-Bach, Mlle Monique Jeanne, Mmes Combrisson and Yvonne Thibout, performed these pages with a powerful sobriety.<sup>13</sup>

Two days later, on February 8, 1937, Jean Langlais took part in the Lyon premiere of his two pieces for full orchestra and organ, written in 1934 in the Conservatory composition class under the direction of Paul Dukas. *Le Nouvelliste de Lyon* described it:

Mssrs Langlais and Darius Milhaud brought the temperate weather of our France to the Grands-Concerts. Of Mr. Jean Langlais’ two pieces for organ and orchestra, the *Essai sur l’Évangile de Noël* instantly captivated me with its poetic sentiment. It’s a discretely colored country nocturne; the organ, notably its reeds, naïvely dialogues with the orchestra’s woodwinds, and this brief piece concludes giving the impression of exquisite serenity.

With its simple means, but free of clichés, the *Hymne d’action de grâces* maintains its noble organization. Ardent melodic phrases and majestic harmonies respond to fragments of the “Te Deum” and “Vexilla regis.” The luminosity, the truly distinctive construction, and the musical substance explain the sympathetic, even warm reception that Mr. Jean Langlais received.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Langlais, “Souvenirs.”

<sup>12</sup> Curiously, Jean Langlais had changed the piece’s title from *Pièce en forme libre* to *Fantaisie*, even though the scores are exactly the same, aside from the transcription of the organ part for piano (manuscript in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais). The composer, undoubtedly wanting to present his work in a context larger than that of the church, decided to offer it to the prestigious concerts of the Société Nationale de Musique, and made the transcription of the organ part. Unfortunately, there was no follow-up to this initiative, and the *Pièce en forme libre* will certainly remain for strings and organ.

<sup>13</sup> “Société Nationale de Musique (6 février),” *Le Ménestrel*, February 12, 1937. 59.

<sup>14</sup> “La Vie musicale” (unsigned). *Le Nouvelliste de Lyon*, February 11, 1936. 2.

In this concert, Jean Langlais fortuitously found himself next to the era's famous French cellist, Maurice Maréchal, since both artists were playing in the program. Impressed with the young composer and the audience's warm reception of his music, Maréchal immediately commissioned him to write a work for cello and orchestra; he appeared delighted when he received Langlais' acceptance:

Paris, August 7, 1936

Dear Mr. Langlais,

I am delighted by the good news you sent me, because I am convinced that you are incapable of writing anything uninteresting!

Therefore, I am anxious and very curious to see your new work for cello and would be very happy to receive the photoengraving that you suggested.

Needless to say, I would be very happy and flattered to accept the dedication of your pieces, and I hope to take them on the road with me as much as possible.

Very sincerely yours,  
Maurice Maréchal<sup>15</sup>

It was an arduous task, but Jean Langlais, spurred on by the idea that his work would enter the repertory of his illustrious commissioner, wrote a *Symphonie concertante* for cello and orchestra, about 25 minutes long, fairly quickly; it was dedicated, of course, to Maurice Maréchal.

In this work in four movements,<sup>16</sup> we note that in the third movement the composer re-used the poetic final Adagio of his *Pièce en forme libre* for quartet and organ, here orchestrated for woodwinds, strings, and organ. Unfortunately, after Langlais had waited several months for a response to having sent the manuscript, the cellist announced that he couldn't play the score because, he said, "The audience would see me, but not hear me" (in other words, "the orchestra is too loud and would cover me").<sup>17</sup> Furious and disappointed, the composer recounts the rest of the story:

So I went to Florent Schmitt's to show him my score and ask his advice. "At this spot," he told me, « make the strings pizzicatti, which would be better; but don't change the rest of it: it's fine ».

And then, by the merest chance, Maréchal arrived at Schmitt's at just that moment. With his habitual caustic tone, and in front of me, Schmitt said, "Tell me, Maréchal, it seems that you don't want to play Langlais' piece? Stick to playing cello and don't get mixed up in criticism of orchestral scores. It's none of your business!"

Shortly after, to have peace of mind, I went to the great cellist Pierre Fournier to ask what he thought of the cello part. Much to my surprise, he asked me, "Can you play a reduction of the orchestral parts on the piano?" "I think so," I answered, surprised.

"Fine. There's the piano, we'll play the work together."

And never having seen a single note of this score, he played it from beginning to end, linking the four movements without pause except for an enormous cadenza for solo cello in the final allegro: "I'll finger it for you," he said, "because at first glance one wants to escape!" In any case, he played the whole piece as if he had known it for 20 years! I then thought of rewriting the work for piano and orchestra, which I did, but only regarding the first two movements (Adagio sostenuto and Introduction et vivace).

The orchestra is exactly the same in the two versions, only with a completely changed

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<sup>15</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais

<sup>16</sup> Adagio sostenuto, Introduction et vivace, Adagio, Allegro appassionato. The work was first published posthumously in 1999 by Carus, in Germany.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Langlais, "Souvenirs."

part for the piano soloist. I titled the piece *Symphonie concertante* pour piano et orchestre or *Suite* pour piano et orchestre.

This score, like its predecessor for cello, stayed in my boxes, and I never had the joy of hearing it with orchestra. It's a shame, because I think it's good music. In any case, Pierre Fournier was enthusiastic. This made me cautious afterwards, and I realized how difficult it is to get played by an orchestra.<sup>18</sup>

## February 27, 1936 : Premiere of Messiaen's *La Nativité du Seigneur* at La Trinité Church in Paris

Among Jean Langlais' projects, an exhilarating task appeared on the horizon: his participation in the premiere of Messiaen's brand new work, titled *La Nativité du Seigneur*, a set of nine meditations for organ that was to revolutionize the organ's language. The concert, which can truly be called "historic," took place on the organ of La Trinité church on 27 February 1936 at 8:45 pm, under the auspices of the Amis de l'Orgue; it was presented as a "special additional concert."



Program from the premiere of Messiaen's *La Nativité du Seigneur*

Figure 22. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

Because of the work's length and complexity, Messiaen divided it among three of his organist friends: Daniel-Lesur (n° 1–3), Jean Langlais (4–6), and Jean-Jacques Grunenwald (7–9). He finished the concert himself, playing his *Banquet céleste*. "Le Verbe" (The Word) "Les Enfants de Dieu" (The Children of God), and "Les Anges" (The Angels) were, then, for Langlais, and he long remembered the problems he had in memorizing the second part of "Le Verbe," a long, meandering cornet solo, changing constantly. What a sighted person could easily read became a test loaded with pitfalls for a blind man.

As Messiaen wrote in his program notes:

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Second part of “Le Verbe”: the divine Speech stretches forth, the Word speaks. It is a long solo on the cornet whose form is related to Hindu ragas, to plainchant sequences and graduals, and to J.S. Bach’s ornamented chorale-preludes.

Such diverse influences!

The composer had said to his friends that his pieces were not “so difficult,” and tried to reassure Langlais about “Les Anges”: “You’ll see that there isn’t even a pedal part.”<sup>19</sup>

Yes, but the hands! Messiaen gave the following written instructions to Jean Langlais regarding the interpretation of this piece:

For the beginning there should be almost no 8-foot stops.

Here’s the opening registration at La Trinité:

Récit: Octavin 2, Cymbale III

Positif: Principal 8, Prestant 4, Doublette 2

Grand Orgue: Prestant 4

Play on the Grand Orgue with everything coupled.

Page 3, second system, second measure: the last C in the left hand is obviously natural.

The final trill is for alternating hands, right hand on D-G, left hand on C-F.

At the end of the trill, slow the repercussions, stopping on a staccato D-G, a comma and a period, and a dry C-F.<sup>20</sup>

In his program notes for “Les Anges,” Messiaen wrote:

A sort of heavenly dance. An exultation of bodiless spirits. The piece is based on rhythms that are immediately preceded by or followed by their augmented values and additions of short values.

It seems that the composer was happy with his interpreter’s playing, as the next day he wrote to Langlais:

Paris, February 29, 1936

Thank you for your great friendship and your marvelous performance of *La Nativité*.

“Les Anges” were astounding. You are a terrific guy.

I embrace you

Messiaen

And Messiaen inscribed the following dedication on the flyleaf of the third fascicle of his *Nativité*, which opens with “Les Anges”:

To my dear colleague and friend, Jean Langlais, who knows how to ring the bells so well, to flap the butterfly wings, to ethereally celebrate the “angels” who open this fascicle.

With great affection,

Olivier Messiaen<sup>21</sup>

Messiaen, extremely fussy about every detail in his works, demanded that performers observe absolutely everything in his texts, an annoying characteristic when one knows the liberties that Messiaen himself took with his own works, but also when he played those by others, as Langlais enjoyed recalling in this charming anecdote:

As I composed my *Poèmes évangéliques* in 1932, I had wanted to paint a rather realistic picture in the third piece, “Les Rameaux” (The Palms), the one day in Christ’s

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Copy in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais

<sup>21</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais

life in which crowds received him enthusiastically. To do this, I indicated “tutti” in my score, with fast perpetual motion in the hands that accompanied a majestic presentation in the pedals of the Gregorian theme, “Hosanna filio David.”

I encountered Messiaen a few days before Palm Sunday in 1935.

He said, “Guess what, next Sunday at La Trinité I’m going to play your “Rameaux,” but don’t come.”

Naturally, I went; and this is what I heard: My piece is marked as allegro, legato, with full organ, and a big bass. But Messiaen played very slowly, with the manual parts entirely staccato; further, he used only a few pedal stops, so one practically didn’t hear the Gregorian theme. When I got home, I wrote to him:

My Dear Olivier,  
I’m just back from La Trinité. I heard my “Rameaux.”  
If you still have any friendly feelings at all towards me, I beg you to prove it and never again play a note of my music.

Three days later, receiving no response, I call Messiaen and say:

“Did you get my letter?”

“Yes.”

“What did you think about it?”

“Well, I thought it was very funny,” but he added maliciously, “Come to La Trinité next year on the same date.”

And the next year, on Palm Sunday, I did just that. Messiaen played my piece dazzlingly as a postlude to the Mass, as no one has ever played it since! That’s so Messiaen...<sup>22</sup>

The premiere of *La Nativité du Seigneur* was like a clap of thunder in the organ world. Never had anyone written music that was so new in all aspects, its modality, its rhythms, its form, and its registrations. Messiaen’s later writings, reported by musicologist Brigitte Massin, clarify the role he thought *La Nativité* played in the new organ music:

Especially with the intrusion of Hindu rhythms in *La Nativité*, I proved—or at least I think so—that one could write organ music that was something other than post-Franckian.<sup>23</sup>

Emotions were comparable to the newness of the score. Although there wasn’t a real scandal (like the one ten years later touched off by the premiere of Messiaen’s *Trois Petites Liturgies de la présence divine*), the backlash was sufficient that the publisher Gilbert Alphonse-Leduc vehemently responded to the critic and organist Bernard Gavoty ten years after the work’s premiere:

You say that Jehan Alain’s faith is luminous, Duruflé’s sensitivity is harmonious, and Langlais’ approach is clear. This recognizes some excellent remedies for our great weariness, which Messiaen also realizes, but in his case he adopts a mystical literature. You seem to consider Messiaen to be isolated and lost in this half of the twentieth century, and consequently you find him an unexpected one-party dictatorship, and certainly unbearable; for my part, I cannot think of him as isolated, and I think he is like a new link in a great mystical chain. He is searching for a new language. Like Tournemire, like all the innovators, Messiaen can’t avoid this necessity. In so doing, he wants to escape from the stable, which all the school leaders created; he leaves the hay behind and seeks green fields.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Langlais, “Souvenirs.”

<sup>23</sup> Brigitte Massin, *Olivier Messiaen: une poésie du merveilleux* (Aix-en-Provence: Alinea, 1989). 172.

<sup>24</sup> The original article by Bernard Gavoty appeared as “Musique et mystique: le ‘cas’ Messiaen” in *Les Études* (1945): 21–37. Leduc’s “Réponse à M. Bernard Gavoty,” 4 printed, n.d., is in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais.

In any case, one of the glories of Langlais' long career as a recitalist was participating in this memorable evening. As a footnote to this event, we have an excerpt from a letter that Messiaen sent to Marcel Dupré shortly before the recital, which also indirectly documents a latent conflict between Dupré and the Amis de l'Orgue in the Thirties:

The concert on February 27 (8:45 pm) is devoted entirely to the premiere of one of my works (the fruit of many years of reflection); you know, dear Master, that it would be an immense joy to have your presence, as well as that of Mrs. Dupré. The work is very heartfelt, the registration very carefully worked out, and the three performers play like lovers. But this is under the patronage of the Amis de l'Orgue, and since I don't know what your attitude is towards them currently, I send my invitation, leaving you free to use it or not. I write this with much affection, as you know, my dear Master, and you know equally that for me there is only one organist in the world, I'd even say only one friend (since Dukas's death)! After that, I have nothing to add. Be assured again of my profound admiration and please accept my affection and respect

Olivier Messiaen<sup>25</sup>

Naturally, Messiaen had his detractors, and surprisingly among them was Charles Tournemire at a certain point of his life. In his *Mémoires*, he comments on the "young generation" and on Messiaen in particular<sup>26</sup> :

From the end of September to October 10, 1936

What do we see today?

Certain newspapers and more or less distinguished amateurs scream genius at the renewal of organ music by the "under thirty" crowd, who inundate the market place of human thought with their absurd and ugly hair-braided ideas; they're children!!

Here's one example among many of the melodic poverty that characterizes an organ music that they speak of as some sort of revelation:

(Extremely slow and solemn) *What follows, in Tournemire's hand, is his pronouncement on one staff of the 25 first measures of the complete theme of the "Prière du Christ montant vers son Père" (Prayer of Christ Ascending to His Father), the last piece of Messiaen's Ascension, and Tournemire's assessment:*

The conclusion is even uglier. The harmonies are implausible. It's a sauce in which pepper and all sorts of ingredients are all mixed up together.

No comment!

## **Jean Langlais and the Amis de l'Orgue in 1936**

From the first organ performance/improvisation and composition competitions sponsored by the Amis de l'Orgue (1929 and 1930), and both won by Maurice Duruflé, Jean Langlais had hoped to participate in the following ones.

Although he won the performance/improvisation competition in 1931, he lost twice in composition (in 1932 and 1934). It should be said that the Amis de l'Orgue, conceived and created by Bérenger de Miramon Fitz-James and Norbert Dufourcq in 1926, worked tirelessly to promote the organ through concerts, conferences, and competitions.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted by François Sabatier in "Olivier Messiaen: Documents des archives des Amis de l'Orgue," *L'Orgue* 295–296 (2011). 117.

<sup>26</sup> Marie-Louise Langlais: *Charles Tournemire, Eclats de Mémoires*, ml-langlais.com website. 126-127.

Very quickly this group, with André Marchal at its center, oriented itself towards the neo-classic, both in terms of organ building and of repertory. After joining this movement for a brief time, Marcel Dupré became a bitter adversary of its stances that were so far removed from his own creed, the symphonic organ and its repertory as inherited from his predecessors at the Paris Conservatory, especially Widor. Since Jean Langlais was taught by both Marchal and Dupré, which path was he to follow? In 1936, Béranger de Miramon sent a questionnaire to 11 young French organists;<sup>27</sup> in it he asked them to express their opinions and choices, which Jean Langlais did:

Paris, April 21, 1936

Dear Mr. Miramon,

I am extremely honored to receive your questionnaire, to which I shall respond honestly.

*What role do you think the organ played in your musical education?*

Because of its enormous literature, especially with the masterpieces that this literature includes, the organ was a powerful source of instruction for me. Further, the many improvisation exercises that are part of any complete organ study were infinitely profitable from all points of view.

*What artistic benefits have you reaped?*

Important artistic benefits: purity of style and aesthetic that comes only from pure music.

*What instrumental interest do you acknowledge in it?*

Although I think the comparison of this instrument with the orchestra is completely erroneous, the two do share an infinite variety and richness of colors, much more complete than any other instrument.

*What are the current trends for the organ in terms of performance, improvisation, and composition?*

It seems to me that organ performance has acquired an accuracy that never existed before this era, to the extent that precise rules can be used for all situations. The fact that improvisation currently features a true and clean technique marks an important development in organistic style. The pursuit of detail—which, however, should never obscure the lines of the totality—seems to me a very modern orientation that can serve as a base for an organ composer, who isn't worthy of this title if he isn't a real organist. The current French school seems to me to be the weightiest influence on organistic brilliance.

*Do you think that the return to building organs oriented towards old polyphony, without completely renouncing nineteenth-century developments, could foster the creation of a new style and new repertory?*

Personally, and while admiring old instruments as in a museum, I don't think that their resurrection could foster the birth of a new style. The consonant harmonies (mostly) of the old composers could tolerate few fundamentals and many harmonics, while current harmonies, with their aggregations, require rigorous exactness [of pitch], an exactness that wouldn't be consistent with the overuse of mixtures from the past. It seems to me that current registrational practice is based on the natural value of colors.

*What is an organist's standing in the musical world? From an artistic standpoint, is he understood and valued?*

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<sup>27</sup> Jehan Alain, Daniel-Lesur, Maurice Duruflé, André Fleury, Jean-Jacques Grunenwald, Jean Langlais, Gaston Litaize, Olivier Messiaen, Noëlie Pierront, Henriette Roget, and Edouard Souberbielle.



Musicians generally think that there are two kinds of music: music and organists' music. That speaks for itself. For 20 years, it seems to me, the organist has gained a status with an independent audience, which wasn't typical before. It is because of this regrettable situation that in big symphonic concerts he doesn't have a place equivalent to a violinist or a virtuosic pianist.

Very Sincerely Yours,  
J. Langlais<sup>28</sup>

Most of the Langlais' answers seem fairly conventional except for the one about the aesthetics of old instruments: Jean Langlais never recanted his opinion that a return to old instruments could never foster the creation of a new style.

On this issue he was at odds with his friend Messiaen, who responded to the same question as follows:

The re-emergence of building organs in the old polyphonic style is greatly to be praised because it gives us "mixtures," that is colors that are the most original, the most vivid, the most characteristic of the instrument. But to have this one should not renounce the wonderful additions to the organ from the nineteenth century, the roundness of the flutes, the breathtaking power of the reeds.<sup>29</sup>

Regarding the organist's standing in the musical world, Daniel-Lesur's answer was much bolder than Jean Langlais':

Alas, you know as well as I that organists are the pariahs of music, and most often, because of their laziness they deserve to be considered as such. The rest of the musical world shamefully ignores them; fine, but what do they, the organists, know about the rest of music? Except, of course, for the ten or fifteen musicians whom we know as the elite class. How many [organists] have you encountered at orchestral concerts?<sup>30</sup>

In short, in the middle of the Thirties, the Parisian world as represented by the Amis de l'Orgue seems to have considered Jean Langlais as a full member of the young guard of organ. He, like his colleagues, fully endorsed the Amis de l'Orgue because he knew that the Society encouraged and assisted young organists and composers, and that this patronage would be very useful for all, at the time and in the future.

In 1937, on the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Amis de l'Orgue, when they undertook an assessment of their activities and asked for the opinions of organists. Jean Langlais answered:

I am extremely happy to give my very best wishes—for a long life, a steady evolution, and artistic activities—to our Society on the occasion of its tenth anniversary. There is no doubt that after encouraging beginnings and practical activities, our phalanx will convert the indifferent who surround us (alas, all too numerous) to the cause of the organ and its music. Our dear founding president certainly has a right to the thanks of

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<sup>28</sup> A photocopy of his hand-written letter was returned to Jean Langlais on May 6, 1987; it was to be reread and approved on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary issue of *L'Orgue*, titled *Soixante années au service de l'orgue, 1927–1987* (special issue, 201–204, 1987), "Jeunes organistes français en 1936". 20–53. Some of the 1936 responses were modified by their authors. Jean Langlais didn't change a comma, not because he hadn't changed his opinions, but because in 1987, after a stroke in 1984, he was stricken with aphasia and could only express himself with great difficulty. The original responses were not published individually, but were summarized in 1936, by Béranger de Miramon Fitz-James in "Notre jeune école d'orgue," *Bulletin trimestriel des Amis de l'Orgue* 27 (September, 1936). 19–21, and (December, 1936). 8–10.

<sup>29</sup> *L'Orgue: Soixante années au service de l'orgue 1927-1987*. 28-29.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

the persuaded, whose cause he has served with so much dedication and comprehension.<sup>31</sup>

In the same publication, Bernard Gavoty presents a very nuanced portrait of Jean Langlais:

Right with his first works, Jean Langlais has shown a concern for refined writing and balanced forms. Perhaps he owes these qualities to his teacher Paul Dukas; he would certainly be the last to deny his influence on the development of his talent.

In spite of his name,<sup>32</sup> he writes music that is as French as could be: delicacy and clarity dominate, but make a good mix with an assertive personality.

He has a sense of structure—not in the sense of stylish—but successful, satisfying as much for the spirit as for feelings.

The pieces that comprise his *Poèmes évangéliques* and his *Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes* are all extremely welcome: the fact that they are played by everyone everywhere (recently America welcomed them) obviates further discussion here. It's not that it is "easy" music, quite the opposite, but it is music where charm dominates.

Blessed man, blessed music!<sup>33</sup>

Jean Langlais was indeed a particularly blessed man, this time in his personal life, with the arrival of his first child, an adopted little girl named Janine. Tournemire sent the obligatory congratulations in a letter very much in his own style:

Paris, March 28, 1936

My Dear Friend,

Bravo!

This is worth more than two symphonies, even for organ!!

A child is the most beautiful "symphony" that one could give to the world. I imagine that the family celebration must have been truly merry, especially having a godfather of the caliber of Litaize.

Madame Tournemire and I send you and Madame Langlais our very best wishes.

Charles Tournemire<sup>34</sup>

## **The deaths of Charles-Marie Widor and Louis Vierne in 1937**

Charles-Marie Widor, born in 1844 and the doyen of practicing French organists, passed away in Paris on March 12, 1937, at the age of 93. Organist at Saint-Sulpice, a post from which he retired on December 31, 1933, at the age of 89, a world-renowned virtuoso and composer, professor of organ and composition at the Paris Conservatory, and permanent Secretary of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, Widor died at an advanced age, having had a truly full career and leaving behind a complete body of work.

Louis Vierne's case was quite different, dying less than three months after Widor, at just 67, and in a dramatic way that left everyone shaken, especially Jean Langlais. Bérenger de Miramon Fitz-James gives the details of this tragic passing:

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<sup>31</sup> "Ce que les grands maîtres compositeurs et organistes français pensent de notre croisade," in "Dix Années au service de l'orgue français (1927–1937)," *Bulletin trimestriel des Amis de l'Orgue* 30/31 (special issue, June–Sept. 1937). 27.

<sup>32</sup> "Langlais" can be understood as "l'anglais," "the Englishman."

<sup>33</sup> Bernard Gavoty. "La jeune école d'orgue française," in "Dix Années au service de l'orgue français (1927–1937)." *Bulletin trimestriel des Amis de l'Orgue* 30/31 (June–Sept 1937). 119.

<sup>34</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais

### **The death of Louis Vierne**

On Wednesday evening, June 2nd at nightfall, we saw him at the foot of [Notre-Dame's] north tower, accompanied by his doctor and a few students and friends ready to help him climb the long spiral staircase that led to the organ. For almost two years, illness had often prevented him from getting to his loft.

Nevertheless, he had resumed playing in the spring.

That evening his face, paler than usual, seemed to us to be puffed with confident energy and cheerfulness. He told us how pleased he was about this intimate concert that had been organized in his honor by the Amis de l'Orgue to celebrate the society's tenth anniversary. Perhaps a little bitterness showed through in the tenseness of his determined features.

He knew, in fact, that in the future the Chapter of Notre-Dame would no longer permit the organ to be heard outside religious services. For him and the thousand « Friends of the Organ », colleagues, students, and admirers who had gathered in the in the darkness of this basilica where he had exercised his talent for 37 years, this evening was to mark the end of his career as a virtuoso.

He had just played his last published work (*Tryptique*: Matines, Communion, Stèle pour un enfant défunt) with meditative emotion that struck those who knew him well.

He was about to improvise a paraphrase on "Alma redemptoris Mater," when a long pedal note reverberated like a harrowing cry.<sup>35</sup> Losing control of his movements, Vierne had just fainted, felled by an embolism.

Doctor Mallet, with the help of Madame Mallet-Richepin, Maurice Duruflé, and Monsieur and Madame Jean Felot tried everything to revive him.

A teacher in Notre-Dame's choir-school came up to the loft and gave him general absolution. A little later we learned that they had moved him to the Hôtel-Dieu.<sup>36</sup>

In the absence of any member of the Notre-Dame clergy we thought it best to explain the painful situation to the audience, invite them to pray privately to commend His servant's soul to God, and then to withdraw.

The worried crowd who gathered at the doors of the Hôtel-Dieu soon learned that all hope of returning the dear Master to life had been abandoned. . . .

The next day it was decided, with the agreement of the administrative Canon, that the body would be moved Friday evening, June 4th, to Notre-Dame.

The wake in the mortuary chapel, for which a number of organists and friends volunteered,<sup>37</sup> continued until the funeral which took place on Saturday the 5th, with a ceremony reserved for members of the Chapter.

The Gregorian service was sung by the choir; the main organ, draped in black, remained mute. The attendees were numerous, and gathered sadly. The absolution was given by Monseigneur Beaussart, assistant to the Cardinal of Paris.

The Master was buried in the family tomb in the Montparnasse cemetery.<sup>38</sup>

This dramatic event was engraved on the collective memory of organists of the era, and was a shock for Jean Langlais, who loved him as a father, even though he had not been his student. Ironically, he had a meeting scheduled with Vierne for June 4th (two days later), since the Master very much wanted to meet his little daughter, Janine.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Jean Langlais, who was present along with his colleagues at Notre-Dame, remembered years later that it was a second-octave E on foundations 16 and 8. He was there too, when, just before climbing to the organ, Louis Vierne turned to Madeleine Mallet-Richepin and spoke this strange premonition: "I leave my work to you, Madeleine, because this night I shall die." (Langlais, "Souvenirs").

<sup>36</sup> The Hôtel-Dieu is a hospital bordering Notre-Dame Square.

<sup>37</sup> Including Jean Langlais, who stood watch over the departed for a portion of the night (Langlais, "Souvenirs").

<sup>38</sup> *Bulletin trimestriel des Amis de l'Orgue*, 32 (Déc. 1937). 1-2.

<sup>39</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

After the funeral, Count Miramon, president of the Amis de l'Orgue, opened a letter that Vierne considered to be his artistic will, which he had addressed to Cardinal Verdier, Archbishop of Paris:

Your Eminence,  
Official organist at Notre-Dame for thirty-five years, I am hostage to illness and do not know if the attack that I recently suffered will recur; given the state of my heart, I have little hope of winning.  
I cannot help being worried about who will succeed me at the Notre-Dame organ, an instrument with world-wide prestige. With only the goal of seeing the post awarded to an artist worthy of the primary basilica of France, and inclined to maintain the grand tradition which I served, I submit to your great benevolence the wish that my successor be subject to the test of a competition, as I was, and recommended to the ecclesiastical authorities by an eminent jury.  
I am retaining sealed copies of this letter for the archpriest of Notre-Dame and for the president of the Amis de l'Orgue, asking them not to open them until after my death.  
With great respect, your humble and devoted servant.<sup>40</sup>

Vierne's worries about his successor were understandable because for the preceding five years, he had been stripped of the right to choose his official substitute; and it was public knowledge that the Notre-Dame Chapter had fixed its choice on an amateur organist, Count Léonce de Saint-Martin, against Vierne's advice.

The organ world mobilized immediately, and created a candidate list of four organists to elicit support for a competition: Maurice Duruflé, Jean Langlais, Gaston Litaize, and Jehan Alain. Litaize makes a point that is essential to understanding Jean Langlais' candidacy:

On the advice of Béranger de Miramon, Jean and I sent our candidacies to the archpriest in order to justify the competition, reserving the right to withdraw at the last minute in order to leave the field to Maurice Duruflé. We knew Vierne's secret wish to see this great artist succeed him.<sup>41</sup>

It turned out to be a waste of time, for the very next day Jean Langlais received the following response from the administrative Canon at Notre-Dame:

Paris, June 8, 1937  
Dear Sir,  
Allow me to say, on behalf of the Chapter, how much we appreciate your offer and to thank you for offering the Cathedral your talent, which certainly the curate of Saint-Pierre de Montrouge appreciates. However, I should tell you that the Chapter does not foresee a competition for Notre-Dame's organ, since it appreciates the work of Mr. Vierne's substitute, and want to continue to enjoy it.  
That is what motivated the unanimous decision to name Mr. de Saint-Martin organist of Notre-Dame.  
Very sincerely yours,  
L. Favier, Administrative Canon at Notre-Dame<sup>42</sup>

The affair was over, and the turbulent story of Vierne's succession remains a particularly painful and inglorious episode in the annals of the often stormy relations between clergy and organists.

<sup>40</sup> *Bulletin trimestriel des Amis de l'Orgue* 32 (Déc.1937). 4.

<sup>41</sup> Litaize tapes, 1983.

<sup>42</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais

## Jean Langlais, a very active thirty-year-old

In 1937, Jean Langlais celebrates his 30 years and is fully part of what is now called the "Young French School of the Organ."

He proves it by participating, on January 28, 1937, in a collective concert in the organ hall of the Schola Cantorum in Paris, which also included Jehan Alain, André Fleury, Daniel-Lesur and Olivier Messiaen.

Several premieres were presented that night, notably by Jehan Alain, who played for the first time in public his *Suite* for organ, which won the award at the Amis de l'Orgue competition in 1936; by Daniel-Lesur, *Cinq Hymnes*; by André Fleury, *Deux mouvements*; and by Jean Langlais "Homage à Francesco Landino" (*Vingt-Quatre Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue*).

Langlais also played "Mors et resurrectio" (*Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes*), and Messiaen interpreted three excerpts from his *Nativité du Seigneur*. Alain, Messiaen, Langlais, Fleury and Lesur playing in the same concert, this is a prestigious bill! The critic present at this event revealed some very definite opinions that do not lack zest:

Jehan Alain comes first: he has dynamism, talent, elegance. Rich in tone, mobile and contrasting, his *Suite* exaggerates a bit the dissonance which, among others, serves as an idea and does not lose strength; in the "Choral" it's a game of scabrous turns modulating abruptly and building... Jean Langlais triumphs. The audience unanimously celebrated him for his "Homage à Francesco Landino" and especially "Mors et resurrectio" based on the gradual "Requiem"... Messiaen compounds the mannerisms of all that is hermetic about his language and comical about his quaintness. Might he have a taste for farce and jokes? This could be spiritual, not in the religious sense. Twirls of the flute ("Les Bergers") give way (in "Les Anges") to the amiable plop-plop of frogs jumping into the pond! A supplement to the *Carnaval des animaux*.<sup>43</sup>

However, in 1937 more than ever, Jean Langlais was interested in diversifying his compositional activities. Still primarily interested in the organ, he dedicated a charming "Légende de Saint-Nicolas"<sup>44</sup> to his daughter Janine. It was inspired by an old popular song from eastern France, "Il était trois petits enfants" (There Were Three Little Children), whose theme had been given him for an improvisation during a concert recorded by Radio-Strasbourg.

Tournemire congratulated him as follows:

Paris, February 20, 1938

My Dear Friend,

I received your new organ work. The end is suave, very religious. It's real organ music. In spirit it's a return to the healthy traditions of the past, of Buxtehude and Bach. You understood that we have to break away from yesterday's misguided ways from which we still suffer!!

Best,

Charles Tournemire<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup>A. Trotrot-Dériot. *La Petite Maîtrise* 287 (April 1937): 20.

<sup>44</sup> Later inserted into the *Folkloric Suite* in 1954 as the second of the five pieces published by FitzSimons of Chicago.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Without explaining just what he meant by “yesterday’s misguided ways,” Tournemire, by invoking Buxtehude and Bach, is truly complimenting his young disciple, who was at the time in the midst of composing Two Psalms for choir and organ or piano, in French (*Psalm 123*, “Cantique des montées” and *Psalm 58* “Contre les juges iniques”). The two texts are wildly contrasting, going from extreme peacefulness (*Psalm 123*) to the most savage violence (*Psalm 58*). Both works received an enthusiastic reception at their premiere on March 19, 1938 at the Société Nationale de Musique:

... I heard the concert on the 19th at the Société Nationale. In a perhaps arbitrary order of merit, I would unhesitatingly put in the top category Jean Langlais’ admirable *Psalm 123*—“Je lève les yeux vers toi” [To Thee I Lift up My Eyes] suavely sung by Joseph Noyon’s Campanile, with a sweetness, a marvelous serenity appropriate to these quasi-celestial pages.

Florent Schmitt<sup>46</sup>

And:

Two *Psalms* by Mr. Jean Langlais, for mixed chorus, 123 and 58; and now it’s matter of immediate certainty. Sensitivity and grandeur are present; and deep intuition of the voices within the hall and outside its walls: there where the crypts or the vaults become, suddenly, simulacra that the music will have seemed to destroy. For the fullness—or perhaps for the inexorable solitude—of outrage or of praise.

The Bible suddenly opened wide.

And, knowing how to make us hear it, the composer at the piano and the “La Campanile” chorus, directed by Mr. Joseph Noyon.

Claude Altomont<sup>47</sup>

These two works were never published during Jean Langlais’ lifetime, and there was never a second performance. But the composer didn’t forget about them, as he transcribed the first one (*Psalm 123*) for solo organ as “Celui qui a des oreilles, qu’il écoute” (He Who Has Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear, Matthew 11:15) at the beginning of the *Cinq Méditations sur l’Apocalypse*, published by Bornemann in 1974—36 years after the original version for choir and piano.

Jean Langlais abstained from the Amis de l’Orgue 1936 composition competition, which was won by Jehan Alain with his *Suite* for organ. But the announcement of the 1938 competition declared an entirely new conception:

In order to encourage enriching the concert repertory for organ, and in view of the restoration of the organ in the Salle Pleyel as well as the rebuilding of the one at the Trocadéro, we have decided that it was the right moment to invite French composers who have never published works for organ and orchestra (as of May, 1938) to send us for this time period a work for *String orchestra, with the optional addition of trumpets, trombones, and percussion*. The award of 6.000 francs will be split among a prize and two mentions (3,000, 2,000, and 1,000 francs). The rules can be requested from our General Secretary.<sup>48</sup>

Langlais didn’t want to submit any more pieces for organ solo—too many bad memories of his defeats in 1932 and 1934—but he was enthused by the prospect of organ, strings, brass,

<sup>46</sup> *Le Temps*, April 2, 1938. 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Le Ménestrel*, March 25, 1938. 82-83.

<sup>48</sup> “Notre Concours de composition de 1938.” *Bulletin Trimestriel des Amis de l’Orgue*, 9: 32 (December, 1937). 14.

and percussion. He completed a *Thème, variations et final* in two months, using organ strings, trumpets, and trombones, with a duration of approximately eleven minutes. For the competition this triptych was performed at the home of the count of Miramon by André Fleury at the organ, a reduction of the orchestral part being played by Maurice Béché and Jean Langlais, piano four-hands.

This review appeared the next month:

Our composition competition for organ and orchestra was judged on Sunday, May 15th. The jury for this test consisted of Mssrs. Maurice Emmanuel, Gustave Samazeuilh, Louis Aubert, Achille Philip, Alexandre Cellier, and André Marchal.

The single work that was entered (*Thème, variations et final* for organ and orchestra consisting of strings, trumpets, and trombones) was unanimously awarded a First Mention (2,000 fr.).

It was authored by Mr. Jean Langlais, teacher at the National Institute for the Young Blind, organist at Saint-Pierre de Montrouge, and former student of the late Paul Dukas.<sup>49</sup>

Partial success, partial failure, depending on how you look at it; certainly a First Mention was not the same as a First Prize for Jean Langlais. He remembered exactly what criticisms he received:

In the finale, the three trombones attack the theme, which is transposed and therefore demands a low C. The trombone can't play that note, but it was also played in the pedal part of the organ, the cellos, and the double basses, and I didn't want to disrupt the line for the trombones by putting a rest there. During the deliberation, I heard my compatriot Louis Aubert say, "He doesn't know how to orchestrate, he wrote a C for the trombones that is unplayable." Before announcing the judgment, I was brought before the jury and Aubert made his criticism.

My reply was, "In Wagner's 'Magic Fire Music' the theme is C-sharp-B-G-F-E, though the flute doesn't have the C-sharp. And that was written by Wagner."

Maurice Emmanuel then said to me gently, "I was a close friend of Dukas, and I should take his place for you. If I see someone who is about to get too close to a gas burner, I should stop him." "Fine," I said, "but where is the gas burner?" "Chromaticism," he replied. And the affair was over. I later changed the piece, deleting the brass parts and adding an andante for solo organ and a finale for strings and organ. This became my *Deuxième Concerto* for organ and string orchestra, premiered in 1963 in the United States.<sup>50</sup>

This criticism of Langlais' use of chromaticism, already made in the second half of the Thirties, was to dog him through the Seventies, as a major fault in the work of someone so adept with modality. It is true that the strong influence of the Second Viennese School and atonality, relegated chromaticism to the world of the old-fashioned, out of the question for a composer worthy of the name to use. Jean Langlais was to suffer for a long time with this label. He briefly considered including this work in a vast *Pièce symphonique* for strings, brass, and organ, with a total duration of approximately 27 minutes,<sup>51</sup> re-using music written earlier in the following design:

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<sup>49</sup> Béranger de Miramon Fitz-James. "L'Activité des Amis de l'Orgue." *Bulletin trimestriel des Amis de l'Orgue* 10: 34 (June, 1938). 20.

<sup>50</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

**Part 1:** *Pièce en forme libre* for strings and organ (complete score from 1935)

**Part 2:** Piece for brass and organ derived from the Toccata from the *Vingt-Quatre Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue*, titled *Choral Médiéval* and structured as follows:

Brass and organ are first contrasted with the full force of the respective voices, then uniting to proclaim the Easter sequence after having given, in the style of a chorale, the most moving Gregorian Kyrie that the Middle Ages ever produced, the Kyrie “Deus sempiternus,” used in the Toccata of my *Vingt-Quatre Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue*.

**Part 3:** *Thème, variations et final* for strings, brass, and organ (complete score from 1938).

But in the end he regretfully abandoned this ambitious project<sup>52</sup>. It does show his definite inclination to reuse his own works with different orchestrations, a habit that would prove to be consistent during the rest of his career.

Langlais didn't forget about the piano in his concern for diversification. In 1936 he had written a *Mouvement perpétuel* for the marvelous French pianist Ida Périn, who always supported his music; three years later it would be at the center of a lively argument with a critic for the newspaper *Le Ménestrel*, “M.H.” (Michel-Léon Hirsch), whose review prompted a reply from Jean Langlais:

Paris, June 10, 1939

To the Director:

I find the following sentence by Mr. H. in the *Ménestrel* from May 12th, about my *Mouvement perpétuel* that was performed in the concert at the Société Nationale on May 3rd: “The *Mouvement perpétuel* by Mr. Langlais, which has three godfathers, Liszt, Chopin, and Debussy (its Toccata, in particular is literally stolen), isn't worth much.” Exercising my right to reply, I ask you to print the following in the next issue of your newspaper: Having been charged with stealing, I am taken as having committed an artistic theft, the most immoral of all thefts. I don't accept this sentence, at least until my good critic feels up to proving what he says with specific and concrete allegations. The “thief” will be generous in giving the precise layout of the work that he created with the help of his looting: this *Mouvement perpétuel* is written in a free mode (A, B-flat, C, D-sharp, E, F, G, G-sharp) of eight notes.

It is based on two themes, in ternary form: exposition of the first theme (first section), exposition of the second theme (second section), and combination of the two themes (third section). From one end to the other, this piece has uninterrupted sixteenth-note motion, hence the title *Mouvement perpétuel*. All harmonic ideas were intentionally eschewed, and only counterpoint serves for development. I would like to tell Mr. H. that he will search in vain for the slightest echo of the sumptuous harmony that pervades Debussy's Toccata. As for the rhythm, it is essentially free and fluctuating, as one encounters 3/4, 5/8, 9/8, etc. The work begins and ends in half-light. Obviously, like Debussy's Toccata, this modest *Mouvement perpétuel* is written “pour le piano” [the title of Debussy's triptych].

It is perhaps to this curious similarity that one should look for the cause of Mr. H's error.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> The three movements of this imagined work were in fact published separately, at different times, and by three different publishers: the *Pièce en forme libre* by Gray in the United States, 1964, then by Combre in 1984; the *Choral médiéval* by Carus in Germany, in 2004; and the *Thème, variations et final* by Doblinger in Austria, in 2016. A scattering of the movements that hardly encouraged performance of the work the composer first envisioned. It was tried, none-the-less, in a world premiere at the First Methodist Church in Duluth, Minn. with string and brass from the Basilica of St. Mary (Minneapolis), Marie-Louise Langlais (organ), and Teri Larson (conductor), on October 26, 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais. An abbreviated version of this letter was published in *Le Ménestrel* of July 14, 1939.196, with an editorial comment: “Our correspondent, to whom we sent these lines, told us that he has nothing to add to his review.”



In this same concert, Ida Périn played the premiere of the *Suite Armoricaïne* that Jean Langlais had composed during the summer of 1938. This Suite, titled *Suite Celtique* in another manuscript, is in five movements with titles that evoke the sea and Brittany:

- I. Épitaphe pour les marins qui n'ont pas eu de tombe (Epitaph for the Sailors Who Had No Grave)
- II. Le vieux pêcheur au large (The Old Fisherman Offshore)
- III. Danse bretonne (Breton Dance)
- IV. Coquillage solitaire (Solitary Shellfish)
- V. Conciliabule chez les mouettes (Seagulls' Chatter)

The press gave it a favorable review:

In closing, Jean Langlais' very noble and very moving *Suite Armoricaïne* for piano, a suite of eloquent internal visions, discreet, completely colored by the interior, and which at the same time are brilliant piano pieces. Miss Ida Périn was a wonder, with sensitive, dazzling, and luminous playing. A beautiful piece!<sup>54</sup>

But to illustrate how the musical press can be completely divided, here are some lines written about these two piano pieces by Jean Langlais, still referring to the concert on May 3, 1939 at the Société Nationale:

The *Suite* by Mr. Jean Langlais is dedicated to the Armorique with the piano as spokesperson. It unfolds picturesque impressions to which I greatly prefer the same composer's brilliant *Mouvement perpétuel*, played by Miss Ida Périn with a virtuosity beyond all praise. A great success.<sup>55</sup>

However, after this, Langlais would not compose a single additional note for piano other than the short easy pieces, *Histoire vraie pour une Môm* (A True Story for a Môm, 1942)<sup>56</sup> and a *Petite Suite* (1985) dedicated to both his grandson Camille and his second daughter Caroline. Was he burned by the poor review of his *Mouvement perpétuel*? Possibly, but that's very unfortunate.

In any case, was it perhaps a reflection of the depressing ambiance of the "Phoney War,"<sup>57</sup> there is not a single trace of a musical score by Jean Langlais in 1939.

Admittedly, during this year the composer had to pass a test, including writing a long pedagogical treatise, to gain tenure at the National Institute for the Young Blind. He therefore wrote *The Organ, Improvisation, and Musical Composition Taught to Blind Students by a Blind Teacher*, in which he gives the broad strokes of the pedagogical philosophy that guided him throughout his long career, for the blind as well as the sighted.<sup>58</sup> He succeeded in the examination and was tenured as the organ instructor of the girls, the class for boys having been assigned to André Marchal.

Langlais, who had begun his teaching career with boys, was hardly happy with the change:<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> P. de St. dans *Les Concerts*, May 5, 1939, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>55</sup> *L'Art musical* 4 :123 (May 12, 1939). 912.

<sup>56</sup> "Môm" was an affectionate nickname that Langlais gave to his goddaughter, Ariane Litaize, daughter of Gaston Litaize. It was an expression used in Lorraine, Litaize's home province.

<sup>57</sup> In French, « la drôle de guerre ».

<sup>58</sup> *L'Orgue, l'improvisation et la composition musicale enseignés à des élèves aveugles par un professeur aveugle*, typescript, 54 pages (collection Marie-Louise Langlais).

<sup>59</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

I really loved my class of boys; my students were always my friends, and our mutual understanding was complete in all senses.

But one day the Director, Mr. Gayet, called me to my office and abruptly told me, with no explanation, "Starting tomorrow, you will no longer teach the boys, but rather the girls." I found the atmosphere very different than with the boys, less cordial, less direct, and it took me at least fifteen years to get used to it!

On an even more important topic, he continues his recollections from 1939:

On June 14, 1939, I got a telephone call from Tournemire, asking me to come over that very night. "It would be difficult," I replied, "as our little Janine is only three, and we don't have a baby sitter." "I want to see you this evening," he said.

You didn't argue with Tournemire, and I made arrangements for Janine to be cared for. I went there shaking like a leaf, thinking to myself, "I must have said something about his music that was misreported to him and displeased him, and now I'll get one of his tongue-lashings!" I was scared stiff.

We arrive at his doorstep, my wife and I. He was charming. We're seated, and he offers us tea. His wife was there. All of a sudden he says, "All right, you know that I had an operation recently. I looked death in the face and I realized that the one thing that really matters to me is my successor at Sainte-Clotilde. I offer it to you."

I was totally stunned and I said what I thought, "But you can't think, dear Master, that I am worthy to succeed Charles Tournemire!"

Since he was very touchy, he flew into a rage and said, "So, I don't know anything about it!" I capitulated.

He added, "I want a successor who is a Christian musician. I want you, and if you accept I'll put a sentence in my will."

I accepted. Afterwards, he invited us to spend a few days vacationing with him at his house on Ouessant Island where he spent all his summers.

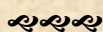
Unfortunately, war had just been declared, and on 4 November 1939, he was found drowned in Arcachon's pool.

After Widor and Vierne, another grand Master of the French School of organ was gone. And this was the Master who had taught Jean Langlais so much, during the same period as Paul Dukas. With these two, Langlais lost his mentors, his friends.

What is striking in the pre-war period is the great variety of Langlais' works that were written after 1935, whether chamber music, vocal music, secular and sacred, symphonic music, not to mention organ music. It is clear that, aware of the narrow limits of the organ world, Jean Langlais tried to escape them, following Dukas's advice.

With an enormous effort, he thus was able to impose on the public and the critics, who seemed very sympathetic, the image of a multi-faceted musician, with an elegant and distinguished style, who was not just an organist. Without being in the avant-garde, like Messiaen, he represented the proven and recognized value of the "Young French Organ School." Rather than appearing revolutionary, he instinctively preferred to express himself musically with sincerity (a touchstone for him), the fruit of a diverse mosaic of influences: Breton folklore, plainchant, Medieval and Renaissance polyphony, Franckian chromaticism, Debussy-like impressionism, and the rhythms and colors of the twentieth century.

He now had to go through the very hard times of World War II.



## CHAPTER 4

### *World War II (1939-1945)*

#### **Sainte-Clotilde: the appointment that did not happen (1941-1944)**

Jean Langlais was 32 when France and Great Britain declared war against Germany on September 3, 1939, marking the beginning of the World War II. Most of the young French musicians were immediately mobilized, including Jehan Alain, who was assigned as a “second class” in the eighth motorized armored unit, and Olivier Messiaen, whose letter to Jean Langlais expresses his distress:

November 2, 1939

From: Soldier Messiaen Olivier.

620th R.I. Pioneers, 2nd Battalion, 5th Company, postal sector 42

Dear Friend,

I am deeply touched by your letter. The slightest evidence of affection goes straight to my heart at this time; and letter-time is such a lovely time! Certainly civilian life—though less painful than the military—must suffer fairly disagreeable transformations during war time. The composer’s task: some beautiful pages between your piano and your sack of beans. For me: my skinned and blackened hands, the swinging of the pickax, the flies, the carrying of the most improbable loads (from tree trunks to lithographic stones) keep me from having a very intimate relationship with music.

Nevertheless, I try to read some orchestral scores—tucked into my bag on top of my rations—when I have a free moment, so as not to lose contact. I left an unfinished work when mobilized. Every day, or almost, I get a letter from my wife, which is a consolation beyond words for me. But I cannot help my dear little boy grow up!... a terrible regret!

Pray for peace and also for your old friend

With all my best,

Olivier Messiaen<sup>1</sup>

As for Jean Langlais, he was exempt because of blindness. Upon the declaration of war, the National Institute for the Young Blind was immediately closed, and its facilities were requisitioned by the War Ministry. The classes were moved to 5 rue Duroc, to the Valentin Haüy Association.

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<sup>1</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

There, somehow, Langlais continued his teaching. The school orchestra couldn't function for lack of basic equipment. Its last concert was held in June 1939, and it was not heard again thereafter. Finally, on December 1, 1939, classes resumed at the National Institute for the Young Blind on the Boulevard des Invalides for the few students who could attend. Little by little, as anxiety took root in hearts and spirits, musical life was gradually put on hold. The Société Nationale, the great sponsor of concerts devoted to young composers, had stopped all activity in 1939. The radio broadcasts of organ recitals, particularly numerous in 1937 and 1938, had become rare.

The premiere of Francis Poulenc's *Concerto pour orgue, cordes et timbales* had taken place in the Gaveau hall on June 21, 1939, and the critic Michel-Léon Hirsch, the one who had vehemently criticized Langlais' *Mouvement perpétuel* for piano, had written:

We think that Francis Poulenc, for whom we have old and charming feelings, has taken the wrong road and is out of breath from pursuing a genre that doesn't suit him.<sup>2</sup>

No comment needed.

Like everyone else, Charles Tournemire was caught up in the whirlwind of this nascent war, and he closed his *Mémoires* with these words:

Hitler, this monster, has brought fire and blood to Europe.  
God won't fail to punish him.  
We must wait! Meanwhile, day by day, deaths by the thousands speak to his cruelty.  
We are hiding at my sister's in Arcachon. We are staying here, presumably for a long time because this cursed war threatens to widen considerably.<sup>3</sup>

A few weeks later, on November 4, 1939, he was found dead in the Arcachon pond, drowned under suspicious circumstances. This death meant that the position of titular organist at Sainte-Clotilde was open. The two recent examples of succession, at Notre Dame in Paris and at the basilica of Saint-Denis, had been deemed disastrous by the Amis de l'Orgue, and especially by its president, Béranger de Maramon Fitz-James, and its general secretary, Norbert Dufourcq.<sup>4</sup>

They hoped that the principle of a competition, supported by the Amis de l'Orgue, would finally be observed by the clergy. Béranger de Maramon didn't restrain himself from exerting pressure in this direction, as we read in a letter that he sent to Norbert Dufourcq on December 7, 1939, a month after Tournemire's death:

Did I tell you that the priest-in-charge of Sainte-Clotilde won't do anything before the end of the war? Duruflé can't make up his mind. He is doing a tour in Spain with the boys choir. He is trying to decide between Sainte-Clotilde and Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, where he has waited four years for the renovation that was begun and then suspended. Langlais wrote me. He's considering it and asks my advice. I told him to apply, but in specifying that he is to compete when, at the end of the war, the priest-in-charge will

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<sup>2</sup> Hirsch, Michel-Léon. *Le Ménestrel* (June 30, 1939). 179. It was the twenty-first concert in the "Sérénade" series, with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Paris under the direction of Roger Désormière, and with Maurice Duruflé at the organ.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Tournemire, "Mémoires," typescript: 194 (collection of Marie-Louise Langlais) and Langlais, Marie-Louise, *Charles Tournemire, Eclats de Mémoire*. Website ml-langlais.com. 168.

<sup>4</sup> In 1937, Léonce de Saint-Martin had succeeded Vierne at Notre-Dame, and Henri Heurtel was named Henri Libert's successor at Saint-Denis.

declare the post to be officially vacant. I wonder if I should write to the priest, who has always listened to me and who, I think, is open to a friendly process. I'll word this in such a way that I can not be accused of meddling in something that isn't my business. In any case, we have to keep an eye on the situation, so that after St-Denis and Notre-Dame we don't have a third failure.<sup>5</sup>

A week later, Jean received the following letter from Charles Tournemire's widow, Alice, in reply to his letter of condolence:

11-27-39

Dear Sir,

I thank you very sincerely for the expression of sympathy you sent me on this sad occasion. I know the deep affection that the Master had for you, and that's why I am fully prepared to tell the priest-in-charge at Sainte-Clotilde of his strong desire to see you replace him at his organ. But it would be necessary for you to write to me asking me to do it, reminding me of last June's conversation.

Armed with this letter, I would make the request, following your wishes as specified in your letter.

Please give my best wishes to your wife, and with kind regards to you,  
Alice Ch. Tournemire<sup>6</sup>

But even though Madame Tournemire did tell Canon Verdrie, the priest-in-charge at Sainte-Clotilde, of Tournemire's wish to see Langlais succeed him, the status quo was to continue: on the one hand, the Canon didn't want to make an appointment before the end of the war, and on the other, Béranger de Miramon wanted to invoke the tradition of a competition.



**Canon Verdrie, curé of Sainte-Clotilde (1914-1946)**

Figure 23. (photograph by Maurice Joublin, collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

As Canon Verdrie explained to Jean Langlais on November 12, 1940:

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in François Sabatier, "Regards sur l'orgue français des années 1930 à travers les lettres de Béranger de Miramon Fitz-James à Norbert Dufourcq," *L'Orgue* 295–296 (2011: 3–4), 36.

<sup>6</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

Dear Sir,

Everything suggests that we wait until the end of the war to replace Monsieur Tournemire. At the moment, our resources are too diminished to allow ourselves the luxury of two organists. The choir organist goes up to the main organ when necessary—very rarely—for the preludes and postludes.

It is not out of the question, however, that we might have need of you in an exceptional situation, and I thank you for the offer that you made to me. Madame Tournemire did indeed confirm that the Master had said several times that he intended to have you as his successor. It's maddening that he didn't leave anything to that effect in writing.

Very sincerely yours,  
P. Verdrie<sup>7</sup>

Although a fair number of families in the Sainte-Clotilde parish had stayed at their country properties during the winter of 1939–1940, everyone returned to Paris in September of 1940 because of the signing of the armistice between France and Germany, which divided France into an occupation zone (in the north) and a “free” zone (Vichy, in the south). With Tournemire dead and choir director Jules Meunier retired, the only musician left at Sainte-Clotilde was the choir organist, Pierre Besson, as Canon Verdrie's letter implies.

However, this war that one had hoped would be short went on and on, and the Canon, following the wishes of the Amis de l'Orgue and the diocesan authorities, announced December 20, 1941 as the date of the competition for the post of official organist for the main organ. Jean Langlais immediately applied. The competition's announcement, in which one can easily see the firm hand of the Amis de l'Orgue, was worded as follows:

A competition has been established for the naming of an organist at the basilica Sainte-Clotilde. The organist so named will be the official (“titulaire”) organist of the grand orgue.

However, the current financial difficulties force the priest-in-charge of Sainte-Clotilde not to make an appointment of the new titulaire organist *until the end of the hostilities*. Until then, the designated organist will have complete latitude to keep the paid position which he might presently occupy. Fees for extra services at Sainte-Clotilde's will be put aside for him, starting now. He will have every opportunity to use the Sainte-Clotilde organ in the services in which he sees it fit to participate.

If the priest-in-charge, to elevate the effect of particular ceremonies, wants an organist to play the grand orgue, the official organist agrees to come himself or to designate a high-quality substitute.

Candidates who wish to take part in the competition should register before 25 November with Mr. Norbert Dufourcq, General Secretary of the Amis de l'Orgue, 37 avenue de Lowendal, XV<sup>e</sup>, who has been delegated by Canon Verdrie to organize this examination. The competition will take place on December 20, 1941 at 1:30 p.m. as a public event.

The contestants will be scheduled to practice on the Sainte-Clotilde organ, which will be made available to each of them beforehand for a maximum of four hours.

The jury, consisting of eminent organists and musicians, will be chaired by Canon Labourt, Vicar General, President of the Diocesan Commission on Sacred Art and Liturgy.<sup>8</sup>

The demanding requirements for the competition, run by the Amis de l'Orgue, were as follows:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

I. Improvisation

- a. Prelude and fugue
- b. Hymn versets in differing styles, the last being a large paraphrase

II. Performance (from memory)

- a. Three pieces by Bach, including a large prelude and fugue, an allegro from a trio sonata, and a large chorale-prelude
- b. Three pieces by César Franck, including one of the Three Chorals.
- c. Three pieces by Charles Tournemire, including a concluding piece from one of the services in *L'Orgue Mystique*.

In each of these categories, the jury will select one of the three pieces that are proposed.

III. Oral questions on the liturgy, the unfolding of sacred services, the role of the liturgical organist, the history of organ building, organ music, performance, registration.<sup>9</sup>

Since Jean Langlais had applied, his friends Litaize, Duruflé, and Fleury—whom he had told about Tournemire's last wishes—declined to compete. Daniel-Lesur and Antoine Reboulot remained. The practicing began at Sainte-Clotilde until Langlais received this letter from Norbert Dufourcq:

Sunday, December 14, 1941

Dear Friend,

Last night Daniel-Lesur told me that he has decided not to participate in the competition for Sainte-Clotilde (his entry permission expiring on the 15th), and Reboulot let me know this morning that he is withdrawing from the competition "because his chances seemed to be zero"; I found the priest-in-charge of Sainte-Clotilde. He decided that since there was only one candidate that there was no need of a competition, and that it would be moved to a later date. Don't bother with practicing for it.

I'm so sorry about this stalemate, and I tried to do everything that I could for two months for the art of the organ, for young organists...and for you.

Very cordially,

Norbert Dufourcq<sup>10</sup>

To say that Jean Langlais was plagued by bad luck in this matter is an understatement, although the worst was yet to come in the form of the following letter from the priest-in-charge of Sainte-Clotilde, barely two-and-a-half months after the cancellation of the competition:

Paris, March 2, 1942

Dear Sir,

I did receive your letter. I was just about to write you. Unfortunately, I am forced to cause you a great disappointment. I like you very much and my recognition of your high standing, which no one would deny, remains constant. But I never thought that the appointment of a "youth," as you are, could be done other than by a competition: everyone came to me to say this, including the archbishop, and even Madame Tournemire agreed that Monsieur Tournemire, in spite of his preference for you, understood full well that his successor would be determined by a competition.

The competition was arranged: you know that at the last minute it couldn't take place, since you ended up being the only one who wished to participate. We then imagined that it could be re-opened: then it turned out not to be so easy: I got a letter from Mr.

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<sup>9</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

<sup>10</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

Litaize alerting me that we would have great difficulties starting it again because almost all your contemporaries and fellow organists likely to participate have decided not to compete against you. To tell the truth, since I had always said that I would willingly wait until the end of the war to resolve the matter, I took a stance in the situation that was thus created. However, little by little, seeing peace so slow in coming, I wondered if I was right to wait so long.

In the meantime, the candidacy of Mr. Ermend-Bonnal, whose new functions brought him to Paris, came to my attention and I was told that this musician's reputation and quality were such that everyone—or almost—was in favor of his being named successor to Mr. Tournemire.

I consulted various competent people who convinced me that Mr. Ermend-Bonnal was the right person, and without a competition. Mr. Labourt, from the archbishop's office, spoke to me himself in these terms.

In your letter, you speak of Monsieur de Maramon's expertise. I'll quote the card that he wrote to me: "In my exile, I have heard that you may be taken by Mr. Ermend-Bonnal's candidacy for Mr. Tournemire's succession. I call your attention especially to this candidate's great titles: great musician, great Christian, generally thought to be highly worthy of your organ loft."

And so, given all of this, what else could I do but accept Mr. Ermend-Bonnal's candidacy? I therefore decided, with much regret, to cause you great disappointment once again.

Let me say that I wouldn't have taken this decision if I hadn't thought that given your age, the possibility of your one day accepting César Franck's organ loft was only delayed: Mr. Ermend-Bonnal himself is not a young man, and he will probably retire in a few years.

Respectfully yours,

P. Verdrie, priest-in-charge of Sainte-Clotilde<sup>11</sup>

Jean Langlais was absolutely devastated by this shameful decision. Everything and everyone seemed lined up against him, led by the Amis de l'Orgue, Béranger de Miramon and Norbert Dufourcq, not to mention the archbishop, who cancelled the competition on the grounds that there was *only one candidate* left in the running, and then two months later turned around and gave the appointment, without competition, to Joseph Ermend-Bonnal.

Unlike the public outcry that the succession to Vierne at Notre-Dame caused, the appointment of Ermend-Bonnal, then aged 62, stirred no protest, which further embittered Jean Langlais. Years later, at the height of his fame, known world-wide as the organist of Sainte-Clotilde, Langlais never missed an opportunity to bring up, publicly, this terrible episode in his career during which he felt deeply humiliated and betrayed.

## First organ symphony

As always with Langlais, his reaction to failure took the form of a new work, in this case the creation of his monumental *Première Symphonie* for organ. As we have seen, in the period immediately before the war the young composer tried to diversify his output by writing for voice, orchestra, and piano, neglecting the organ except for the installments of the *Vingt-Quatre Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue*.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



With the *Première Symphonie*, the grand organ returns in full majesty. Reviving a tradition outlined by César Franck in 1863 in his “Grande Pièce Symphonique” and continued by Guilmant, Widor, and Vierne, Jean Langlais threw all of his compositional knowledge into the enterprise. It took him four months, from the end of 1941 to the beginning of 1942--the exact period of time between the two letters about Sainte-Clotilde just quoted above—to compose a symphony in four movements (Allegro, Églogue, Choral, Finale) in a harsh and dissonant language, as if the simultaneous trials of the war and the Sainte-Clotilde affair had increased tenfold his potential for aggressiveness.

Dedicated to Gaston Litaize, this long work (over a half hour) remains probably the most technically difficult work in Langlais’ whole catalogue. The composer sets aside plainchant and modality, which had contributed so much to his success, and puts a blast of fresh air into a genre in which Widor and Vierne seemed to have said everything.



**Jean Langlais, 1941**

Figure 24. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

For this symphony, it is notable that Langlais adopted the shape for improvising a symphony that Dupré had imposed on his students: four movements, following the model of the last organ symphonies by Widor, the “Gothic” and “Roman,” whereas in his previous symphonies Widor had vascillated between five and seven movements. As for Vierne, after

his *Première Symphonie* in six movements, he structured the following five in five movements each.

Note with what extreme care Langlais structured his four movements: The initial **Allegro** (17 of the Symphony's 44 pages) uses a Beethoven-like sonata form, the whole being governed by developmental techniques, melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, by expansion and its opposite, elimination, and last, superimposition.

Langlais cleanly contrasts the characters of his themes, A and B, above all rhythmically. The A appears as dynamic and strong, and B as melodic and calm; although B has a narrower ambitus than A, both use a free modal scale, A more chromatic than B's closeness to Messiaen's second mode (step, half-step); but the composer refuses to be confined within strict scales.

From the sixth measure he repeats A, modifying the interval patters, juxtaposing the second mode with a chromatic one.

Just as the composer juggles modal scales, he plays with rhythms; he leaves the fairly conventional world of his first works, here multiplying the metric changes, alternating within a short span (the first two pages of the Allegro) fragments in 2/4, 7/16, 5/8, 2/4, 6/8, 2/4, and 3/4, emphasizing off-beats, giving weight to weak meters and other ruptures, succeeding in achieving a sense of continuous instability and anguish. In terms of texture, harmony and counterpoint (particularly canonic passages) mix constantly; the coda to the Allegro offers a significant example: canon at the octave and quarter note between soprano and bass.

Another technique used with abundance is the superimposition of the two themes at the beginning of the coda: first theme A is in the manuals and theme B, transposed to D, is in the pedal; seven measures later, A is put in the pedal and B in the manuals, both themes having been transposed to F-sharp, an example of a rising third-relation that was customary with César Franck, and which Langlais often used both in his written works and improvisations.

From a purely harmonic point of view, this Allegro is characterized by the constant use of chromaticism and passing notes or chords that accentuate the breathless, unstable aspect of the work, just as the parallel 7th, 9th, and 11th chords do, never resolved, which are the backbone of these 17 pages of music.

After such an intense climax, the listener as well as the performer needs some rest, and this is where the **Églogue** intervenes as the second movement of the Symphony. According to dictionaries, an églogue is a small pastoral poem, a definition that the composer follows to the letter in a true country scene. In the first measure, a first pastoral theme is introduced in the mode on F (Lydian, F major without B-flat), harmonized by a sort of polymodal harmonic carillon.

At measure 45, the beginning of a new component of the "pastoral poem," -the second theme- is presented in the form of an unaccompanied melody played on the Swell Oboe, a sort of nostalgic tune spun out by some imaginary shepherd. Right after this solo a third melody appears, a cousin to the second, once again using a harmonic carillon as accompaniment (this time more complex, using a superimposition of an assortment of unrelated gestures). Once the three themes have been introduced separately, Langlais creates all sorts of intricate combinations before bringing in a fourth theme, unexpected in such a calm movement, a quick scherzando which moves ahead virtuosically for 21 measures in irregular meters. The composer then recalls all the themes (1 and 2 together, 1 and 3, then a bit of each of the four themes), before concluding with a dissonance (F, C, A, C-sharp, F), which seems oddly consonant.

About this last chord, Jean Langlais explains:

I really tried to end on a consonant chord of F, but because of the texture of the movement, it seemed dissonant. So I did the opposite and concluded by adding a C# to the consonant chord of F.

The unexpected eruption of the quick scherzando in the *Églogue* (m. 80) allows the composer to assign the role of the symphony's slow movement to the following **Choral**. The word "choral" has no liturgical implication here. Rather, in Langlais' mind, it is a standard musical form in which each of four thematic sections is massive and square, punctuated by rests at the ends of phrases, typical of Lutheran chorales. But Jean Langlais departs from chorale tradition in harmonizing his theme with a series of cluster chords placed systematically on the off-beat, following a scheme already adopted by Messiaen in "Les Mages," the eighth movement of *La Nativité du Seigneur*. As surprising as the harmony is the registration for this movement, which calls for five different sonorities on four manuals and pedals:

Right Hand:

Manual IV: flute 8

Manual III: cornet (presents the theme)

Left Hand:

Manual II: soft foundations 8 and 4

Manual I: soft cromorne (for the theme in canon)

Pedal: flute 8

This layout is unique as far as we know. At the most, it is possible to cite it in the "quartet" of Louis Marchand (1700), which staggers four voices on three manuals and pedal, about which the renowned organ builder Dom Bédos de Celles wrote:

This manner of making a quartet on four keyboards (three manuals plus pedal flute) is difficult to perform: one can hardly make the two top parts sing because they have to be played by the one right hand on two different manuals; or in the second possibility, one has to play the two inner parts with a single left hand on two different manuals.<sup>12</sup>

What would he have thought of a distribution on *four* manuals and pedal!

The opening *Allegro* of the *Première Symphonie* was faithful to the formal approach of a Beethoven sonata. In the same way the **Finale**, the fourth movement, espouses the classic rondo form, but as a type of sonata-rondo that, with its size, has the dimensions of an independent work, with three contrasting sections juxtaposed:

1. Alternation of refrain and episodes (AABACA), mm. 1–130. Pure rondo form.
2. Short andante (mm. 131–177).
3. Finale (*allegro*), starting with a free fugue which is quickly transformed into a toccata, which has at its climax the combination of the main theme from the first movement and the refrain of the rondo (mm. 142 to the end).

Langlais introduces some idiosyncrasies within the classic form: first, contrary to standard form, he repeats the refrain at the outset so that, according to him, "the D-major tonality is understood to be a vision of future sunlight, that is, the end of the war."<sup>13</sup> Second, the *allegro* of the finale begins with a fugue (whose theme is a transformed version of the

<sup>12</sup> Bédos de Celles, François [Dom Bédos], *L'Art du facteur d'orgues*. 4 vols. Paris: Louis-François Delatour, 1766–1778. Vol. 3. 528.

<sup>13</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

refrain), and it evolves imperceptibly into a virtuosic toccata in which the composer creates a cyclic form by superimposing the refrain of this movement on the first theme of the first movement. The work ends with a virtuosic display unequivocally in D major, even though the Symphony had begun in a free mode on D. In any case, it is clear that Jean Langlais put all of his energy, all of his musical knowledge into this piece that remains without equal in terms of complexity and technical difficulty in all his work.

As he later explained:

I wrote in a complicated language and style because I felt that I myself was in a complicated, tormented world. Assaulted on all sides by war, injustice, my only way to fight back was to write a work that represented the sum of everything I knew musically.<sup>14</sup>

And he didn't entrust the premiere of this work to anyone else. It took place on June 27, 1943 at the Palais de Chaillot (the Trocadéro Palace). A photograph from the time shows him during the concert on this monumental organ which he had played once before, two years earlier.<sup>15</sup>



**Jean Langlais in concert on the Cavallé-Coll/Gonzalez organ at the Trocadéro, June 27, 1943**

Figure 25. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

His daughter Janine, then seven years old, remembers:

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> During the war, major organ recitals were given at the Chaillot Palace (formerly Trocadéro Palace) on the 1878 Cavallé-Coll organ that had been rebuilt by Victor Gonzalez and re-dedicated in 1939. The most famous organists took part from the very beginning of the series in 1940; Jean Langlais played the fourth recital on June 15, 1941, then again, the fifteenth recital on June 27, 1943, November 23, 1944, and later, on December 13, 1945. The last two were also broadcast on the radio.

One of my earliest childhood memories is of the legendary concert at the Chaillot Palace in which Dad premiered his *Première Symphonie*. I can still see myself jumping up and down for joy when I heard the audience cheer. The hall was standing room-only, and I remember that just behind me there were two German soldiers who laughed at my antics!<sup>16</sup>

Olivier Messiaen devoted to this work one of the few articles that he wrote during the occupation, in his inimitable mixture of poetry and deep analysis:

The fifteenth organ recital at the Chaillot Palace was entrusted to Jean Langlais. I won't comment on his virtuosity and prowess in registration, which everyone knows. But an analysis is needed of Langlais' Organ Symphony—played masterfully by the composer—which constituted the *pièce de résistance* as well as the program's premiere. The language—not aggressive, but with a brilliant harmonic palette, sometimes harsh, with a chromaticism that always shimmered—was true to itself, the style never breaking down in the course of its four movements.

The opening Allegro with two themes was openly Beethovenesque. The second part, *Églogue*, had two solos (one for oboe, one for cornet) of a winged melody like a bird's laughter; it was distinguished by its superimpositions—not polytonal, but *polymodal*.

Third part: *Choral*, the best moment of the work. Somber, sad, like a star of lead, its chords enclose the listener in mysterious and black water. A combination of five timbres, one for the pedals, four for the manuals (each hand playing on two manuals at the same time) - the effect is new in organ literature—it was hard to write, to register, and to play; Langlais treated these difficulties as trifles. The *Finale* remains, very brilliant; the “great chorus” sparkled with the organ's sharp-edged joy: a fan of sun in cold water. All of this is well constructed, substantial, serious, and consoles us from the so-called French colour.<sup>17</sup>

Shortly after the concert, Hérelle and Jean Langlais signed a contract to publish the work, and it came out in 1945.

### **Jean Langlais' daily life in occupied Paris - Composition of *Neuf Pièces* for organ.**

Like many French people during the black days of the Occupation, Jean Langlais and his family suffered the rigors of the time, including food rationing, the curfews that were imposed, and the particularly bitter cold weather during these winters of war.<sup>18</sup>

Starting in 1940, food cards with detachable tickets were distributed to Parisians. In 1941, for example, Jean Langlais and his family officially had an allowance of 9 oz. of bread per day; 9 oz. of meat and 3 oz. of cheese per week; and 19 oz. of butter and oil, 17 oz. of sugar, 7 oz. of rice, and 9 oz. of pasta per month. There were similar ration tickets for clothes and coal to heat dwellings.

Jean Langlais long remembered the seven flights of stairs that he had to climb to his newly rented flat at 26 rue Duroc to carry sacks of coal from the cellar in order to heat the

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Janine Langlais-Motton, June 1985.

<sup>17</sup> Messiaen, Olivier. “Récital d’orgue de Jean Langlais (June 27).” *L'Information musicale* 124 (July 9, 1943). 389.

<sup>18</sup> Paris was occupied by Nazi forces from June 22, 1940 to August 25, 1944.

apartment.<sup>19</sup> The same cellar served as a bomb shelter for the whole building during the German and Allied air raids.

Rutabagas and Jerusalem artichokes rapidly replaced potatoes, and the shortages were so severe that sometimes, because of lack of provisions, the ration tickets couldn't even be used. Fortunately for the Langlais family, occasional packages from Brittany arrived to improve the ordinary situation, but this was completely insufficient and everyone competed in finding cunning ways to get food. Michel Villey, a friend, remembered:

Thus one day, Jean and I took off on a tandem bicycle looking for vegetables in suburban Paris. After a long ride, we came home exhausted but happy to proudly show off what we thought were cabbages, and with one look from our wives, who found it hilarious, we were told that it was lettuce.<sup>20</sup>

Another food story was retold by Janine, Jean Langlais' daughter:

I remember a certain rabbit that we had to throw out. God knows that no one wanted to throw out meat in those days! At the market, Mom had bought a (so-called) rabbit which she lovingly cooked. It smelled wonderful. But with the first mouthful it was obviously inedible, and we had to throw it out. I remember that Dad yelled at Mom, "So, did you take a good look at the head of the rabbit when you bought it?" "Of course, I assure you" she replied without much conviction.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, they later learned that the merchant who sold these rabbits at the market was arrested for having sold... cats. And, lacking warm clothing, Jean Langlais sometimes put newspaper in the lining of his clothes to protect himself from the cold.

In 1942, the musicologist Armand Machabey published a monograph that included a sensitive portrait of Jean Langlais.

From Francesco Landino to Cabezon and Vierne, illustrious predecessors paved the road that Langlais is following. This blind organist of Saint-Pierre de Montrouge, accepts a dark life not with simple courage, but with a sort of hopeful optimism, which is already justified by demonstrable results. It is because the interior life of a blind person has something of the unlimited and, I assume, inaccessible to the sighted; and when this blind man turns his attention to expressing himself in music, we cannot predict its boundaries, its depth, or its complexity...

Rich in the confidence of his elders and his colleagues, esteemed by critics not known for their leniency, Jean Langlais, who senses in himself a revival of a long Breton heritage, is gaining a reputation as a thoughtful and inventive musician with a solid technique, all animated by ideas that only he could conceive as he rises to the level of the great names that have preceded him in the austere destiny of a blind composer.<sup>22</sup>

The fact that Machabey reused this material in a 1949 volume in which he juxtaposed Langlais with the likes of Messiaen, Dutilleux, and Duruflé, is proof that at the end of the war Langlais was perceived to be a full member of the "Young French School."

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<sup>19</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs." The building did not have an elevator in this era; it was installed only toward the end of the 1960s, just after the composer bought the apartment in 1965.

<sup>20</sup> Recounted in an interview with the author.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>22</sup> Machabey, Armand. "Galerie de quelques musiciens parisiens: Jean Langlais." *L'Information musicale*: 77 (July 3, 1942). 1009.

Unfortunately, in this period, the time that he could devote to composition was greatly reduced by various duties: church services, private lessons, and above-all by his six hours of daily teaching of organ and theory at the National Institute for the Young Blind. One of his former blind students during the war, Lucienne Dannely, testifies to the care that Langlais brought to his teaching:

We worked according to Marcel Dupré's method, and he displayed great respect for the teaching of his former mentor at the Paris Conservatory. Jean Langlais explained our errors very clearly, and he could discern them perfectly by ear. He asked us questions about the form of the works we played, teaching us to understand the workmanship in certain pieces, telling us about the composers. He showed himself to be patient, assessing with certainty the potential of each one of us. For those of us who were far from conservatory level, he moderated his requirements, but each had to give his all. I never saw him ignore a relatively ungifted classmate, nor neglect him in favor of another who stood out.

Unlike the others, I particularly liked composition. One day when he had just finished improvising on a liturgical theme to teach us how to do it, I blurted out, "When one hears you, it seems so easy that one thinks he could do the same."

"But that's a real compliment that you're giving me! Go to the organ and improvise, too," he said to me. And when I had finished, he commented humorously, "You've made an improvisation for a sick room!"

He rarely had us play his works, because the slightest snag, the slightest wrong note wounded him as if by a thorn.

I also learned a lot from his theory classes: I still remember clearly the first one, where he "took apart" J.S. Bach's first Two-Part Invention. We also did reports on the works heard at the Concerts Colonne to which the school took us twice a month. In conclusion, I think that Jean Langlais prepared us for possible musical functions with great professional conscientiousness and competence.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to his official teaching at the Institute, Jean Langlais had numerous private students of all ages and backgrounds at home. Among these were the Baroness of Lassus, Blanche Trillat (whose uncle, Ennemond Trillat was the director of the Lyon Conservatory), Pierre Denis (his future assistant at the Sainte-Clotilde organ), the law professor Michel Villey, the organist Micheline Lagache (to be a first-prize winner in Marcel Dupré's class in 1946), and Claire Boussac (whose grandfather, the geologist Pierre Termier was a friend of the author Léon Bloy).

Ms. Boussac (Jean Langlais liked to remember her as "the only one of my students to whom I never had to say the same thing twice"<sup>24</sup>) found she still had a syllabus for a theory course that Jean Langlais taught to his private students in 1942. She recalls:

On those evenings, he analyzed the following works for us: a *ricercare* by Palestrina, a *tiento* by Cabanilles, various major Bach works (the Prelude and Fugue in E-flat Major and the B-Minor, the Toccatas in F major and D minor, and three chorale-preludes: *Babylone*, *De profundis*, and *Gloria*);<sup>25</sup> he also explained his motet "O Bone Jesu." Then, settling himself at the Kasriel pedal harmonium, he played the works just analyzed, even Bach's monumental *Passacaglia* and *Fugue in C Minor*.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Lucienne Dannely, October, 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

<sup>25</sup> BWV 653, 686, 676.

<sup>26</sup> The present author's interview with Claire Boussac, November 1993.

As for concerts, there was greatly reduced activity, due to the war. Churches' lack of heat, supply difficulties of all kinds and rationing kept the public away from concerts in churches.

But in terms of composition, the war years would prove particularly fruitful for organ music. The publisher S. Bornemann, who was very involved in organ music, especially that of Marcel Dupré, commissioned a collection of organ pieces from Langlais in 1942. This set, composed in 1942 and 1943, will be titled *Neuf Pièces*.

These became a collection divided into three parts. The first brings together four "chants" (songs): "de peine" (of pain), "de joie" (of joy), "de paix" (of peace), and "héroïque" (heroic). They are free poems on themes reflecting the dedicatees of the pieces.

In the second part, for the first time in his career Langlais works on Lutheran chorales: "Dans une douce joie" (In dulce júbilo), "De profundis" (Aus tiefer Not), and "Mon âme cherche une fin paisible" (Herzlich tut mich verlangen nach einem sel'gen End, better known as the passion chorale, O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden). Finally in the third part he freely paraphrases Gregorian chants ("Prélude sur une antienne" and "Rhapsodie grégorienne," the latter using "Sacris solemnis," "Verbum supernum," and "Lauda Sion").

If the "Chant de peine," dedicated "to the memory of my dear teacher, Paul Dukas," gives an impression of intense sadness, with its long expressive phrases on the harmonic flute supported by series of dissonant chromatic chords, the "Chant de joie" is the opposite, celebrating in a toccata in which Langlais repeatedly makes reference to Tournemire, such as in the double trills in the inner parts on the manuals framing melodic lines in the *surmajure* scale on F (F major using a B-natural) typical of the Lydian mode.

Jean Langlais himself explains the genesis of his third "song":

My "Chant de paix" is dedicated to the grand-daughter of a great geologist, Pierre Termier. Her name was Claire Boussac and she was a such a peaceful soul, so uncomplaining, so calm in the face of life, that I wrote this piece for her.<sup>27</sup>

The piece is only 32 measures long, but these measures greatly contributed to the composer's fame, as they admirably reproduce a sense of poetry and internal life using the simplest means: a spacious melody, with a wide ambitus given to the four-foot flute in the Pedal, rises over long, sustained harmonies (largely inversions of seventh chords) in the Swell, in quadruple meter.

The following piece, "Chant héroïque," is also one of Langlais' better known works. Written "in memory of Jehan Alain, heroically fallen for France in defending Saumur, June 1940," it is a veritable cry of anger and sadness in the face of the tragic and unfair death of the young musician:

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<sup>27</sup> Interview transcribed by François Carbou in the notes for his recording *Langlais joue Langlais aux grandes orgues de Sainte-Clotilde*. LP. Solstice, SOL1, 1976.



My “Chant héroïque” is dedicated to the memory of my very dear friend (whom I consider a genius) Jehan Alain. He visited me during his last leave, about a month before his death, and I said to him, “I don’t know, I’m not a soldier and I don’t know what’s going on, but this seems to me to be, above all, dangerous duty.”

And Jehan Alain replied with superb confidence, “You think so?! With the equipment that we have, we don’t risk anything!”

And a month later he was no longer of this world... It was an enormous loss for music, and I wrote a protest song in his memory. I put into it... as a sort of poetic feeling of his own music. I didn’t want to make a pastiche of it, of course, but I wanted to immerse myself once again in his modal thought.

However, I cut that short by emphasizing certain passages of “La Marseillaise” (“aux armes, citoyens!”), but in minor and with harrowing harmonies, since I must say that the death of Jehan Alain truly broke my heart, my spirit; and further, it put an end to our friendship, which had been grand.<sup>28</sup>

Jean Langlais composed this tumultuous and heartbreaking musical farewell in a single night on his modest pedal harmonium. The piece pays homage to his friend by using a melodic line and the second mode characteristic of Alain’s *Litanies*, with frequent rhythmic pauses and the unexpected insertion of the phrase “Aux armes citoyens” from the French national anthem, “La Marseillaise”, in minor (B minor and then C minor) on full organ, a sort of tragic sublimation of patriotic protest.

After these four “songs,” so very personal, the composer turns for the first time to the Lutheran chorale. Until then, the word “choral” seems to have only meant to him an abstract style (see, for example, the “choral” in the *Vingt-Quatre Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue* or in the *Première Symphonie*), stripped of any religious context. But in *Neuf Pièces*, in contrast, he chose chorale melodies that are particularly well known to Lutherans and set them in his own manner, without worrying about their original versions because he was content to take the versions that J.S. Bach used. So, without realizing it, by taking Bach as his model, Langlais modified the Reformation originals. But didn’t he do more or less the same thing rhythmically with plainchant in his early works?

The composer seems to hesitate about the language for the titles of his chorals. Consciously ignoring the German (the war undoubtedly played a role in his choice; he loathed using the occupiers’ language), he used French (“Dans une douce joie,” “Mon âme cherche une fin paisible”) and Latin (“De profundis”).

But no matter; Jean Langlais perfectly grasped the meaning of the messages conveyed by the chosen texts, and while distancing himself from any reference supporting Bach, he inserts into his own pieces, although with a different vocabulary, the same pulsations of joy, sorrow, or peace that his illustrious predecessor used.

For the chorale “De profundis” (n°6 in *Neuf Pièces*), he breaks away from the normal rigidity of the Lutheran melody and renews the commentary on it, as he himself explained:

For a theme, I took the same text that Bach used in his six-voiced chorale-prelude, in German “Aus tiefer Not” [BWV 686]. But I didn’t look at it only through the contrapuntal lens: I was just as concerned with the literary text. It is a sort of lament. I remember a commentator who wrote, concerning this subject, “At the end, we have the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

striking impression of a tomb that is closing.” I had never thought of the image, but I find it very apt.<sup>29</sup>

He similarly transforms a harmonized chorale (n°7) into an extraordinarily expressive page just by appoggiaturas, ritards, and tritone progressions which create a translation of the tormented soul in search of heavenly peace.

In the chorale “Mon âme cherche une fin paisible” (piece n°7), the repeated use of appoggiaturas gave birth, rather obviously, to the idea of the intended indecision to symbolize what the soul is seeking. It would be appropriate to see a few measures of this piece in the appoggiatura section of a harmony book to show music students how effective the appoggiatura can be when well understood and used well technically.<sup>30</sup>

For Jean Langlais:

Another chorale that Bach set marvelously; as a result, I was careful not to approach it in the same manner, as that would have been certain failure!

On the other hand, I was very drawn to it: my soul longs for a peaceful end, so it doesn't have it now. Thus a chromatic system that describes the present state of the Christian soul, which seeks peace but does not have it.<sup>31</sup>

The last two of the collection draw upon Gregorian chant, and oddly they are the least convincing works in the *Neuf Pièces*, even in the opinion of the composer himself. That is certainly true of the “Prélude sur une antienne,” which is nothing more than a simple vacation exercise that Marcel Dupré assigned his organ students in 1929; the lack of maturity is obvious. On the other hand, it is perhaps over-ambition that makes the “Rhapsodie Grégorienne” miss the mark. Jean Langlais himself said that several times. 15 pages long, and filled with plainchant, this final piece in the collection is intended as an homage to Charles Tournemire, to whom it is dedicated. In it Langlais presents and then combines three of the best known Gregorian melodies: “Sacris solemniis”, “Verbum supernum” and “Lauda Sion”, in other words, two hymns and a sequence for the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament.

“Worked out too fast, in a single evening,” he used to say; this vast rhapsody never pleased its author, who never stopped reworking it, something very rare with him. It wasn't until 37 years later (!), in 1980, that he brought it to a conclusion, cutting 42 of the 185 opening measures and completely rewriting the end. Bornemann published the new version as the 19th printing of the collection. Was Jean Langlais completely satisfied with the changes? It's doubtful, in view of the fact that six years later, in 1986, he composed *In Memoriam*, a vast fresco for organ based on several Gregorian themes, and once again dedicated to Charles Tournemire. To be sure, the themes that he chose were different from those in the “Rhapsodie Grégorienne,” but it is unusual to see an artist work—with a 40-year interval—on two similar large-scale works dedicated to the same person. In his 1986 recorded recollections, the composer asserted, “Each time, I was agonized by the idea of not reaching the level of this master who was so enamored of perfection.” Perhaps that is the best explanation.

In any case, from their first appearance, *Neuf Pièces* had an undisputed success. More than 20,000 copies were sold between 1945 and 2014 (according to the statement of royalties sent

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Jean Langlais, “Orgue.” *Musique et orgue* (February, 1946). Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>31</sup> Carbou, op cit, footnote 188. 100

by the Bornemann editor), led by the “Chant de paix” and “Chant héroïque,” if one believes the evidence of concert programs both in France and abroad.

During this wartime period, Langlais learned about the deaths, both on March 19, 1943, of two musicians who were dear to him: Albert Mahaut, his harmony teacher at the Institute for the Young Blind, and Abel Decaux, former organ teacher at the Schola Cantorum. In honor of their memory, Langlais composed *Deux Offertoires pour tous les temps* for organ, which the Durand company immediately agreed to publish.

The first, sub-titled “Paraphrase de la messe ‘Stelliferi conditor orbis’” (Mass 13) is dedicated to Decaux, while the second, “Paraphrase de la messe ‘Magnae Deus potentiae’” (Mass 5) is for Mahaut. Both use the complete melodies of three of the Ordinary texts, the Kyrie, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei, and for the first time in his composing career Langlais replicates the traditional rhythmic interpretation of the chants, presenting them in even quarter notes, with longer notes only where the modern rules of plainchant require them.

Here in these new pieces, he takes a decisive step forward, retaining the unmetrical rhythm of plainchant as he had heard it his whole life, a new approach for him that he would make a rule in the years to come.

He was careful to specify, at the top of his first Offertory, “in the rhythm of Gregorian chant,” a notation that appears here for the first time in his organ works.

After these many pages for organ, our composer agreed to the request of one of the priests at Saint-Pierre de Montrouge, Father Pouplain, to work on a project for “the liturgical mystery of Good Friday.” He was given a detailed synopsis that specified exactly where music should intervene in the spoken texts (Overture, Miserere, Psalm verses, and the final hymn, “Pange lingua”).

Father Pouplain described a vibrant pageant that he hoped to create:

Men, all veiled in black, process and prostrate themselves before the tomb that is placed in the middle of the stage, topped by an empty cross. They murmur the Miserere, in French so that the congregation can understand it, with voices in the background who sing in Latin.<sup>32</sup>

Jean Langlais began this *Mystère du Vendredi Saint*<sup>33</sup> with a short “Prelude” in Latin for four mixed voices, strings, and organ on the text, “O crux ave.” This is followed by a “Miserere mei” that remains one of Langlais’ most deeply moving pieces. The whole work, premiered at Saint Pierre de Montrouge on Good Friday 1943, with Antoine Reboulot at the organ, was published only in part (just the “Miserere Mei” section) under the title *Déploration*.<sup>34</sup> It took the many celebrations of Jean Langlais’ 80th birthday to bring this gripping work out of the shadows. Various audiences were struck by its intense beauty; the American organist Kenneth Landis, director of the Arch Street Church Choir in Philadelphia, wrote after such a concert honoring Langlais’ birthday:

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<sup>32</sup> Manuscript in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>33</sup> Unpublished manuscript. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>34</sup> It was first published separately by Costallat in 1956, then after Langlais’ death republished by Combret in a score titled *Déploration*, together with “Libera me Domine” for three voices and organ, composed in 1948. The pair of works was given the title *Deux Déplorations*.

The concert went well; even though most of the audience and singers were not familiar with this music, they became Langlais' "fans." Many people told me how moved they were by "Déploration"; several singers were in tears at the end of the piece! And most of them (the choir has about fifty singers) are professionals coming from the "Philadelphia Singers." Their sound was exceptional.<sup>35</sup>

As in the chorale-prelude "De Profundis" in *Neuf Pièces* for organ, composed at about the same time, in the *Déploration*'s 47 measures, Langlais intensifies the dramatic force of Psalm 50<sup>36</sup> (from which he borrowed the Latin text "Misere mei") with very effective use of silences, to give the impression of "a tomb that is closing."

At the end of 1943, French Radio commissioned Jean Langlais to write *Trois Motets* for one voice, orchestra, and bells. The titles of these unpublished motets are "O Salutaris," "Salve Regina," and "Oremus pro pontifice";<sup>37</sup> they were conceived for concert performance, not for the church. All Gregorian references seem to have been excluded: the words are faithful to the Latin texts, but the melodies are radically different from the plainchants. The celebrated soprano Irène Joachim sang the longest of the three, "Salve Regina," on March 30, 1945, accompanied by the Colonne orchestra.

The end of 1943 also brought great extra-musical joy to the composer and his wife with the birth of a son, named Claude in memory of Claude Debussy, on December 16.<sup>38</sup>

In 1944, a single major work was added to the Langlais catalogue, one not at all related to the organ: *Trois Danses* for winds, percussion, and piano. There are some orchestrational innovations here, as Langlais used only the low woodwinds (English horn, two bass clarinets, and two bassoons) along with the brass in threes. The percussion (snare drum, cymbals, gong, and bass drum) has a modest role, whereas the piano is ever-present and constantly changing its role, sometimes soloist, sometimes accompanist. Modality reigns supreme in each of the *Trois Danses*:

Mode two in the first, whole-tone scale for the second, and a freely chromatic mode in the third. Rhythmically, they are straightforward and fairly rudimentary, even with balanced phrases in 3/4 and 2/4, and are a bit disappointing in this middle of the twentieth century which is so teeming and exuberant. Jean Langlais said several times later that he regretted that, because of his blindness, he had not been able to learn in detail the percussion instruments, which would have allowed him more fantasy and rhythmic liberty in orchestration.

These new pieces were not performed publicly until 1949, five years after their composition, and here is what a critic said of them:

In this good old hall at the Conservatory, which hardly attracts anyone other than the Society of Wind Instruments, directed by Fernand Oubradous, we were first offered the *Trois Danses* by Jean Langlais. Here is an original work, remarkably written for some winds that play with finesse together with a sober but clever piano. A somewhat oriental

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<sup>35</sup> Letter sent to the present author by Kenneth Landis on February 28, 1987 (collection Marie-Louise Langlais).

<sup>36</sup> Psalm 51 in Protestant numbering

<sup>37</sup> Unpublished manuscripts. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>38</sup> Beethoven's birthday, as Jean Langlais enjoyed pointing out.

harshness suits the nostalgic languor or the rhythmic bursts that follow with a rare skill in this triptych for which one can foresee a enduring success.<sup>39</sup>

Alas, reality gave the lie to this assertion, and this work for which Gérard Michel predicted a brilliant future was not published until fifty years later, in 1999 (eight years after Jean Langlais's death), by the German publisher Carus. It no doubt had the misfortune of being too distant from the rest of Jean Langlais's repertory.

## The liberation of Paris: August 25, 1944

In a letter sent on September 20, 1944, to his relatives in La Fontenelle, Jean Langlais describes in detail the greatly desired liberation of Paris.

His almost cinematic "reporting" is striking, coming from a blind man:

Dear Family,

I tried to get a note to you via the Red Cross, but here is more complete information about us.

The months of July and August were terrible here. Food supplies were completely insufficient. And so we have lost a lot of weight, especially Janine and me. As for Claude, he never has enough milk.

Here are some details about the events:

During the week leading up to August 15 we clearly heard all over Paris intense bombardments that first got closer and then seemed more distant. We have since learned that it was the encircling of the capital. We should mention that the Parisians appeared overjoyed to hear these formidable sounds of war.

At the same time an enormous movement of German vehicles of all sorts occurred.

We had no idea if they were going to Normandy or East. What we did know was that lots of buildings were being emptied of their German occupiers.

On August 15th, a huge event: we learned of a general strike by the police.

An enormous resistance was getting ready. Until the 19th, there was no evident change. We all expected the arrival of the allies on Friday evening the 19th. In its place there was a general uprising. The FFI<sup>40</sup> seized the police headquarters, the Paris City Hall, and other official buildings. From that moment, the Germans were no longer the masters of the capital. In the following days you could see the streets filled with trucks loaded with Germans armed to the teeth, crossing other trucks full of FFI, also armed, but with much less powerful weapons, seeming to ignore each other. On the evening of the 23rd, enormous agitation: we went through the houses collecting everything we could, and in the blink of an eye strong barricades were erected, practically encircling the German army within the capital. All sorts of things were put into these barricades: sacks of sand, old stoves, old metal bed frames, wooden gates, public benches, quickly cut trees, old baby carriages, and even newspaper kiosks. We never understood how the construction could happen so quickly. It was these barricades that most aroused the Germans' fury.

The FFI, with insignificant arms, managed to capture tanks, some Tiger tanks.<sup>41</sup> On the evening of the 24th, Paris was transformed. We were told of the imminent arrival of 30,000 men from Leclerc's army and an unknown number of Americans. About eight o'clock in the evening, one of our neighbors across the street yelled from the window that some French troops were crossing the Austerlitz bridge. Opening my window and

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<sup>39</sup> Gérard Michel. "Musique: enfin, de vraies premières auditions." *Paroles françaises* (March 18, 1949). 5.

<sup>40</sup> FFI: Forces Française de l'Intérieur (French Domestic Forces), composed of all the groups in the French Résistance, about 400,000 people.

<sup>41</sup> A particularly heavy tank developed by the Germans and used in the war from 1942 to 1945.

my big piano, I played, practically breaking my wrists, a formidable “Marseillaise,” which was applauded in the street below.

The next day, about 9 am, the Leclerc troops entered a delirious Paris.

In nothing flat the people tore down the barricades in order to let the army pass. At about 10 am the Leclerc army came through the Boulevard des Invalides.

I stayed at home to babysit Claude; Jeanette and Janine rushed out to watch the march. They had barely reached the Invalides boulevard when the FFI suddenly sent everyone home, announcing that our troops were going to attack the École Militaire and the Invalides, which are a little over 400 yards from our apartment. The first shells fell immediately. The noise was enormous, but short-lived. Then something unspeakable happened: men and women appeared on the roofs or at their windows shooting at the soldiers and the crowd. This roof-top gunfire continued day and night; for two days we couldn't put a foot outside, as it would evoke rage. The FFI responded with gunfire under our windows. We had to pay close attention not to be anywhere near the windows, as bullets whistled and ricocheted everywhere.

On Saturday the 26th, de Gaulle was supposed to go to Notre-Dame to hear the Te Deum. The square was filled with people. With one of my colleagues, I managed to get into the cathedral. As de Gaulle was at the entrance to Notre-Dame, gunfire came from the towers, and even from the galleries within the cathedral more gunfire came, and it didn't stop until the General left, twenty minutes later.

Most of this time we were mostly flat on the floor. It was real work to get home, all the roofs being full of snipers. The saddest is that many of them were French.

There's much more to tell, but we will talk about it in person.

I embrace you all.

Jean.<sup>42</sup>

The war lasted five years, five years of a life of privations, fear, and anger. When it began in 1939, Jean Langlais was 32, the age of all hopes, the age of a successful career unfolding. Six years later, at 37, his career as concert artist had stagnated, necessarily, because of the war, except for the two concerts he gave at the Chaillot Palace on June 15, 1941 and June 27, 1943. Still organist at Saint-Pierre de Montrouge, he had seen his hopes to succeed Tournemire at Sainte-Clotilde evaporate, and his new compositions, aside from the *Première Symphonie* and the *Neuf Pièces* for organ, were fewer and fewer during the war. But he never stopped writing for orchestra, as the *Trois Motets* for voice and orchestra, commissioned by the Radio, testify.

### **Ermend-Bonnal death - The Sainte Clotilde appointment**

And then, eleven days before the liberation of Paris, on August 14, 1944, Joseph Ermend-Bonnal died at the age of 64. Once again, the organ loft at Sainte-Clotilde was vacant, but this time it was a matter of succeeding Ermend-Bonnal rather than Tournemire. On the other hand, the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Emmanuel Suhard, had issued a new ordinance, instituted in April 1943, more than a year before Bonnal's death: there was to be no appointment to a major Parisian organ, like Sainte-Clotilde, without having a juried competition. Jean Langlais, who had never abandoned the hope of becoming the organist at Sainte-Clotilde, immediately decided to renew his candidacy with father Verdrie, the priest-in-charge of the basilica. He got the following reply:

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<sup>42</sup> Copy of the letter; collection of Marie-Louise Langlais.

Paris, October 24, 1944

Dear Sir,

I have received your letter informing me that you are still a candidate for the succession of Mssrs. Tournemire and Bonnal. I only learned of the latter's death a few days ago.<sup>43</sup>

I remain very favorably disposed towards your candidacy, which is perfectly legitimate. Officially there must be a competition if other candidates make themselves known within a few days.

As you know, Madame Tournemire has always maintained that her husband wanted you as his successor, but via a competition.<sup>44</sup> But if there is no other serious candidate, obviously, there is no need for a competition, and in this case you would become our organist. I think you have already realized that from a financial standpoint, the situation would undoubtedly be less advantageous than what you have, because here the extra fees are not significant.

Very sincerely yours,  
P. Verdrie<sup>45</sup>

Four days later, he sent Jean Langlais the letter that he had received from Father Lesourd, private secretary to Cardinal Suhard:

His eminence's personal wish is clear. The reply that I am to give you frankly is that there must be a competition, and in any case an appointment must not be made without a jury having been convened (as per the ordinance published in April 1943), even in the case in which the choice is a candidate with unquestionable credentials.

One fact has reinforced the Cardinal's wish: two other major organ lofts are vacant at the moment: Saint-François-Xavier, and for the last several weeks, Saint-Eustache. The appointment of an organist with neither competition nor jury at Sainte-Clotilde, whose organ is one of the most prestigious in Paris, would be a regrettable violation of the rules promulgated last year. It would make it difficult for the priests at Saint-François-Xavier and Saint-Eustache to hold to the decision they have made: to be contented with an interim organist until the end of the war, when there would be a competition.<sup>46</sup>

Would you not, Father, want to adopt the same solution: keep Mr. Bonnal's replacement<sup>47</sup> for the moment and reserve the appointment of a permanent organist until the end of the hostilities, which, one hopes, will not be more than several months away.

Respectfully yours,  
H. Le Sourd, private secretary<sup>48</sup>

For Jean Langlais, as tenacious as any Breton, it was out of the question to shirk the obligatory competition. But things dragged on for almost a year, and four months after the end of the war, on September 12, 1945, Le Sourd suggested that Langlais offer his candidacy yet again to Vicar General Labourt, secretary of the Commission on Sacred Art and Liturgy:

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<sup>43</sup> Bonnal died on August 14, 1944, more than two months before this letter, and the Sainte-Clotilde priest-in-charge was not informed?

<sup>44</sup> This contradicts her letter to Langlais cited at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>45</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>46</sup> In point of fact, André Marchal would be appointed the permanent organist at Saint-Eustache without a competition, by a simple letter of candidacy in July 1945, succeeding Joseph Bonnet who died on August 2, 1944 at St. Luce-sur-Mer in Québec.

<sup>47</sup> It was Bernard Schulé (1909–1996), a Swiss organist and composer. He was the last replacement for Charles Tournemire in 1938–1939, then substitute for Ermend-Bonnal from 1942 to 1944, and then interim organist from August 1944 to November 1945.

<sup>48</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais. At the liberation of Paris, Cardinal Suhard (1874–1947) was accused of collaborating with Marshal Pétain's government and of being weak facing the Germans; he was refused entrance into the Cathedral of Notre-Dame for the famous *Te Deum* celebrated in de Gaulle's presence the day after the Liberation.

Paris, September 12, 1945

Dear Sir,

I did receive your letter and my delay in responding was to gather information. I did so yesterday with Vicar General Labourt, the general secretary of the Commission on Sacred Art for the diocese.

Canon Verdrie has not told the General Vicar of his intentions, but nothing suggests that he might want to evade the rules laid down by the Cardinal: competitions and, in exceptional cases, appointment on the basis of credentials.

This second path was followed recently for the appointment of Mr. Marchal at Saint-Eustache, but after deliberation of the archbishop's council.

It seems to me that the best thing is for you to present your candidacy to the priest-in-charge at Sainte-Clotilde.

I very much hope that your candidacy will be successful by means of the test of a competition, which seems to me to be in the best interests of both the artists and the church. ...

Devotedly yours,

H. Le Sourd<sup>49</sup>

At the beginning of October 1945, the weekly *La Semaine Religieuse* announced the vacancy of the position of organist of the main organ at Sainte-Clotilde and invited candidates to make themselves known as soon as possible, conforming to the ordinance by his Eminence dated March 12, 1943. Thus, six years after Tournemire's death, they were back where they started.

But Providence intervened: Father Marc Lallier, a personal friend of Jean Langlais's who knew of the young composer's repeated setbacks at Sainte-Clotilde, brought Cardinal Suhard and Jean Langlais together for a cordial lunch at the Petit Séminaire, where he was the superior. At the end of the meal, the archbishop of Paris had these words for the young organist: "We understand your problems and we'll reflect on them," which in ecclesiastical language, Father Lallier said to Jean Langlais, means: "it's a done deal!"<sup>50</sup> The very next day, the priest-in-charge at Sainte-Clotilde sent the following message to Langlais:

Paris, October 28, 1945

Dear Sir,

The waiting period for applications from potential candidates is over. No one came forward. Therefore I consider you the permanent organist in the Sainte-Clotilde loft, starting now.

I am writing, however, to Mr. Labourt. I believe that he has come to an agreement with you that Mr. Schulé will play the organ on All Saints Day.

On Sunday the 4<sup>th</sup>, at the 11 o'clock Mass, we want to honor the memory of Mr. Tournemire (it's the anniversary of his death).

Mr. Schulé, who has been asked to play some pieces by this master, will defer to you if you decide to play the organ yourself.

Let us know, and especially Mrs. Tournemire.

Respectfully yours,

Father Verdrie, priest-in-charge at Sainte-Clotilde<sup>51</sup>

Thus Jean Langlais assumed the organist duties on November 4, 1945. It had taken him six years to get the post that he wouldn't leave until 42 years later, in 1987, at the age of 80. And during all those years as *titulaire*, he never stopped playing, teaching, and recording the

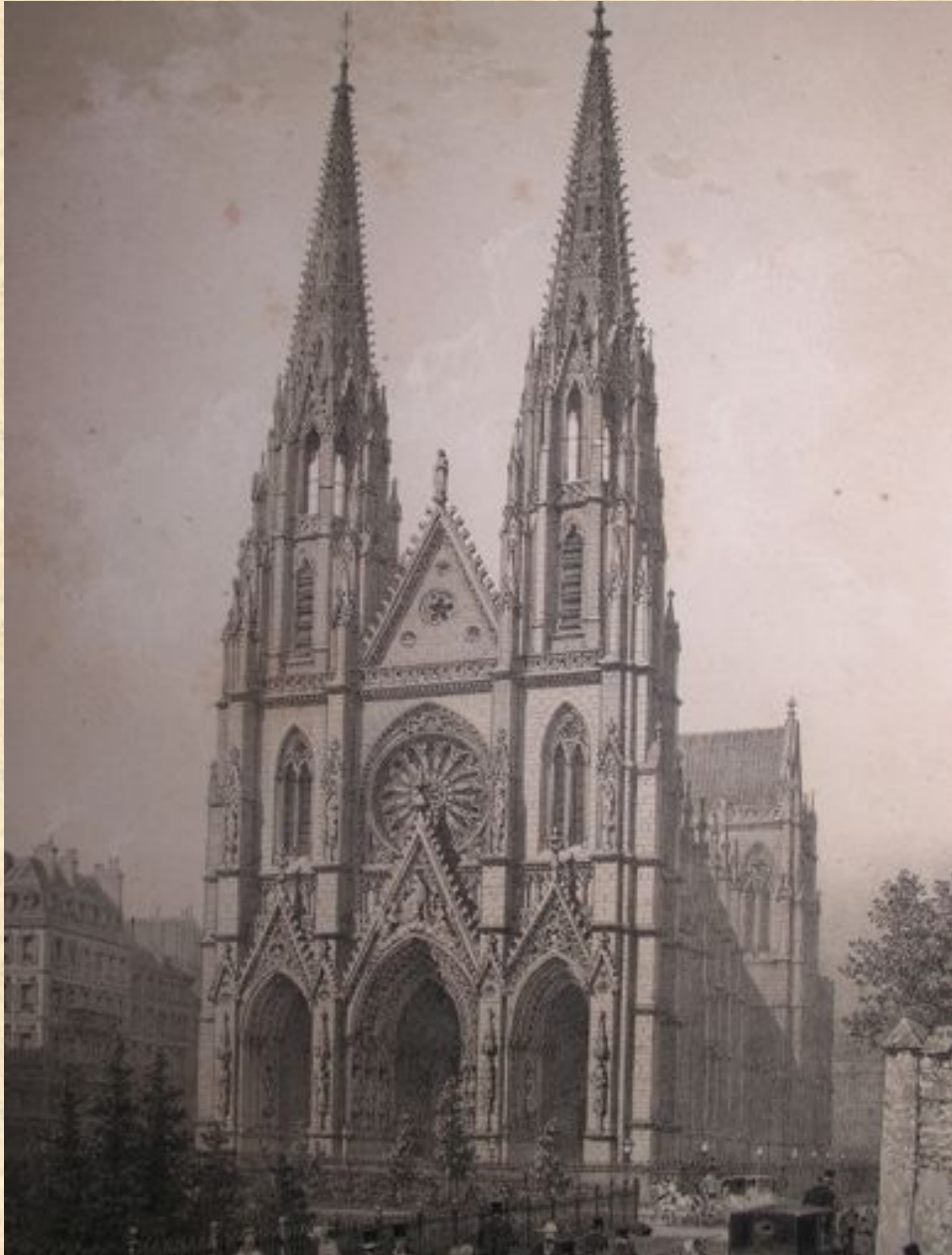
<sup>49</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>50</sup> Private conversation with the author.

<sup>51</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

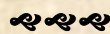


music of his glorious predecessors, César Franck and Charles Tournemire, marking the line of descent from these composers that he would always assert. Thus, he himself will become the third link in what the American musicologist Robert Sutherland Lord would later call “The Sainte-Clotilde Tradition.”<sup>52</sup>



**The Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde, 1857**

Figure 26. (lithography by Philippe Benoist, collection Marie-Louise Langlais)



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<sup>52</sup> Robert Sutherland Lord, *The Sainte-Clotilde Tradition, Toward a Definition*, taped essay sent to Jean Langlais, November 4, 1981. 7. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Professional Recognition (1945-1951)*

#### “Organiste Titulaire” at Sainte-Clotilde

Once the intense joy at the coming of peace to Europe on May 8, 1945 had abated and once his appointment as *organiste titulaire*<sup>1</sup> at Sainte-Clotilde was officially announced, Jean Langlais had to adapt to his new parish,<sup>2</sup> so different from the ones he had known previously. Notre-Dame-de-la-Croix de Ménilmontant and Saint-Pierre-de-Montrouge, big parishes with 84,000 and 64,000 parishioners respectively, had many paid extra services, weddings, and funerals. There was nothing comparable at Sainte-Clotilde, which had at most 10,500 parishioners in 1945.

Although the smallest parish in Paris, it was, however, prestigious because of its location. The neighborhood included the National Assembly, embassies, and most of the governmental ministries; its boundaries, within the 7th arrondissement, virtually coincided with the administrative center of France. All these public buildings meant that there were that many fewer apartment buildings. Sainte-Clotilde, unlike Ménilmontant and Montrouge which were largely working class neighborhoods, was the fiefdom of the French aristocracy which since the eighteenth century had chosen to live in the beautiful private mansions of the nearby Saint-Germain neighborhood. Clearly, Jean Langlais was not an aristocrat. He used to tell the following anecdote:

After having played at Sainte Clotilde for the marriage of a descendant of the Rohan-Chabot family, owners of the Bonnefontaine château,<sup>3</sup> I was invited to the post-wedding reception; it was probably the only time, by the way, that I received such an invitation from a Sainte-Clotilde parishioner.

The groom, the Count of Rohan-Chabot, thanked me in a very friendly fashion, and I said said to him : “I know your family well because it happens that my grandmother was one of the servants to your family and washed your laundry at the château.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Titulaire” does not have a direct equivalent in Anglo church systems. Being appointed *organiste titulaire* is akin to being tenured in an academic position, in which the appointment is assumed to be lifetime unless the organist chooses to leave or some other major upheaval occurs.

<sup>2</sup> It should be understood that “parish” here refers to the total population within the boundaries declared by the church and state, not the number of people attending services on a regular basis.

<sup>3</sup> Located next to La Fontenelle, Jean Langlais’ birthplace.

<sup>4</sup> The present author accompanied Jean Langlais at this reception.

I often played for the weddings or funerals of famous people, like the Murat princesses, for example, and the ceremonies were always interminable, sometimes lasting more than two hours. In a more intimate setting, in March of 1956 in the Sainte-Clotilde chapel, I played for the wedding of Jacques Chirac, future president of the French Republic, to Bernadette Chodron de Courcel, whose father, an affluent Sainte-Clotilde parishioner, wrote a superb book on the basilica, to which he added a handwritten inscription to me.<sup>5</sup>

In 1946, Canon Verdrie, who had kept Jean Langlais waiting so long to be named to Sainte-Clotilde, died. His successor, Canon Henry Hubert, was installed with great pomp on October 5, 1946 by Cardinal Suhard, who stressed the importance of the parish in his homily:

We know that this beautiful basilica extends its influence well beyond the limits of the parish which includes two train stations,<sup>6</sup> nine ministries, and numerous large administrative offices.



**Canon Henry Hubert<sup>7</sup>, curé of Sainte-Clotilde (1946-1968)**

Figure 27. (Photograph in Robert de Courcel. *La Basilique de Sainte-Clotilde* : Paris, Lescuyer, 1957. 129)

Canon Hubert was a simple man, but throughout his long tenure at Sainte-Clotilde (1946–1968) he had to carry the fatal flow (in the eyes of some snobbish parishioners) of having spent 30 years at the working-class parish of Notre-Dame-de-la-Croix de Ménilmontant, whereas Canon Verdrie had only known Saint-Louis-d’Antin and Sainte-Clotilde, both of them chic and posh.<sup>8</sup> In any case, the new priest-in-charge decided that he needed a professional choirmaster capable of handling important marriages and funerals. He therefore brought with him François Tricot, who had fulfilled these functions at his previous parish.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Chodron de Courcel. *La Basilique de Sainte-Clotilde*. Lyon: Lescuyer, 1957. On the front page of Jean Langlais’ personal copy, is the following handwritten dedication: “A Monsieur Jean Langlais, organiste du Grand Orgue de la Basilique Sainte-Clotilde et compositeur éminent, bien cordialement, Robert de Courcel, 10 novembre 1957” (collection Marie-Louise Langlais). The printed dedication is, “À Monsieur le Chanoine Henry Hubert, curé de la Basilique Sainte-Clotilde, Hommage très respectueux.”

<sup>6</sup> Gare des Invalides and Gare d’Orsay, the second later becoming the Musée d’Orsay.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Langlais dedicated his *Messe Solennelle* to him in 1949.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Tranchant. *Petite Histoire de la Paroisse Sainte-Clotilde (1935–1965)*. Paris: Sainte-Clotilde, 1996. 75.

Tricot stayed in the new position for 42 years, from 1946 to 1992, just like Jean Langlais, with whom he always got along perfectly well.

## The Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde

To understand the architectural peculiarities of Sainte-Clotilde which directly influenced the construction of the organ that was built and dedicated there in 1859, it is important to understand the history of the church's construction. It was the Municipal Council of Paris, not the archbishop of Paris, who decided to build a large new church in the Saint-Germain neighborhood in 1827; we can reasonably assume that it was essentially a political decision, given the location. It was built primarily to fill a void: although the neighborhood was one of the most religious in the capital and had a whole constellation of chapels, monasteries and convents, it had few large parish churches aside from Saint-Sulpice. Therefore a new religious edifice of grand proportions was deemed essential.

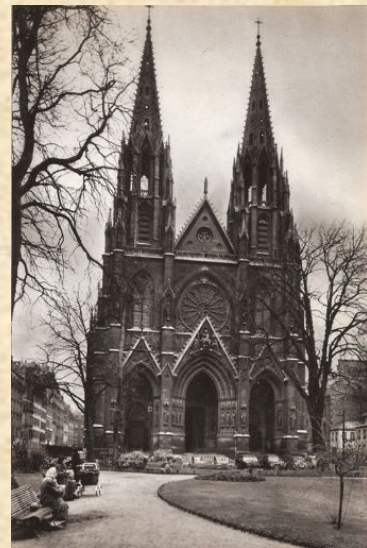
Architectural taste at the time still tended toward monumental buildings inspired by Greek art, such as the nearby Panthéon and Church of the Madeleine. But as ideas evolved, little by little the taste for medieval architecture, especially gothic, grew, and thus the first neo-gothic church in Paris was erected: Sainte-Clotilde.



**Church of La Madeleine in the Fifties**

Figure 28. (photograph by Lottman)

**Greek style**



**Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde in the Fifties**

Figure 29. (in Robert de Courcel. *La Basilique Sainte-Clotilde*)

**Neo-Gothic style**

Sainte-Clotilde was dedicated in 1857, 30 years after the decision to build it was made by the Municipal Council. Two architects were responsible: François-Chrétien Gau,<sup>9</sup> whose fame came principally from his expertise in uncovering the Pompeii ruins;<sup>10</sup> and after his death, his assistant Théodore Ballu, later celebrated for the rebuilding of the Hôtel-de-Ville in Paris. From the beginning, the new building was the butt of very strong aesthetic criticism,

<sup>9</sup> Franz-Christian Gau (1790–1853) was born in Köln, Germany.

<sup>10</sup> It was said that prefect Rambuteau, charged by the City of Paris with choosing the architect, selected François Gau, explaining that “Gothic architecture having its origins with the Goths, François Gau’s name alone is a sufficient guarantee of his fitness.” Quoted in Augustin-Joseph du Pays. “La nouvelle église Sainte-Clotilde.” *L’Illustration* 771 (5 December 1857). 371.

objecting to its “neo-gothic” qualities as well as the lack of proportion and the severity of its lines: a narrow church, topped by two rather graceless towers, a very high portal and a central rose window placed very low in the façade. Everything invited criticism and no one held back, starting with the organ builder chosen by the City of Paris, Aristide Cavallé-Coll.

Cavallé-Coll was already famous for his instruments at the Basilica of Saint-Denis (1841) and the Church of the Madeleine (1846). The Préfet de la Seine awarded him the contract for Sainte-Clotilde on 22 June 1854, when the church was far from finished.

### **The Sainte-Clotilde organ built by Aristide Cavallé-Coll**

Cavallé-Coll had to overcome the serious problems connected with the construction of the church itself: the building’s narrowness (the nave is 314 feet long, but only about 30 feet wide and 90 feet high), the excessive height of the stone loft intended for the organ, and a relatively low rose window which had to be left visible.<sup>11</sup> All these factors were obstacles to a harmonious design for the instrument.



**The Sainte-Clotilde organ case**  
Figure 30. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

Cavallé-Coll couldn’t cure the problems, but invented very bold solutions. Ignoring the stone gallery intended by the architect to be the organ loft (it was much too small), he substituted—with considerable technical prowess—an immense two-story wooden structure. The first story, situated above the main entrance door, had to support the great organ case’s main façade (the second story of the structure), the organ itself being attached to the church’s

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<sup>11</sup> This photograph (collection Marie-Louise Langlais), taken before Jean Langlais’ modification of the organ in 1963, shows the height of the rose window, partially visible above the organ. By adding an acoustic panel, Langlais would completely close off the window from view from inside the Basilica.

wall with a system of metal pillars. This part of the case and the wooden flooring under the console are thus completely suspended.<sup>12</sup>

The work was declared finished with a “final statement of work on the organ” that the builder presented to the architect Ballu on 29 August 1859.<sup>13</sup> Thus it took Aristide Cavallé-Coll five years to complete his work. His particular and very original solutions to the architectural problems would lead the first official organist, César Franck, appointed in 1859, to develop a unique style of registration, the specifics of which can be only be understood in this context.

If the organ case has a resolutely Gothic appearance with its big side-towers crowned by two finely chiselled openwork steeples reminiscent of the church’s towers, the instrument conceived by Cavallé-Coll has nothing to do with things medieval, quite the opposite. It is a wonderful example of French symphonic organ building, with its 46 stops on three 54-note manuals (C–f’’) and 27-note pedalboard (C–d’), its large proportion of 8-foot foundations (11 of the 46 stops) and reeds (14 of 46).

Certain stops of great finesse (Oboe 8’ and Voix Humaine 8’ in the Swell) lend a touch of delicacy to the organ’s broad and brilliant sounds. The distinguished voicing, entrusted to Gabriel Reinburg, is well served by the nave’s exceptionally clear acoustic.

But one has to take into account the smallness of the Swell, and César Franck understood this well: only ten stops, four of them reeds. Because of their unusual placement, at the very back of the instrument, they sound very distant. But because of a very sensitive expression pedal, the organist can make very subtle nuances with this division, which Franck didn’t ignore. One just has to listen to the sound of the organ under Charles Tournemire’s fingers to realize all the dynamic possibilities that exist between pianissimo and forte.<sup>14</sup>

The other unusual element of the disposition of the organ’s divisions is the placement of the Positif. Situated in the front-middle of the case, it is as loud as the Great to which it, in fact, acts as a complement, each having 14 stops.

As Robert Martin writes:

Being forced to fit the two bellows for the Great into the side towers, Cavallé-Coll *ipso facto* favored the Positif, placed ideally in the front-center of the case, thus very present, creating an entirely new effect as the Positif was as loud as the Great.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, the reeds (16’, 8’, 4’ on the Great, and 8’, 4’ on the Positif) had the same power if not the same colors, which meant that Franck, in the Andante of his “Grande Pièce Symphonique” could have the swell foundations and reeds accompany a solo on the Positif Cromorne, Bourdon and Flûte 8’, unthinkable on most instruments from this era. Relatively small, with its 46 stops, the instrument sounded magnificent, amplified by the

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Martin. *Les Grandes Orgues de la Basilique Sainte-Clotilde, essai historique et technique*. Unpublished typescript, 1993. 125 (collection Marie-Louise Langlais).

<sup>13</sup> Fenner Douglass, *Cavallé-Coll and the Musicians*, Volume 1, Sunbury Press: Raleigh, 1980. 134.

<sup>14</sup> Recordings made by Polydor in 1930, re-issued on CDs as volume one of *Orgues et Organistes Français du XXe siècle*, 5 volumes. (EMI Classics, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Martin, op. cit. 31.

nave's dimensions: height, narrowness, and length. It is certain that Franck composed at least eight of his "Douze Pièces pour grand orgue" with the Sainte-Clotilde organ in mind.<sup>16</sup>

The most beautiful rendering of the Sainte-Clotilde organ's console, unquestionably, is in a famous painting by Jeanne Rongier,<sup>17</sup> showing the perfect harmony between César Franck and his instrument.



**Cesar Franck at the console of Sainte-Clotilde, 1888**

Figure 31. (painting by Jeanne Rongier. Photograph in collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

The organ remained virtually unchanged for 74 years, but in 1933 Charles Tournemire declared that the organ demanded constant care. A "pious" refurbishment was decided upon "because of the poor condition of the whole instrument".

Even though he greatly admired the organ, he wanted to correct certain defects, above all the ranges of the keyboards (54 notes) and the pedalboard (27 notes), which he found much too narrow for a demanding twentieth-century composer such as himself.

On the other hand, he deplored the gaping hole in the stoplist, that of mutations, especially the cornets needed for old music, which he admired; and he found the Swell poor without mutations and mixtures.

He took advantage of the deterioration of the instrument, with insufficient wind, to make major changes, adding ten stops, six of them in the Positif, thus getting close to an organ that was clearer, more complete than in the past, the ideals extolled by people like André Marchal and the Amis de l'Orgue.

<sup>16</sup> We exclude the "Final" from the *Six Pièces*, obviously composed for a much larger organ than Sainte-Clotilde's, and the *Trois Pièces* written specifically for the inauguration of the Trocadéro organ in 1878.

<sup>17</sup> Jeanne Rongier (1852–1934), French painter close to the Barbizon school.

This is how he explained himself at the re-dedication of the organ:

The addition of ten new stops and the extension of the keyboards (from 54 to 61 notes) and pedal (from 27 to 32) demanded the greatest circumspection... This enrichment is justified by my concern with fully serving, in all good conscience, the art of the organ from the thirteenth century to our time. Further, I didn't stop myself from dreaming of future possibilities.<sup>18</sup>

To be historically faithful, he chose the Cavallé-Coll firm to carry out the work, directed by the very young Joseph Beuchet, assisted by Michel Mertz as voicer.

The Sainte-Clotilde organ was surely the first Cavallé-Coll in the history of the twentieth-century French organ to have taken the “neo-classic” route, in Tournemire's sense of the word, lightening it without eliminating Cavallé-Coll's rich sonorous fabric.

### Jean Langlais and the Sainte-Clotilde organ in 1945

This, then, was the organ that Jean Langlais inherited in 1945: a Cavallé-Coll, still with mechanical action, but “classicalized,” and its original balance modified by the addition of 10 stops and with the enlargement of the swell-box, which had become too small for the 16 stops that had replaced Cavallé-Coll's 10.

Basically, the new stops were a Cornet on the Great; a Piccolo and Tierce on the Positif; a Bombarde 16' and both mutations and mixtures in the Swell. Another balance change: the Positif's assertive Cromhorne was moved to the Swell, where, in coming under expression, it took the name Clarinette. This is not to mention the modified pressures, the added top notes to the manuals and pedal (including some new super octaves in the pedal), and of course, a new console to take all these additions into account.<sup>19</sup>

We are led to wonder if Tournemire, pulled in opposite directions by his devotion to Cavallé-Coll and Franck and by the wish to leave his personal modern composer's mark, had doubts about irreversibly denaturing the balance Cavallé-Coll wanted by his enlargement of Sainte-Clotilde's organ. Surely not, since in his eyes the only thing that mattered was the higher ideal: to serve Art.

Still, after the inauguration of the organ in 1933, the critics—muted before—multiplied. It was left to his successor, Jean Langlais, to face the consequences after he assumed the position in 1945. Jean Langlais was not bothered by these aesthetic concerns about organ building. What mattered above all to him, as it had to his predecessors César Franck and Charles Tournemire, was the inspiration that the prestigious instrument gave him to continue his organ work. And from the outset, with *Fête* (Celebration), the first organ piece composed after the war, in 1946, Jean Langlais expresses an enormous joy, joy to be past the horrendous wartime, and joy finally to be at Sainte-Clotilde. Deeply admiring of the art of his predecessors, he was determined to continue on their path.

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Tournemire, *Inauguration du grand orgue de la basilique Sainte-Clotilde de Paris* (dedication program, June 30, 1933, collection Marie-Louise Langlais). The 1859 and 1933 specifications are listed in this program.

<sup>19</sup> Tournemire gave the original César Franck's old console (whether or not he had the right to do so) to his friend, the Belgian organist and composer Flor Peeters. Since 1991, it is the property of the musical instrument museum (Vleeshuis) in Antwerp, Belgium, inventory no. AV 991.05.





First photograph of Jean Langlais at the console of Sainte-Clotilde, 1945

Figure 32. (Collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

*Ouest-France*, one of the most important French dailies, greeted his appointment with the headline, “**After Franck, Pierné, Tournemire, a Breton: Jean Langlais is organist at the Sainte-Clotilde Basilica.**” The reporter introduced the new official organist in this way:

The little door, hidden on the left of Sainte-Clotilde basilica’s neo-gothic peristyle, opens to a narrow spiral staircase. I climbed the seventy stone steps, and there I was in the loft of the celebrated organ, celebrated for its musical qualities but above-all because it was played for more than thirty years by César Franck, then by Gabriel Pierné, and finally until 1939 by Charles Tournemire. A little forty year old<sup>20</sup> man sat where Franck composed and registered so many masterpieces. He wore dark glasses, but these glasses didn’t change the expressivity of his face. He is a Breton.

How could it be that the little boy from La Fontenelle near Antrain, from a modest family, becoming completely blind at the age of three, is official organist in this loft which enjoys immense prestige in the world?<sup>21</sup>

Then follows an interview with the new organist that traces his musical development; his studies with Marchal, Dupré, Dukas and Tournemire, his previous positions in Ménilmontant and Montrouge, and his appointment at Sainte-Clotilde. And the reporter concludes:

And now, to make me appreciate the infinite variety of this organ, the most beautiful in the world for Tournemire, Jean Langlais improvises on a popular Breton noel for me. The instrument’s fullness was moving and gave me shivers. Langlais’ playing is by turns mysterious, scintillating, and sumptuously forceful. This master who does honor to Brittany, also honors Franck and Tournemire, whose photos, the only decoration in this loft, animate the somber woodwork. Jean Langlais leaves me. Alone in Paris with his

<sup>20</sup> Actually, he was 38 years old at this time.

<sup>21</sup> Valmarin, *Ouest-France*. December 23, 1945 (collection Marie-Louise Langlais).

white cane, for he has an independent spirit above all; he is going home to his wife and two little children.

Visitors came up to the loft in numbers, to hear the new organist and congratulate him. For example, this is what Maurice Duruflé wrote in the guest book kept on the organ's console:

To my dear friend Jean Langlais, with hearty congratulations on becoming the official organist of this magnificent instrument, and all my joy that he is a worthy successor to César Franck and Charles Tournemire.<sup>22</sup>

But in addition to Sainte-Clotilde, what exactly were Jean Langlais' musical concerns in the post-war period? We find some examples in this letter to Melchior and Christiane de Lisle, his friends then living in Cameroon and to whom he gives news of the musical world:

Paris, January 7, 1946

Dear Friends,

Still no organ appointment at St-François-Xavier.<sup>23</sup>

I think you have all the organ news, except of my *Première Symphonie* (Hérelle) written after my first failure at Ste-Clotilde.

As for chamber music, the other day I heard Webern, a student of Schoenberg, recently assassinated by a Nazi,<sup>24</sup> who seemed to me a great talent. Unfortunately Stravinsky's wartime productions seem to me uninteresting, as are those of Darius Milhaud. On the other hand, I recommend the strong personalities of Tibor Harsanyi and Martinu. We were rewarded with a good number of Soviet works, including Shostakovich's renowned "*Stalingrad*" *Symphony*; I don't remember much of note in all that, and to my knowledge the greatest glory of the Soviets is the major talent Prokofiev, who has been living in Paris for a long time. Keep in mind the "*Moscow*" *Symphony* by Tournemire, which has some surprising moments; but especially as a "great event," let us remember well the *Visions de l'Amen* by Messiaen, large pieces for two pianos, a work of genius in my opinion. Also keep in mind this great fellow's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* [Quartet for the End of Time] for clarinet, violin, viola, cello,<sup>25</sup> written while in captivity,<sup>26</sup> *Trois Petites liturgies* for orchestra and women's voices, and *Vingt Regards sur l'enfant Jésus* for piano (lasting two hours and forty minutes). We congratulate you on the enlargement of your family; ours now also has a new member in the person of a young Claude, two years old. Everything you tell us about your life is very interesting; ours is unremarkable. We spent the whole war in Paris, including the most moving moment, which was the arrival of the Allies. On the whole, events were fairly positive for us. Come home as soon as possible and stay for as long as possible; with our faithful remembrance.

Jean Langlais

26 rue Duroc VIIe

PS: Dupré has three new pieces dedicated to the Virgin being published (Bornemann), and I just wrote a new piece for Gray in New York (started the 4th, it will be finished the 8th).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> November 7, 1949 (collection Marie-Louise Langlais).

<sup>23</sup> It would go to Gaston Litaize in May of the same year, as offered by Msgr Chevrot, the priest-in-charge. Litaize kept this position for 44 years, until his death in August 1991, three months after Langlais.

<sup>24</sup> Actually, Webern was wrongly shot by an American soldier while smoking a cigar outside his home during the Allied occupation of Austria four months after the end of the war. It was decades later that the seemingly true story emerged.

<sup>25</sup> The instrumentation is actually piano, violin, clarinet, and cello: what was available to him while a prisoner.

<sup>26</sup> Messiaen was captured at Verdun in 1940 and was imprisoned in Stalag VIII-A in Görlitz, an actual boarder between Germany and Poland.

<sup>27</sup> The collection of letters from Jean Langlais to Melchior and Christiane de Lisle were returned to Marie-Louise Langlais after the death of Mrs. de Lisle (1913-2009). She was, among other things, assistant to Olivier Messiaen at La Trinité from 1951 to 1961. The composition mentioned in the post scriptum was *Fête*, and the comment makes it clear how rapidly it had been composed.

## Radio Music

Upon the Liberation, French radio broadcast was fundamentally changed at the Libération and the musical direction was entrusted to composer and musicologist Henry Barraud. An enthusiastic and indefatigable man, he divided his new domain into a multitude of areas; among these were religious music (Sunday services and organ recitals) under the direction of Gaston Litaize, and incidental music headed by the composer Henri Dutilleux, whose duties included commissioning original music for radio broadcast.

In 1946, Dutilleux asked Jean Langlais to set to music a “Mystère” by the poet Jean Cayrol, entitled *Le Diable qui n'est à personne* (The Devil Who Belongs to Nobody). In his introduction to the broadcast Étienne Lalou emphasized the importance of this work:

Today, the characters of the medieval mystery with their truculence and naïveté seem to us to be simultaneously colorful and as out of date as *Images d'Épinal*,<sup>28</sup> with their truculence and naïveté; nevertheless, to the eyes and ears of people at the time they evoked a profound reality that formed the substance of their life. In trying to touch our very different profound reality, we who are still shaken after a horrifying ordeal, Jean Cayrol revived the same spirit as the Mystery of the Middle Ages.

French Radio is proud to create a work of this importance. It is proud that a musician like Jean Langlais, actors like Berthe Bovy, Pierre Renoir, Jean Vilar, and so many others have assisted in erecting this monument.<sup>29</sup>

In reading the score—the music was approximately half the total length of the work—it is easy to imagine the thankless labor of the composer, confined by a strait-jacket of discontinuous but strictly timed sections (sometimes extremely brief, five seconds for example), even though he had a large orchestra at his disposition, with strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion, choir, harp and ondes Martenot. This production obviously pleased the authorities at the Radio, since a short time later, the office of Musical Illustrations again asked Jean Langlais to collaborate on *La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier* after Flaubert.

Once again, the composer found himself required to write disconnected musical passages (17 in all), separated by spoken text. This piece, in which the music only lasted about ten minutes, was broadcast on March 8, 1948. For his third such collaboration, Jean Langlais launched into a much more ambitious undertaking than the previous ones: 45 minutes of music for a text by Albert Vidalie about Saint Francis of Assisi, *Le Soleil se lève sur Assise* (The Sun Rises on Assisi).

This time, each musical section has a title and form that are so autonomous than one could imagine the music standing on its own, without the text. Actually, in subsequent rebroadcasts, the play was presented without music, and one time even with music by a different composer! The titles of the scenes are as follows:

1. The Sorrows of the War
2. Choirs of the Angels and Countryside of Assisi

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<sup>28</sup> “Épinal prints” were 19<sup>th</sup> century images that were a commonplace in France and later fostered a term for simplistic depictions.

<sup>29</sup> Étienne Lalou. “La Création du *Diable qui n'est à personne*.” *Radio 46* (Lyon), February 7, 1947. A recording of this modern Mystery is preserved at the Phonothèque de l'Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA) in Paris.

3. Song of the Soldier and Military Rhythm
4. The Beautiful Dream-Arms
5. Rustic Dance
6. The Blood of War
7. The Sun of Love
8. The Prayer of Francis
9. Interlude and March
10. Francis's Grand Prayer
11. Sister Tourterelle and the Apparition of the Leper
12. The Kiss to the Leper
13. Hymn to Creatures
14. Saint Francis March
15. Simple and Pure Love

The 109-page manuscript, some of whose pages have less than 17 staves, constantly contrasts two groups: full orchestra, with woodwinds, six-part brass, strings, percussion, and three ondes Martenot; and "small" orchestra with just strings and woodwinds, while the male chorus only joins the full orchestra for the overture and final. This concluding section is spectacular, mixing the Maundy Thursday Gregorian melody, "Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est" sung fortissimo by the male chorus, with the orchestra.

*Le Soleil se lève sur Assise* was broadcast for the first time on Saturday, December 30, 1950, and received a number of reviews in the press, such as this one:

Here is one of the summits of the art of the microphone, both artistically perfect and moving on the human level. The perfect production by Jean-Jacques Vierre, the beautiful music by Jean Langlais, and the performance, dominated by Serge Reggiani's Francis, come together to enhance the beauty and the grandeur of an exceptional work.<sup>30</sup>

30 years later, Olivier Messiaen, starting with the same figure of Saint Francis of Assisi, created his only opera, *Saint-François d'Assise*, which premiered on November 28, 1983 at the Paris Opera, and to which he invited Jean Langlais. Langlais' version was certainly more modest, from the perspective of 50 years later, but the choice of subject shows a similar approach by these two composers who were so devoted to faith.<sup>31</sup>

In 1951, those in charge of religious programming at the Radio had the idea for Christmas to have *Le Mystère de Noël* (The Mystery of Christmas), a poetic text by Loys Masson, set to music by five composers: Claude Arrieu, Elsa Barraine, Daniel-Lesur, Raymond Gallois-Montbrun, and Jean Langlais. Each of these artists was to illustrate a different episode from the Gospel: the annunciation, going to Bethlehem, the nativity, the adoration, the flight into Egypt, the massacre of the innocents.

The last two parts were assigned to Jean Langlais. Unlike Langlais' previous three radio contributions, the music in *Le Mystère de Noël* largely overrides spoken text. The solo singers and female choir sing and speak, according to the plot, following and commenting on the action, on the model made famous by Arthur Honegger in his 1921 oratorio *King David*. The

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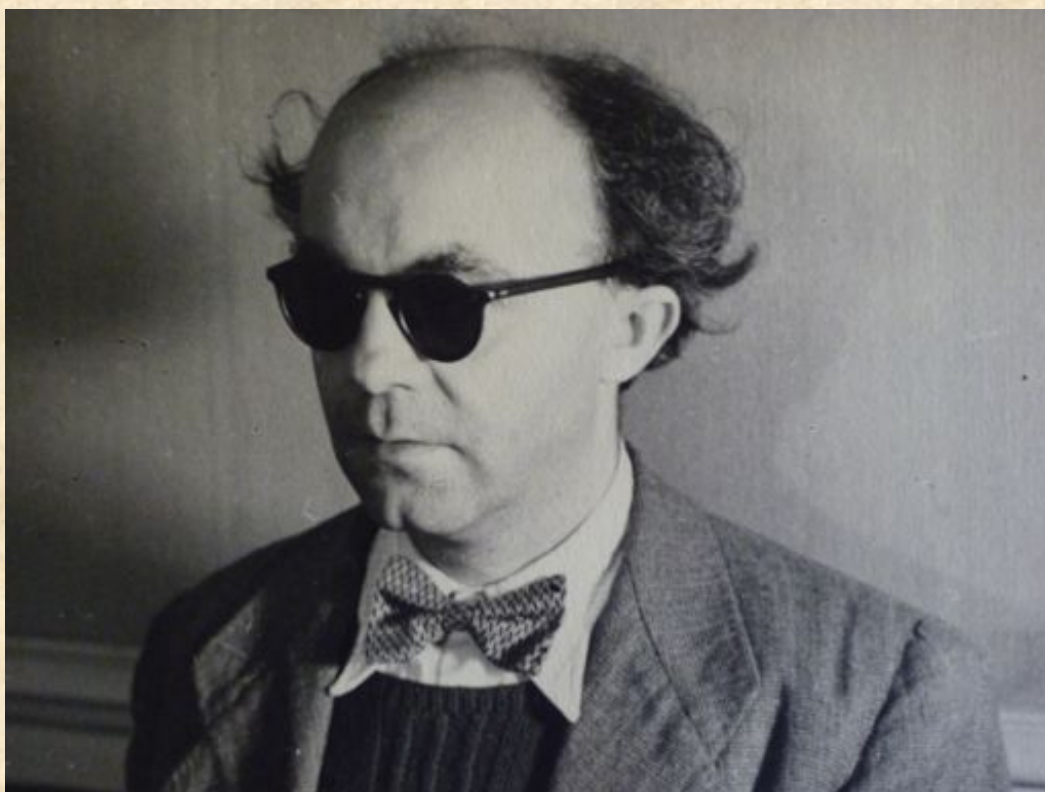
<sup>30</sup> Roger Richard. "Le Soleil se lève sur Assise." *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision: hebdomadaire catholique des auditeurs et des spectateurs*, November 18, 1951 (collection Marie-Louise Langlais).

<sup>31</sup> Let us not forget *Il Poverello di Assisi*, five lyric pieces in seven scenes, the last major work composed by Charles Tournemire in 1937-1939, just before his death.

Gregorian hymn “*Maria mater gratiae*,” in honor of the Virgin Mary, serves as a Leitmotiv for the 76 pages of the manuscript of *La Fuite en Egypte* (The Flight Into Egypt) and *Le Massacre des Innocents* (The Massacre of the Innocents). Thus Mary, represented by her hymn, figures as the main character in these episodes of the Nativity story. We will find exactly the same idea a few years later, in Jean Langlais’ 1958 *La Passion*, where contrary to tradition, he gives the primary vocal part to Mary rather than to Christ. This Marian vision of Christ’s Passion, completely original, corresponds well with the composer’s deep beliefs: in his personal faith, Mary was the central figure.

In just five years, between 1946 and 1951, Langlais was asked four times by French Broadcasting to write the music for radio plays on religious subjects. Clearly he was perceived at the time as a specialist in sacred music.

### **The Grand Suites for organ**



**Jean Langlais, 1947**

Figure 33. (photograph in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais)

At the same time, Jean Langlais was impatient to create large frescos for organ, and his new organ at Sainte-Clotilde was to supply many occasions. But what was the state of the organ world in the post-World War II era? Langlais wrote a long article in May of 1947 giving a detailed and optimistic picture of the organ at the period, but he also warns against certain tendencies that seemed to him to be dangerous and against which he battled all his life:

### Some Reflections on the Modern Organ

To witness the increasingly important role that the organ plays in the French musical literature of our time is great consolation. For 40 years the number of artists who dedicate their lives to the study of this great instrument has continually grown, and the era in which only two or three organists surpassed all the others is over.

In France there is a veritable host of eminent virtuosos which never stops asserting itself and increasing; their dominant characteristics are precision in execution, great care with timbre, and in all areas, soberness. We should also be mindful of the comforting homage often paid to the modern French school from abroad. It should be emphasized that this school counts among its members an overwhelming majority of composers, and because of their talents, in our opinion, it is no longer possible to divide musical production into two distinct parts, the music of composers and the music of organists. In fact, in addition to their organ works, the majority of them have had brilliant success in a variety of musical activity. On the other hand, I note that some of the great non-organist masters of our time have been drawn by the numerous resources of the pipe organ and have made contributions to enrich its literature.

An informed and larger public eagerly attends organ concerts and reads whatever is written about the instrument. French radio has considerably enlarged the number of organ broadcasts, and its efforts to improve them continues unflaggingly.

It is only our great orchestral conductors who still seem to be poorly informed of the immense possibilities right at their doorstep; but they do have the excuse that their concert halls don't have the equivalent of the grand instruments that are the pride of our churches and of French organ building.

Under pressure from a very small number, albeit genuine, friends of the organ, a new orientation to organ building is trying to assert itself. Its essential characteristics are to minimize the foundation stops and maximize the mixtures, both to an extreme;<sup>32</sup> the justification for these two tendencies, according their propagators, is to return to the concepts of the old masters. It is not possible, in a simple article, to develop all the necessary arguments for a real rebuttal about such an aesthetic matter that has potential consequences for the performance of Romantic, Modern, and future works.

In my opinion, and in that of the large majority of my colleagues, it is extremist to consider mixtures as a goal in and of themselves. Their scintillating effect is as precious as it is necessary, but their ill-considered profusion in an organ stoplist seems to me as regrettable as their extreme rarity would be.

Similarly, it seems to me that to play complicated polyphony on a registration in which the fundamental is insufficient (an eight-foot bourdon, for example) is regrettable and ends up disappearing under the avalanche of mixtures.

Is the argument that a *plein-jeu*, a composed mixture, is a clarifying element, is that argument irrefutable?

One doesn't have to be particularly well versed in organ matters to know that what's called a "*plein-jeu*" comprises the fifth, the fundamental, and a doubling of the fundamental. There could be several fifths and several octaves according to the composition of the registration. Let's take the chord of C-E-G. The C produces the fifth G, E the fifth B, and G the fifth D. If, then, a registration includes several *pleins-jeux*, the sound of the foreign pitches is more and more perceptible, and in my opinion, the polyphony loses its precision. We must also highlight the confusion caused by repeating composed mixtures, especially when it comes to the cymbale; these repetitions create overlaps, crossings, sonorities which make a low voice sound with higher pitches than the upper part, etc.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> This is the opening salvo of a lifetime war that Langlais waged against what he would later call *le baroqueisme*.

<sup>33</sup> Published in *Musique et radio* 38: 432 (May, 1947). 133–135.

Armed with these certainties, he went ahead to put his convictions into practice and in a remarkably short period of time composed his best known suites.

• *Suite brève* (1947)

Langlais started writing for the organ in 1947 with a *Suite brève*, the first of his first large “Suites” for organ, published by Bornemann, who had already brought out his *Neuf Pièces*.

His model for a traditional suite was a succession of at least four contrasting movements (slow-fast-slow-fast). The *Suite brève* conforms more or less to this scheme, since the majestic “Grands jeux” at the beginning is followed by a “Cantilène” theme and variations, then a melancholy “Plainte,” gives way to an impetuous rondo entitled “Dialogue sur les mixtures.”

But if his titles refer to the classic French organ style, he only rarely pays attention to historical meanings, which were not normally considered important at that time: his “Grands jeux” mixes foundations, reeds, and mixtures (an incongruous combination in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), while his “Dialogue sur les mixtures” should be a dialogue literally on the mixtures, not with the reeds that the Langlais score stipulates. Couperin and his contemporaries used the term “dialogue” for flutes or reeds, not mixtures.

Langlais made his thoughts clear about “old music,” typical of the organists at that time, when he wrote:

Corrette, in his 1703 edition, suggests playing a fugue with the following registration: “Manual 1: bourdon, prestant, trumpet; Manual 2: bourdon, prestant or montre and cromorne.”

And to top it off, he asks for the manuals to be coupled. Can anyone reasonably imagine such a disparate combination? It is easily tempting and easy to show that the historic registrations sound bad, and that such precedents are not always to be followed.<sup>34</sup>

So, in 1947 Jean Langlais knew historic registrations, but couldn’t think of them as “reasonable.” Caring so little about historic accuracy in terms of registration, he also had no intention of making a harmonic pastiche of the classics, which is evident in the four movements, each of which speaks a different musical language.

Firstly, the “Grands jeux,” inspired by excerpt 11 in *Le Diable qui n’est à personne*, composed for the Radio not long before, has a penchant for a major triad in root position and the use of C major on full organ, illustrating Henry Barraud’s comment :

Although we are today, after four centuries, a little jaded about the plenitude of C major, if not tired of it, it still has a certain power of fascination.

Witness moments in the music of the musician who can be considered the first assassin of the tonal system, Richard Wagner, who in the prelude to *Das Rheingold* doesn’t hesitate to submerge us for 46 measures in the three notes of a major triad.

These three sounds. Nothing more, nothing less. It’s true that it is the beginning of the tetralogy [the *Ring des Nibelungen*]. He had plenty of time ahead of him!<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 135.

<sup>35</sup> Henry Barraud. *Pour comprendre les musiques d’aujourd’hui*. Paris: Seuil, 1968. 22–23.

In the second movement of the *Suite brève*, “Cantilène,” also an organ version of a section of *Le Diable qui n’est à personne* (section 15), modality dominates, derived from the old Breton song that serves as the theme, which Langlais harmonizes according to his mode (Dorian transposed to F-sharp minor).

Although this movement is totally a slave to the melody, the composer plays all sorts of contrapuntal games and enjoys constantly modulating, without ever changing the original modal scale, a technique that he was to use throughout his life; the registration gives the theme to the pedals using the octave coupler to the Swell’s Oboe 8’, a registration that could seem odd but is explained by the fact that at the time four-foot pedal reeds in France were usually powerful clarions, not soft stops.

The third section of the *Suite brève*, “Plainte,” plays the role of a slow movement, immediately announcing itself with a pronounced Franckian chromaticism. For the third time, Langlais uses a theme previously found in the first Dance (*Trois Danses* for Orchestra, 1944) and in the twentieth section of *Le Diable qui n’est à personne* (1946). The registration, the Great’s soft foundations 8’ and 16’ with the Swell’s Voix Humaine and tremolo coupled, accentuates expressiveness, especially at Sainte-Clotilde where this combination has a profundity and mystery without equal. Tournemire used this color frequently in his published music and improvisations.

With the fourth movement of the collection, “Dialogue sur les mixtures,” the composer recaptures the verve and energy of *Fête*, with a rondo in which the C-major refrain alternates with three couplets (in G major, G minor, and E major). As in *Fête*, Langlais places a short meditative passage with solo cornet in the middle of the movement, before returning to the dynamic, fast refrain. The echo effects in this pirouette finale are a reference to classic dialogues.

### • *Suite médiévale* (1947)

With the previous work barely finished, the composer added a second “suite” for organ, this time entirely liturgical, as the subtitle specifies: *Suite médiévale* “en forme de messe basse.” Dedicated to his first organ teacher, André Marchal, it is divided into five movements with the following double titles:

Prélude (Entrée)  
Tiento (Offertoire)  
Improvisation (Elévation)  
Méditation (Communion)  
Acclamations (sur le texte des Acclamations Carolingiennes)

Gaston Litaize explained the two categories of Sunday Masses at the beginning of the 1950s in France :

During this era, the organist at the main organ normally played two Sunday Masses:  
1) The “Grand Messe,” which involved a processional, an offertory, often an elevation, a communion, and a postlude; in addition he alternated with the choir for verses of plainchant for the Ordinary (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei); they sang a verse and the organ commented on it, changing registrations for each verset.  
2) The “Messe Basse,” where the organist could virtually play a recital. With everything spoken in a low voice [“à voix basse,” hence “Messe basse”], this is what happened: the priest left the sacristy; the organist played a procession, which lasted until the Gospel



reading, then came the sermon. The organ then resumed and didn't stop until there was no one left in the church. So one could easily play a complete *Choral* by Franck.<sup>36</sup>

The sub-title of the *Suite médiévale* (“in the form of a low Mass”) and the shortness of each of its movements allowed it to be used both for a low and high Mass, and nothing prevents us from even imagining it as concert music.

Clearly, in this “Suite,” Langlais followed the formula devised by Charles Tournemire in his 51 Offices in *L'Orgue Mystique*, which takes the Gregorian themes appropriate for each service as a point of departure, creating a suite of five pieces, always in this order:

Prelude to the introit  
Offertory  
Elevation  
Communion  
Closing piece

This is exactly the organization of Langlais' *Suite médiévale*, except that unlike Tournemire he didn't try to create a service with the themes appropriate to the feast-day (Easter, Epiphany, Assumption, etc.).

On the contrary, Langlais chose plainchant melodies from various liturgical services. We have suggested, with regard to the *Suite brève*, that its diverse elements came to the fore, mixing neo-classicism, chromaticism, modality, and tonality.

With the *Suite médiévale*, it is more appropriate to speak of a « neo-medieval » aesthetic, made explicit in the title as well as in the first measures of the Prelude where successions of parallel fourths and fifths for a long time inevitably evoke the Notre-Dame School. Rhythmically, Langlais worked out multiple changes of meter, alternating 2/4 with 7/8, 3/8, and 9/8; but realizing the cumbersomeness of that system, for the “Tiento,” the second piece, he used 0 as the time signature, explaining in a note, “The sign 0 means that the length of measures is variable, but the relative values of the notes are literal.” He used this system in movements 2, 3, and 4 of this Suite and in a number of later works.

The “Tiento” is sub-titled “Offertoire” to make clear its placement in the service. Here Langlais honors the Spanish masters of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, using a genre with similarities to the Italian *ricercar*. A four-voiced fugato (SATB) with successive expositions, more and more closely spaced, is punctuated by three insertions of the Kyrie “fons bonitas” in the Pedal on a soft 8' reed or flute 8', 4' to make it clear.

The third movement of the *Suite médiévale*, the calm and meditative “Improvisation-Élévation,” briefly introduces the intonation “Adoro Te,” one of the best known and most frequently sung melodies in the Gregorian repertory. In so isolating a short Gregorian fragment, Langlais gave it an unexpected magnitude, which Father Giraud perceived when he wrote, “To the extent that a Gregorian citation loses importance in length, it gains interest by being merely a small gem in its frame.”

The fourth piece, “Méditation,” along with the final “Acclamations,” is one of the most fully developed pieces in the collection, in length as well as complexity, intended for Communion. Jean Langlais symbolizes this

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<sup>36</sup> Conversation with the author.

singularly important liturgical moment with two appropriate plainchants, treated separately and then together, following a technique derived from César Franck. Thus we hear “Ubi caritas” and then “Jesu dulcis memoria,” both presented in a unique color: Bourdon, Nasard, and Tierce for the first, and Bourdons 16’, 8’, and 4’ for the second.

The “Acclamations (on the words of the Carolingian Acclamations),” the last movement of the *Suite médiévale*, is a perfect example of what Langlais could create for a grandiose and majestic postlude at Mass. The composer takes the “Laudes Regiae” (the Carolingian Acclamations) as a base, repeating constantly the melody for the words “Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat” (Christ has overcome, Christ reigns, Christ commands) in a powerful litany alternating with “exaudi Christi,” a fragment from the same chant. Once he has established the characteristic Gregorian cell (“Christus vincit”), Langlais animates the whole piece in an almost obsessive fashion, using an ascending harmonic progression that he favored when he wanted to create tension. Thus we find “Christus vincit” successively in F, G, A, to which “Christus imperat” responds in the pedal in F, F-sharp, and then G. Towards the end of the piece, when everything seems to have been said, Langlais introduces a pedal carillon in long notes (C-F-G-D) which is superimposed on the “Christus vincit” litany and whose peal, in counterpoint with the chant, closes the piece with blazing full organ. In writing this ringing of the bells, Langlais was thinking of the bells of the Reims Cathedral, where French kings were crowned in the Medieval period, as he explained to the present author.

Father Patrick Giraud summarized the liturgical aspects of the *Suite médiévale* as follows:

As Jean Langlais well knows, the role of the organist during a service is to help the faithful in their prayers, not to distract them, to improvise on the choir’s singing to give the “musical climate” or to prolong a meditative chant, such as at the Offertory.

And when it isn’t a question of either a prelude or a postlude [to a sung chant], as in a *messe basse*, he chooses appropriate themes, simple and familiar, very evocative because of the associated words; and he doesn’t impose them on the faithful in learned forms in which the musical interest is dominant, but rather in supple paraphrases, often delicate improvisations during which, as if by chance, he inserts the selected text.

In the sumptuous Prélude of the *Suite médiévale*, he discretely announces the Asperges which will soon be sung; at the Elevation, he stimulates the faithful’s adoration in delicately suggesting the words of the “Adoro te” to them, and his preaching is as good as a young priest’s vigorous admonition!

At the Communion, he meditates on an antiphon from the Holy Thursday service, “Ubi caritas,” which he joins with the “Jesu dulcis memoria.” And he sends the faithful off with a big joyful litany on “Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat,” which he offers them for their day.<sup>37</sup>

### • *Suite française* (1948)

How can we not think that Langlais’ appointment to Sainte-Clotilde was a powerful catalyst for creating organ music, when we see that barely had he finished the *Suite médiévale* in 1947 than he set to work on the *Suite française*, completed in January of 1948.

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<sup>37</sup> Father Patrick Giraud. *Le Thème grégorien dans les œuvres pour orgue de Jean Langlais*. Thesis, Institut Grégorien de Paris, July 1, 1964.

Dedicated “to my friend and student, Pierre Denis,”<sup>38</sup> the *Suite française* is the opposite of the *Suite médiévale* in the sense that it has no preoccupation with liturgy and shows the composer’s willingness always to take the opposite stance from his preceding works, following the principle dictated by Paul Dukas in the composition class at the Conservatory: “A composer should always give the lie to his reputation.”<sup>39</sup> This Suite is divided into 10 movements:

1. Prélude sur les grands jeux
2. Nazard
3. Contrepoint sur les jeux d’anche
4. Française
5. Choral sur la voix humaine
6. Arabesque sur les flûtes
7. Méditation sur les jeux de fonds
8. Trio
9. Voix céleste
10. Final rhapsodique

Conceived in the same spirit as the classic French organ suite, this new collection attempts to breathe new life into the genre that was so popular in the early eighteenth century with composers such as Clérambault, Dumage, and Guilain.

But if the *Suite française* conforms to the old organ model in the sense of being a collection of brief pieces that explore a variety of tone colors (« Voix céleste », « Nazard »), the title of the last piece, “Final rhapsodique,” brings us clearly into the symphonic and post-symphonic world.

The “Prélude sur les grands jeux” immediately announces its color, registered by Langlais with a combination of foundations, mixtures, and reeds, as he had done the year before in the “Grands jeux” from the *Suite brève*, even though the classic grand jeu uses reeds and cornets.

It must be said that at the time only a few initiates, led by Jean Fellot and Edouard Souberbielle (the teacher of Michel Chapuis and André Isoir at the École César Franck) were concerned with historic registrations whose rugged sounds shocked most organists in that era, including Jean Langlais. Moreover, there is another departure: in French Baroque practice, the “Prélude” would be played majestically on a *plein jeu* (foundations and mixtures) and not as a brilliant toccata on full organ. These differences let us know immediately that the *Suite française* transcends its model.

The “Nazard” is much closer to the spirit of Couperin or Clérambault, a successful translation of a color (solo Bourdon 8’ and 2 2/3’) of Baroque “récit de nazard.”

The “Contrepoint sur des jeux d’anche,” on the other hand, doesn’t have any particular precedent in classic French organ literature. To begin with, the reeds here (bassoon, oboe, and clarinette) were unknown to the old masters.

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<sup>38</sup> Pierre Denis was Langlais’ student, friend and biographer, and from 1945 the primary substitute at the Sainte-Clotilde organ. Notably, he wrote a long chronicle of Jean Langlais’ life in the series “Les Organistes français d’aujourd’hui” in *L’Orgue* 52 (July-September, 1949), 66–73.

<sup>39</sup> A principle repeated to the present author more than once.

The title of the fourth piece in the collection, “Française,” is a little witticism because “it has the form of...an allemande [“German” in French],” as the composer liked to say, and is a reference to J. S. Bach’s French Suites, introducing a German element to “Française.”

The “Choral sur la voix humaine” also evokes a German model, even though the theme is not religious, unlike a German chorale-prelude with an ornamented solo cantus firmus. Langlais, in any case, delivers deliciously subtle counterpoint.

The fluidity and technical difficulty of the “Arabesque sur les flûtes,” a spinning song on an eight-foot flute, is reminiscent of the “Fileuse” in Dupré’s *Suite bretonne* or Vierne’s “Naïades” from the *Pièces de fantaisie*. The velocity and constant modality of this piece prevent any comparison to the classic French “flûtes” movements, which are always slow. In any case, it was one of Jean Langlais’ favorite pieces, which he played more than once as an encore to his recitals.

The “Méditation sur les jeux de fonds,” the seventh piece, is of majestic harmonies, always supported by the pedals in octaves with foundations 16’ and 8’, a sonority and technique inconceivable on a classic French organ with its eight-foot pedal. If there is one piece in this collection that has virtually nothing to do with classic spirit, it is the “Trio” (n° 8) where atonality reigns from the very first measures. It was, Jean Langlais said, Messiaen’s favorite piece in the collection.

To treat the « Voix céleste », as the ninth piece is titled, as a solo voice, was an original and even audacious idea, as most organists think of this stop, vulgarized in the nineteenth century, as accompaniment. In using it as a solo with quick monodic arabesques, Langlais was playing against type, and in the process ennobled this stop.

The closing movement, the “Final rhapsodique” combines the themes of the “Prélude sur les grands jeux,” “Choral sur la voix humaine,” “Arabesque sur les flûtes,” and the “Voix céleste,” not to mention a few fragments from the “Nazard.” We have already seen this “rhapsodic need” in Langlais, which recalls one after another the various motives heard separately earlier, following the exalted model of Franck’s “Grande Pièce Symphonique.” Here, that cyclic tendency again contradicts the conception of the classic French Suite, whose rules Langlais was trying to renew.

But in using a sometimes biting harmonic language, he opened himself to criticism. As proof, we offer an example from London’s highly respected *Musical Times*:

In his *Suite française*, the composer shows some relenting from the acerbities—mental even more than tonal—of his recent work... Some of the ten movements are quite hideous, and often oddly miserable. Surely the *voix céleste* has never before been made to sound so dyspeptic as in the movement so named, nor the *nazard* so much like a wet Sunday in Wales.

In all this there is nevertheless an interesting technique. Mr. Langlais writes each movement as if he were trying to score for some particular organ tone; he seems to listen for the reeds, the foundation stops, the mutations to suggest to him what he has to say. He has a fondness for the major seventh, one of the most impersonal and ugly of intervals, which is heard continually in both melody and harmony. It is a pity he takes his pleasure so sadly.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Archibald Farmer. “New Music.” *The Musical Times* 1282. 90. (December 1949). 447.

Here then we find Langlais vigorously taken to task by the English press, for the first time in his career, although at the same moment a French critic wrote about this same work:

This month we find in the Bornemann catalogue the *Suite française* by Jean Langlais, a collection of ten pieces which one must recommend to all who wish to have a precise understanding of what modern organ literature is, a literature, one should remember, that has provoked so much controversy.

It would be pretentious to try to say in mere words all that these admirable pages contain. We simply note that in general every thematic element, within a plan showing extraordinary musical enlightenment, presents itself with a sovereign clarity that only great creators know how to execute.

To the continual originality of everything written by this pen is joined an absolutely personal manner—and this is indisputable—of taking a motive consisting of a few notes, a motive that in other hands would mean little, and making it take on a meaning that is also moving.<sup>41</sup>

As the saying goes, “There’s no accounting for taste”!

### **Premier Concerto for organ and orchestra (1948-1949)**

### **Incantation pour un Jour Saint (1949)**

### **Hommage à Frescobaldi (1947-1951)**

This period of intense creative activity just after the war was brutally interrupted by a chance accident: Jean Langlais was taking a walk along the water at La Richardais,<sup>42</sup> holding the hand of his four-year-old son, Claude, when he fell off a low wall and fractured his right ankle. Poorly treated at the Dinard hospital, this fracture limited his mobility for eight months and seemed to permanently compromise his career as an organist.

Moved by this state of affairs, Professor de Sèze,<sup>43</sup> an old friend, entrusted him to the care of the surgeon Merle d’Aubigné,<sup>44</sup> who decided on a second operation on the ankle and rebuilt it fragment by fragment. But he warned Jean Langlais that he would probably never play the organ again, a proposition that the composer couldn’t accept. To completely re-educate the stiff joint, Langlais decided to write a piece « for pedal solo » that greatly increased the technical difficulties, with four-note chords in long notes and a three-voiced fugue on a theme by Frescobaldi.

This formidable piece would later be included as the “Épilogue sur un thème de Frescobaldi pour pédale solo” in the *Hommage à Frescobaldi* (1951).

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However, Langlais did not receive this review at the time; the article didn’t come to his attention until 40 years later, in 1987.

<sup>41</sup> Eric Sarnette. “*Suite française* de Jean Langlais.” *Musique et Radio* (October, 1949): 131

<sup>42</sup> After the war, Jean Langlais had acquired a small vacation home at La Richardais, a Breton village between Dinard and Saint-Malo; he used it until 1983. Having purchased a pedal piano, he wrote a large part of his works there.

<sup>43</sup> Stanislas de Sèze (1903–2000), French professor of medicine, father of French rheumatology, and a friend of both André Marchal and Jean Langlais.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Merle d’Aubigné (1900–1989), famous French orthopedic surgeon.

• *Premier Concerto for organ and orchestra*

The composer took advantage of his forced inactivity in 1948 to compose, after the *Suite française*, a first Concerto, a major undertaking that occupied him from October 1948 through July 1949. It was commissioned by the Swiss conductor Walter Kăgi, who wanted to invite him to be the soloist on August 14, 1951, playing Handel's G-minor Concerto (op. 4, n° 1, HWV 289) and a work composed specifically for this concert, to be given by the Bern Stadtorchester at the cathedral there. It would be more correct to speak of the new work as a concerto for organ or harpsichord, which is the title in the manuscript.

The pedal part of its three movements (Allegro, Andante, Final) is *ad libitum* (optional) and thus the choice of either instrument is possible. It seems that Langlais was inspired for this extremely neoclassic work by Handel's manualiter organ concertos. The orchestra is also classic, with strings doubled by woodwinds in pairs (flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons).<sup>45</sup>

• *Incantation pour un Jour Saint*

While writing the Concerto, Jean Langlais composed one of his strongest works, the *Incantation pour un Jour Saint* (Invocation for a Holy Day, 1949), written for the first issue of a new series called *Orgue et Liturgie* and edited by Nobert Dufourcq and Félix Raugel. It was dedicated to Rolande Falcinelli, who had just played the complete organ works of Marcel Dupré in four concerts at the Salle Pleyel.<sup>46</sup> Since the title of this first issue of *Orgue et Liturgie* was "Easter," the works in it were all supposed to be inspired by that holiday. Thus, there were new works by three French composers (Henriette Roget, André Fleury, and Jean Langlais) as well as historic works by Pachelbel, Scheidt, Fischer, Dandrieu, and Albrechtsberger.

Langlais chose to illustrate the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday, a transitional day between Good Friday and Easter, as stipulated in the Roman Missal:

At the Office

The Priest, surrounded by the Clergy and acolytes, with the cross, Holy Water, and Incense, repairs to the porch of the Church, and there blesses the new fire... He then blesses the five grains of incense, which, in the form of a Cross, will later on be placed in the Paschal Candle... The procession moves towards the High-altar... As the procession moves up the Church, one of the three candles on the rod is lighted... a second is lighted... and a third... As each candle is lighted, the Deacon kneels, and sings, raising his voice higher each time, Lumen Christi (The light of Christ), Deo gratias (Thanks be to God).

That is exactly the musical plan that Jean Langlais was to adopt for this work, but in addition to this triple invocation (fortissimo in D, D-sharp, and E with closing cadences on open fifths) Langlais chose a different Gregorian fragment, the Litanies of the Saints,

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<sup>45</sup> It was published posthumously in 2004 by Dr. J. Butz Musikverlag (Germany), edited by Otto Depenheuer.

<sup>46</sup> Rolande Falcinelli (1920–2006), composer, organist, and disciple of Marcel Dupré, whom she succeeded as organ teacher at the Paris Conservatory from 1955 to 1986.

traditionally sung at the Kyrie in this service, in which he underlined the offbeats in the melody by accompanying them with hollow chords, largely open fourths and fifths.

Invocations and litanies, these are the two elements that alternate for the whole first part of the work. To respect the liturgical rubric, Langlais adopts an ascending harmonic scheme, stretching to a presentation of the obsessive motives of the litanies in C, D-flat, E, F-sharp, B-flat, F, A-flat, B-flat, D-flat, and D. The second section of the piece, *vivo con fuoco*, uses a new melody taken from the Litany of the Saints, the fragment “Peccatores te rogamus audi nos” calling for the risen Christ to liberate humankind from evil. Here the style breaks completely from what preceded, using brilliant toccata style in the manuals while the pedal incessantly repeats the new chant fragment. To close, Langlais brings back the “Lumen Christi” of the beginning, concluding *tutta forza* with a majestic “Deo Gratias” which triumphs in the pedal with a D-major chord, unexpected after so many pages in minor. But in retrospect, there is nothing more normal than this triumphant major. Isn’t it logical for a musical conclusion celebrating the God’s mercy to humans, despite their sins, in the light of Christ?

One can see that for Jean Langlais, music was not just an expression of his artistic soul; it is also, in as clear a manner as it was for his predecessor Charles Tournemire, a profound expression of his Christian soul. That is undoubtedly one of the factors that make this organ work—written very quickly between February 14 and 20, 1949—one of the composer’s key works, and this is with the perspective of more than 60 years after its appearance in 1954.

In this same period, Olivier Messiaen, who had put aside organ composition after *Les Corps glorieux* (1939), was preparing once again to revolutionize the organ world, as he had already done in 1936 with *La Nativité du Seigneur*. This time it was with two new scores, the *Messe de la Pentecôte* (1950–1951) and above all, the *Livre d’orgue* (1951–1952), both of which overtly use serial language. Jean Langlais admired the construction, but remained impervious to “avant-garde” techniques, which to him raised too many mathematical speculations.

For his part, as he wrote *Hommage à Frescobaldi*, Langlais followed, without deviating, the line that he had drawn in *Suite brève*, *Suite médiévale*, *Suite française* and *Incantation pour un Jour Saint*.

### • *Hommage à Frescobaldi*

As we have previously seen, Jean Langlais effectively started this new organ Suite when, in August 1947, as physical therapy for his broken ankle, he composed a piece for pedal solo, with a central three-voiced fugue based on a theme from Frescobaldi’s “Canzon dopo l’Epistola,” from the “Messa della Madonna”, part of the *Fiori musicali* of 1635. Langlais particularly liked this collection and frequently played the elevation toccatas from it at Sunday Mass at Sainte-Clotilde, just as his mentor Charles Tournemire had done in his time.

The “Épilogue sur un thème de Frescobaldi” for solo pedal takes the form of a Buxtehude “prelude and fugue,” juxtaposing four continuous and contrasting sections (prelude, recitative, fugue, toccata) which explore all the possibilities of the pedalboard: rapidity and chords requiring the use of the heel and toe of both feet. The piece is striking in the extreme classicism of its

harmonic language, and it quickly became famous among organists the world over for its demanding virtuosity. In placing it as the closing movement of his new suite in 1951, Langlais clearly indicated the general sense of this new eight-movement organ suite, composed “in the spirit of Frescobaldi.”

An analysis shows that the work divides into two parts: the first five movements comprising movements for a service, in the manner of the *Suite médiévale*, and the last three freely complete the service:

1. Prélude au Kyrie
2. Offertoire
3. Élévation
4. Communion
5. Fantaisie
- 
6. Antienne
7. Thème et variations
8. Épilogue sur un thème de Frescobaldi pour pédale solo

Unlike the *Suite médiévale*, whose medieval splendor unfolds with brilliance in its “Prelude” and concluding “Acclamations carolingiennes,” the “service part” of the *Hommage à Frescobaldi* (excepting the concluding “Fantaisie”) seeks above all poetry and meditation (for example, the “Prélude au Kyrie” where the Gregorian melody blossoms peacefully on a pedal four-foot flute, accompanied in the manuals by a soft gamba).

Jean Langlais admired Frescobaldi’s modernity and pays homage to him in using polytonality in the imitative counterpoint of the “Homo quidam” in the Elevation.

Throughout this mass, he uses various Gregorian motives: “Lucis creator” (Offertory), “Homo quidam” (Elevation), and “Sacris solemnibus” (Communion), but always in the sweet and mysterious atmosphere that he so appreciated in the *Fiori musicali*. In the “Fantaisie” that closes the “mass,” Langlais employs a procedure that he would always willingly use, the transformation of a short motive—here the first four notes of the “Ite missa est” of the “Cunctipotens genitor Deus” Mass (A-A-G-A)—into an animating cell for the work (one hears it no fewer than twenty-four times) before presenting it in full on the pedal reeds 8’ and 4’, accompanied by open fourths and fifths more evocative of Machaut than Frescobaldi!

*Hommage à Frescobaldi* could well have ended with this brilliant “Fantaisie,” but the composer added three supplementary and completely independent pieces. None of them brings in a plainchant motive, not even the “Antienne” (n° 6) where the modal and personal theme serves as a point of departure for the contrapuntal games that evoke Frescobaldi but also Marcel Dupré, the dedicatee of the volume, recalling the scheme he gave to his improvisation students at the Conservatory. In the “Thème and Variations” Langlais displays his contrapuntal skills in the first two variations, two-voiced then four-voiced, and his sense of humor in the Lisztian third variation. The final pirouette, humorously, is reminiscent of the picturesque conclusion of Louis Vierne’s “Impromptu.”

Upon its publication, the *Hommage à Frescobaldi* quickly proved to be one of Jean Langlais’ leading collections, along with the *Neuf Pièces*, and the *Suite brève*, *Suite médiévale* and *Suite française*. In just a few years, from 1942 to 1951, the composer thus



established himself as one of the masters of organ music in his time. But the organist made himself equally known as one of the recitalists who was well-known to the public.

At the end of the 1940s in the aftermath of World War II, organ recitals were fairly rare in Paris. And when the young American organist Charles Dodsley Walker<sup>47</sup> arrived in Paris from New York in the summer of 1948, having just been named Cathedral Organist and Musical Director at the American Cathedral, he was delighted to hear his first Parisian concert, the 18<sup>th</sup> concert in the series “Musical Season for Summer.” Held on Saturday, August 14, 1948, at Sainte-Clotilde, it featured the titular organist, Jean Langlais, in a program titled “Festival Bach–Franck.” Walker recalls the era:

For me today, it’s striking and joyous to think about those days in Paris. I remember that it was my first adventure when I arrived: I went to Ste-Clotilde to attend a recital that was played magnificently by Jean, whom I hadn’t yet met.<sup>48</sup>

Walker continues his Paris memories in a published interview and remembers his special ties with organists from this era in connection with his position at the American Cathedral:

*Neal Campbell: Tell me about the organ series you organized at the American Cathedral.*

*Charles Dodsley Walker:* We did a concert with the *Palestina Missa Brevis* and the *Bach Magnificat* with the Paris Chamber Orchestra directed by Pierre Duvauchelle ... I must have met Langlais by then, because I remember that he came to that concert and complimented me on the Palestrina... When I got there I found out what a wonderful organ it was. It had been a big three manual Cavaillé-Coll. In 1930 it was enlarged and a fourth manual added. It was one of the very few organs in France at that time with capture combination action...

Anyway, I saw this organ and thought “wouldn’t it be nice to have a recital series.” The way it worked was this: I said to the dean “I’d like to invite a bunch of famous French organists to play on this organ” and he said “Fine, go ahead.” I wish I could remember the fee we paid them, but it was ridiculously small. I think it was 10,000 F which was about \$30. So, I picked up the phone—believe it or not—and called Marcel Dupré, who I had met through Clarence Watters in this country. He was the only one I knew, and I didn’t call him Marcel, either!

It was “Maitre, would you be willing to play in a series on this organ? I want to help raise the reputation of the American Cathedral as an artistic center in Paris.” He agreed and I thanked him, and put the phone down.

Then I called André Marchal, and repeated my story, saying that Dupré had agreed to play, and would you do it, and he said yes. Of course if Dupré hadn’t agreed to do it, it might have been a different story. I didn’t know Marchal from a hole in the ground! So, the same with Langlais, Messiaen, and Duruflé. These names were legendary, even back then... The recitals were a week apart in Lent, and there were big crowds, and wide newspaper coverage.<sup>49</sup>

*NC: How did the organ in the American Cathedral really stack up in comparison with the famous Paris organs?*

*CDW:* Well, for one thing, it was in better tune than any of the others, and that was

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<sup>47</sup> Charles Dodsley Walker (1920-2015), founder and conductor of Canterbury Choral Society. He earned a Master of Arts at Harvard before moving to Paris. Returning from Europe in January 1951, he became then organist/choirmaster of the Church of the Heavenly Rest in New York for 38 years. He was President of the American Guild of Organists (1971–1975).

<sup>48</sup> Comment made to the author in New York City, July 2007.

<sup>49</sup> The series of six Friday evening organ recitals (“Lenten Concerts”) began March 4, 1949, with a program by Charles Dodsley Walker, then continued with André Marchal, Jean Langlais, Marcel Dupré, Olivier Messiaen, and Maurice Duruflé, every Friday until April 8, 1949. One of the reviews about this series, “Recitals by Noted Men at the American Cathedral in Paris,” appeared in *The Diapason* 40:5 April 1, 1949. 21.

because of the Germans. They had taken over the cathedral and used it as their army church. Say what you will about their politics, but by golly if they were going to have a *Wehrmachtskirche*, it was going to have an organ that was in tune. So the organ was in great shape when I got there. It was amazing.

NC: Did you have an opportunity to hear any of these organists in their own churches?

CDW: Very little... I did go to Ste.-Clotilde from time to time, because I was very close to Langlais.<sup>50</sup>

For his recital on March 18, 1949 at the American Cathedral, Langlais played (as he would often do in the future) music by his predecessors at Sainte-Clotilde, César Franck and Charles Tournemire, but also Louis Vierne and the “young” composer of the era, his friend Gaston Litaize. Then he chose excerpts of his own works, from *Neuf Pièces* and the recent *Suite brève* and the *Suite française*. He ended, as always, with an improvisation, on a theme given by Nadia Boulanger.

This concert marked the beginning of the friendship between Charles Dodsley Walker and Jean Langlais.

In the next season’s “Lenten Concerts,” Jean Langlais was again invited, this time with the addition of Walker’s young wife, the soprano Janet Hayes, to perform his *Trois Prières* (1949). During this concert on March 5, 1950, he played the premiere of his just completed *Incantation pour un Jour Saint*, which would later become famous, as well as excerpts from his *Suite médiévale* and his *Suite française*, and ended with the “Final” from his *Première Symphonie* (1942).

The bonds of friendship forged at this time with Charles Dodsley Walker and his wife Janet proved to be unailing, lasting until the death of the composer in 1991.

## The Secular and Sacred Songs

Jean Langlais didn’t want to appear to be only an organ composer,<sup>51</sup> which is why after the war he had invested himself in other parts of the musical world, especially song. When his wife, passionate about modern poetry, read to him from the first published collection of Jacques Prévert’s *Paroles*, he was immediately beguiled and decided to set seven texts to music, favoring alternately emotion and derision:<sup>52</sup>

Déjeuner du matin (Brunch)  
Pour toi, mon amour (For You, My Love)  
Le Jardin (The Garden)  
Paris at Night  
Quartier libre (Free Time)  
Conversation  
Les belles familles (The Beautiful Families)

<sup>50</sup> Neal Campbell. “Conversations with Charles Dodsley Walker.” Part II. *The Diapason* 101:6 (June, 2010). 24.

<sup>51</sup> The category of organist-composer was said to make the composers captives in a sort of musical ghetto from which few had any chance of escaping; this was especially true for Charles Tournemire.

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Prévert (1900–1977), surrealist poet and screenwriter, was adept in casual French with a caustic humor, and a virtuoso of the absurd. The 1946 collection, *Paroles* (Words), made him instantly famous, and several later editions appeared of the poems, many of which had been published individually in the 1930s. Jean Langlais set nine poems, two of which having unfortunately been lost: n° 5, “Sables mouvants” (Quicksand), and n° 10, “La Batteuse” (Thresher).

Langlais premiered these *Paroles* on May 10, 1946; he himself was at the piano accompanying soprano Anne-Marie de Barbentane. Bernard Gavoty wrote the following review:

At the Société Nationale de Musique, it was an organist who appeared, this time separating himself from the lot: Jean Langlais.

Putting aside for a moment the serious concerns of his fine profession, he had fun illustrating nine miniatures by Jacques Prévert, familiar, tender, or amusing. He did it with restraint, charming relevance and moderation, and above all, even with malicious texts, his music has the great merit of remaining vocal: it never descends into sarcasm or overdone caricature, heavy doses of which are completely insufferable.

Miss Barbentane was exquisite with them, vocally and physically.<sup>53</sup>

And for Pierre Denis:

The Société Nationale gave a premiere of a new suite of songs, *Paroles*, on texts by Jacques Prévert; the musician delightfully translated the short poems where the banality of daily life and a certain legendary fairyland join together, astounding everyone who thought that the only things an organist is capable of writing are *Tantum ergo* and *Ave Marias*.<sup>54</sup>

Convinced of the quality of this cycle, whose duration is less than 13 minutes, the composer decided to look for a publisher. To that end, he requested permission from Jacques Prévert... who categorically refused it. It is true that the poet already had his appointed musician in the person of Joseph Kosma. Thus this collection remains unpublished even today.<sup>55</sup>

Some isolated vocal pieces from 1946 to 1948 saw the light of day, one of which, an old Breton song, *La Ville d'Ys*, exists as a song with piano accompaniment as well as in an a capella version.

In 1948, overwhelmed by Jean Cayrol's reading of the enigmatic *Passe-temps de l'homme et des oiseaux* (Pastime of Man and Birds), a poetic and transcendent account of the daily horror that the poet experienced in the Mauthausen concentration camp, Langlais resolved to set four of the poems to music:<sup>56</sup>

J'ai chanté (I sang)

À bas la feuille (Down with the leaf)

Oiseaux fatigués de m'entendre (Birds tired of hearing me)

Il y a des hommes (There are men)

Here is the superb and tragic text of the first of these:

J'ai chanté pour la mort

Pour les hommes nus en tas

Qui brûlaient dépareillés.

J'ai chanté pour une femme

<sup>53</sup> Clarendon [pseudonym for Bernard Gavoty.] "Les Concerts." *Le Figaro*, June 5, 1946. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Pierre Denis. "Les Organistes français d'aujourd'hui: Jean Langlais." *L'Orgue* 52 (July–September, 1949). 72.

<sup>55</sup> Fortunately, there is a beautiful recording with virtually all the songs by Jean Langlais, almost all which are unpublished. It was made under the supervision of Canadian organist and producer Jacques Boucher. These *Paroles* were remarkably well served by soprano Louise Marcotte and pianist Brigitte Poulin, using the manuscripts from the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais. VOX 7841-2. 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Jean Cayrol (1911–2005) was a poet, novelist, and essayist; he was a member of the Resistance in the Second World War and was deported to Mauthausen. He was the screenwriter for *Nuit et brouillard* (Night and Fog), which made a great impression on generations of audiences. The manuscript texts for these songs are in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais.

Ouverte comme une ciguë  
Les seins bleus  
Elle était vêtue par habitude.  
J'ai chanté pour un enfant tout froid  
Avec son pain à la main  
Il recommençait à rire  
Et personne ne veut plus  
M'entendre

(I sang for death | For the nude men in a heap | Who burned separately. | I sang for a woman | Open like a hemlock | Her blue breasts | She was dressed as usual. | I sang for a totally cold child | With his bread in his hand | He started to laugh again | And no one still wants | To hear me).

When the French musicologist Lila Maurice-Amour dedicated a radio broadcast titled *Les poètes et leurs musiciens* (The Poets and Their Musicians) to Jean Cayrol on October 4, 1951, she made the following observations about Jean Langlais' music :

Simple music, but rich in consequence, intentionally pared down, but not naked; music in which the melody lets the text speak, and brings the background landscape to the surface without ever replacing it.

The process of composition brings together two linear melodies: the song and its accompaniment. If it weren't nonsense, one could say that this resembles "two-voiced Gregorian chant," to borrow Pierre-Jean Jouve's phrase regarding his own poems, also set to music by Jean Langlais. In effect, the melodic text remains completely outside, to retain all of its integrity, and the piano intervenes only to underline the aridness of the scene.

This is the poetry of waiting, of a world on the look-out, like on Holy Saturday when the sepulchre is empty: one doesn't yet know if there will be a resurrection, but something has to happen.

In this waiting, Jean Cayrol writes poems, for which Jean Langlais composes the music... It will be good when the people of the church sing them, these simple and strong words, these words of certitude.<sup>57</sup>

During this period Jean Langlais also wrote *Trois Prières* for solo voice or unison choir with organ. Two of them, "Ave verum" and "Ave maris stella" use French translations of the Latin texts, while the third, "Tantum ergo" can be sung in either Latin or French. Similarly, the composer easily supported religious song in the vernacular, prefiguring the recommendations of Vatican II in the 1960s.

Of the 65 songs written during the composer's long career, 25 come from this short post-war period, where he seems to have had an active interest in the genre, going from the cheeky humor of Prévert to the tragic intonations of Jean Cayrol.

But afterwards he showed a increasing disaffection for the art song, so prized in France at the beginning of the twentieth century and then abandoned in the aftermath of World War II.

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<sup>57</sup> The typed text of this broadcast was sent to Jean Langlais by Lila Maurice Amour (collection Marie-Louise Langlais).

## Sacred polyphony: Cantatas, Messe Solennelle

### . *Cantatas*

Of the *Cantate à Saint-Vincent* for mixed voices and string orchestra or organ, which Jean Langlais wrote in 1946, there remains no trace; the composer destroyed the manuscript. It was an “occasional piece” commissioned by the Saint-Vincent school in Rennes for the inauguration of its chapel organ. The composer judged it too long, and completely rewrote it in 1953 in an abridged version entitled *Caritas Christi*.

Another vocal piece, in simple style, *Cantate en l'honneur de Saint-Louis-Marie de Montfort* (1947), wasn't published until 2007 on the occasion of the composer's centenary. This work, for three-part female choir, solo soprano, organ, and three *ad libitum* trumpets, was written at the request of the school for blind girls in Larnay.<sup>58</sup>

In 1948, Jean Langlais wrote a motet in Louis Braille's memory, *Libera me Domine* in Latin for soprano, tenor, bass, and organ, for which he borrowed the whole text of the Gregorian response sung at the dismissal of the Requiem Mass. But even if the Latin words are those of the service, Jean Langlais uses a completely personal music, as had Gabriel Fauré and Maurice Duruflé in their Requiems. This *Libera me*, with its poignant simplicity, was performed at the Madeleine in Paris for the funeral of the organist Jeanne Demessieux in 1968. Knowing she was dying, she had specifically requested that this work be sung at her funeral.

### • *Messe Solennelle*

For more than 15 years, Langlais had had an ambitious and difficult project in mind, writing a solemn mass in Latin for four-voices mixed chorus and two organs, on the model of Louis Vierne's *Messe Solennelle*. The provision for a choir and two organs (“grand orgue” in the rear gallery and “orgue de chœur” at the other end of the church) is reasonable in France because most large churches have both; an old tradition assumed that the organist of the “grand orgue” never accompanied the choir, but dialogued with it (playing in alternation with sung verses). Although conceiving this solemn mass was long and difficult, the actual writing of it was rapid: according to the markings in the braille score,<sup>59</sup> the composer began with the Gloria (November 9-12, 1949), then added the Kyrie (November 14-15), Sanctus and Benedictus (18-19), and ended with the Agnus Dei (20-22), that is, eleven days to compose a work that he had thought about for more than 15 years!

When he began notating this mass, he was absolutely scrupulous in following the liturgical requirements of the time, particularly Pope Pius X's *Motu proprio* on sacred music from November 22, 1903, which was considered the final word on Catholic music until the Second Vatican Council. Jean Langlais knew it in French translation and with commentary by

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<sup>58</sup> This Cantata was printed by Combre in 2008 and recorded for the first time on a CD in October of 2007, on the occasion of the Jean Langlais centenary by the Maîtrise des Bouches-du-Rhône under the direction of Samuel Coquard, with organist Marie-Louise Langlais (Soltice SOCD 241 CYD 75).

<sup>59</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais

Amédée Gastoué as published by Schola Cantorum, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Paris, 1910). The key recommendations were as follows:

1. Sacred music, an integral part of the solemn liturgy, shares in the overall purpose of the liturgy: the glory of God and the sanctification, the edification of the faithful. Sacred music contributes to the beauty and the splendor of the ceremonies of the Church...
2. Sacred music should consequently possess, in the highest degree, the qualities proper to the liturgy, in particular, *sanctity* and *goodness of form*, which will spontaneously produce the final quality of *universality*.  
It must be *holy*. Sacred music must, therefore, exclude all that is profane, not only in itself, but also in the manner in which it is presented by those who execute it.  
It must be true art... but it must above all *universal*...
- 3... These qualities are found in the highest degree in Gregorian Chant.  
Consequently, this is the song that is proper to the Roman Church, the only song she has inherited from the ancient Fathers, the only song she has jealously guarded for centuries in her liturgical manuscripts, the only song she directly proposes to the faithful as her own, the only song she prescribes exclusively for some parts of the liturgy, and the only song which recent research has so happily restored to its integrity and purity...
4. The above-mentioned qualities are also possessed in an excellent degree by classic polyphony, especially of the Roman School, which reached its greatest perfection in the sixteenth century, owing to the works of Pierluigi da Palestrina... Classic polyphony is an admirable match for Gregorian Chant, the supreme model of all sacred music...
5. The Church has consistently favored the progress of the fine arts, admitting to the worship service everything good and beautiful that human talent has produced, down through the ages, although always with due regard to the liturgical laws. Consequently, modern music is also allowed in the Church when its compositions have a kindness, sobriety and gravity that do not render it unworthy of its liturgical functions.
6. Among the different kinds of modern music, that which appears less suitable for accompanying the liturgy is the theatrical style, which was exceptionally popular during the [nineteenth] century, especially in Italy...

Langlais took the following points to heart:

7. The language proper to the Roman church is Latin. Hence it is forbidden to sing anything in the vernacular in solemn liturgical functions, let alone to sing in the vernacular the variable or common parts of the Mass and Office.
9. The liturgical text must be sung as it is in the books, without alteration or inversion of the words, without undue repetition, without separating syllables.
15. Although the music proper to the Church is purely vocal music, music with organ accompaniment is also permitted. In some special cases, within due limits and with required appropriateness, other instruments may be allowed, but never without the special permission.
16. As the singing should always have the principal place, the organ or other instruments should merely sustain and never overwhelm it.

17. It is not permitted to have the singing preceded by long preludes or to interrupt it with intermezzo pieces.

Langlais followed these papal injunctions to the letter, especially Paragraph 9 about modifying the liturgical text. This paragraph is reacting to vocal works—more numerous than might be imagined—where the breaking up of texts is virtually heretical, as for example in a “Kyrie eleison” in which the choir sings “ele,” and then after a long rest or a chord from the organ, finally adds “ison”!

Complying with the *Motu proprio*, Jean Langlais uses syllabic repetition in just two situations: first, where a word or phrase has exceptional importance (e.g., doubling “Jesus Christe” and “Amen” in the Gloria, the “Hosanna in excelsis” of the Sanctus, or the “Dona nobis pacem” at the end of the Agnus Dei); and second, when it is a matter of imitative polyphony, such as a four-voiced point of imitation (the entrances of “Et in terra pax bonae voluntatis” in the Gloria, or the fugal exposition of the first Agnus Dei).

Pius X authorized organ accompaniment to the extent that it didn’t dominate or interrupt the text (paragraphs 15, 16, and 17). Langlais clearly observes this in the *Messe Solennelle*, in which the organ serves two functions: the “orgue de chœur” accompanying the voices, merely doubling them at each entrance to provide stability and security; or the “grand orgue” as soloist, providing preludes, interludes, or postludes, always brief (ten measures for the Kyrie and Sanctus preludes, four or five measures for the interludes, and one to three for the postludes). This stereophonic distribution (the “orgue de chœur” accompanying the choir, while the “grand orgue” enters solo) will prove extraordinarily effective.

Olivier Messiaen analyzed the work in an undated manuscript which Langlais carefully preserved in his archives:<sup>60</sup>

Jean Langlais : Messe Solennelle, analysis by Olivier Messiaen.

The Kyrie is excellent with its austere form. Its primary harmonic progression is reminiscent of a cadence by Guillaume de Machaut. The second part (the expressive part) of its theme is inspired by the plainchant Kyrie XIII (stelliferi conditor orbis). It borrows a litany form with rhythmic changes (think of Gregorian neumes); but since it is almost always in even quarter notes, this is easy to accomplish (as long as one conducts in quarter notes when the changes should happen).

The Gloria is a fugue. Its subject, in the mode on D, takes the first notes of the plainchant Gloria XIII as a point of departure. The episodes, on various fragments of the subject, separate the subject entries in distant tonalities. Stretto, and conclusion in the major.

In the Sanctus, free use of major and minor consonant chords, creating chromatic modes. Once again we find Machaut’s cadence.

The Benedictus will captivate all true musicians. The chromatic two-voiced arabesques on the eight-foot bourdon, over the voix céleste’s modal background, provide much poetry in supporting the singing of the women alone in octaves.

The Agnus is simultaneously tormented and meditative. The call for peace has tragic

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<sup>60</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

intensity which is especially topical.<sup>61</sup>

This work doesn't pose any great performance difficulties, all the vocal passages that are a little tricky are always doubled by the organ, and the choral entrances always carefully prepared. The two organs never play at the same time: a single organ could easily suffice if the work were performed in a church that only had one. In sum, a beautiful work, severe, serious, truly liturgical, easily prepared, to be recommended to all choir directors.

Olivier Messiaen

Messiaen said it all, except for Jean Langlais' achievement of a perfect stereophonic effect if two organs are used, opposing the small choir organ for accompanying and the great solo organ, in the best of circumstances in a large church, more than 300 feet apart.

In his choice of texts, Langlais maintained the classic Ordinary (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus with Benedictus, and Agnus Dei), intentionally omitting the Credo, which in France was normally sung in plainsong *alternatim* by the choir and congregation.

Here is how the composer successfully reconciled Pius X's wishes regarding Gregorian chant, "Palestrinian" polyphony, and modern music:

a) *Gregorian Chant:*

Strictly speaking, there is no plainchant in the *Messe Solennelle*, but many of its melodic lines were inspired by it, especially in the first two movements, where the contours of motives in Mass XIII are suggested and stylized, before Langlais frees his imagination to create a personal melodic line.

b) *Polyphony:*

Paragraph 4 of the *Motu proprio* praises both Gregorian chant and Palestrina-like polyphony. For Langlais, polyphony is not necessarily synonymous with Palestrina, and he used imitative techniques without feeling bound to any one style. Thus he drew from various eras, alternating as he wished Medieval practices (the Kyrie and Agnus Dei) with fugal passages (especially in the Gloria, where one finds a virtually classic four-voiced fugue with entrances from bottom to top, and episodes using fragments of the subject). And although the *Messe Solennelle* is clearly a polyphonic Mass, it has a long homophonic passage in its Benedictus for the words "Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini," in which the sopranos and altos sing in long-note octaves, an oasis of peace in the midst of complex polyphony. In terms of the vocal tessituras, the composer is traditional, writing in middle registers and carefully preparing, using step-wise motion, extreme notes, highlighting the voices without demanding needless prowess.

c) *Modern Music:*

The fifth paragraph of the *Motu proprio* recognized the validity of modern music in church as long as it bowed to the requirements of liturgical laws. Jean Langlais fully complied, but how was he to work within such tight constraints without preventing the blossoming of his language? A study of his first organ works, especially the *Vingt-Quatre Pièces pour harmonium ou orgue* already displayed his taste for musical collage, juxtaposing musical

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<sup>61</sup> Messiaen is undoubtedly referring to Korea and the Cold War that so troubled the times.



fragments derived from totally diverse techniques or eras. Further, the composer seemed to have a distinct penchant for the musical atmosphere of the Middle Ages (*Suite médiévale*) revisited in the light of distinctly twentieth-century harmonies. The *Messe Solennelle* confirms these tendencies: next to affirmations of Gregorian modality (Hypodorian in the Kyrie and Sanctus, Dorian in the Gloria, Hypolydian in the Sanctus) is polyphony inspired by the Middle Ages and Renaissance; and it adopts also tonality and chromaticism developed in much later periods. In that way, Jean Langlais moves easily from a medieval Kyrie with open fourths and fifths and Machaut-like cadences to fortissimo Sanctus that opposes tormented chromaticism and triumphant tonality on the word “Sanctus,” sung on a completely consonant C-major chord with a spectacular high C for the sopranos.<sup>62</sup> And to complete this balancing of diverse techniques from different eras, he closes the Agnus Dei in an absolutely modern atmosphere, using a whole-tone scale, melodic tritones, and melodic added-value notes.

It is lyricism that unites all these heterogeneous techniques, a lyricism that comes from his concept of the sacred, lyricism that never oversteps the bounds of Pius X’s call for religious decorum.

The private premiere of the *Messe Solennelle* took place on October 15, 1950 at Sainte-Clotilde, with the choir from the National Institute for the Young Blind directed by Jean-Gabriel Gaussens; at the great organ was Pierre Denis, and at the choir organ was Sainte-Clotilde’s choirmaster, François Tricot<sup>63</sup>.

Three years later, the public premiere took place in the Besançon festival, and Clarendon wrote in *Le Figaro*:

Babylonian success for Jean Langlais, whose *Messe Solennelle* received its premiere at the Saint-Ferjeux Basilica with the fine participation of the Marcel Couraud vocal ensemble. In basing his polyphony on Gregorian melodies or simple modal tunes, the author uses a very old formula of which the old masters have left us many examples. That was precisely the danger, to fall into a pastiche and make faux-Lassus or imitation Palestrina. Langlais knew how to remain traditional while protecting his personality. I particularly admired his Gloria, whose structure is magisterial. Jean Langlais, my colleague, have you finally found the recipe for religious music, the church composer’s philosopher’s stone? In that case, the crown of the blessed awaits you.<sup>64</sup>

After its publication in 1950, the *Messe Solennelle*, dedicated to Sainte-Clotilde Canon, Henry Hubert, found immediate success, particularly in English-speaking countries, Germany, and Northern Europe. 65 years later, there are many who consider it a classic in 20<sup>th</sup> century religious music, alongside Duruflé’s *Requiem*. The two works, in fact, are often paired in choral concerts. Before signing a contract on February 15, 1951 to publish this work

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<sup>62</sup> Jean Langlais wanted this high C, but he wasn’t certain that choral sopranos could sing it easily, so he compromised on a G. While concertizing in the USA, he explained this to Karel Paukert, organist and choirmaster at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, who was to conduct the *Messe Solennelle* on September 27, 1981. Paukert invited Langlais to the performance, and the composer for the first time heard the high C.

Enthused, he immediately had the publisher correct the score.

<sup>63</sup> The stereophonic arrangement desired by the composer was unfortunately impossible at Sainte-Clotilde, since there, “orgue de chœur” and “grand orgue” are placed one below the other, in two superimposed galleries.

<sup>64</sup> Clarendon [Bernard Gavoty]. “Au Festival de Besançon.” *Le Figaro*, October 1953 (clipping in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais).

with Éditions de la Schola Cantorum et Procure Générale de Musique (a French publisher specializing in religious music), Jean Langlais received this letter from the head of the firm:

Paris, January 9, 1951

Dear Sir,

We willingly give you permission to orchestrate your *Messe Solennelle*, published by our house, and to have it performed in this version.

It goes without saying that you will submit this orchestration to us with the intent of our acquiring it.

Please accept my best wishes,

Abbé Bardy<sup>65</sup>

Langlais did in fact make a version for large orchestra (strings, woodwinds, brass), but it remained in manuscript in the composer's personal papers, thus completely unknown until 2015, when the Éditions de la Schola Cantorum (purchased in 1983 by the Swiss conglomerate of Charles Huguenin, Cantate Domino, and Triton) decided to publish it at the initiative of the new dynamic young director, Sébastien Frochoux.<sup>66</sup> Thus, this work for chorus and orchestra without organ,<sup>67</sup> which Langlais never heard, appeared 65 years after its composition.

But the original version gained rapid success and critical acclaim:

Jean Langlais has an uncommon writing technique, but for him technique becomes power and beauty, since genius reigns in this music. It is very difficult, almost indelicate, to express that which can be born under the power of religious sentiment, but for us the *Messe Solennelle* by Jean Langlais isn't a tired act of kneeling, an overly contemplative acceptance; it is an anguished and fervent cry of a man of the twentieth century, one of those men who still believe in sincerity, one of those who know how to approach God without embellishment, without hypocrisy, without fear and even without pride, simply burdened with the weight of their doubt, of their hope, of their unquenched generosity, of their love. If our enthusiasm has gotten the better of us, we ask Jean Langlais to forgive an exaltation whose only defense is in the admiration that we have for his music.<sup>68</sup>

Jean Langlais thus acquired a veritable notoriety in the world of sacred music at the very moment, when, having just turned forty, he was in full possession of his musical skills. A long interview with Pierre Denis only four years after he assumed his post at Sainte-Clotilde, paints an enthusiastic portrait. Here are a few excerpts, starting with the introduction:<sup>69</sup>

At Sainte-Clotilde, the service is soon to end. The joint shadows of Franck and Tournemire seem, with their silent presence, to challenge the musician who is trying to measure up to them on the instrument that was recently the witness to and translator of their inner thoughts, in a competition both perilous and hopeless. A young artist at the keyboards improvises on the hymn or the introit, calm and lucid, he elaborates a vast rhapsody, always coherent and which blooms in our attentive and overjoyed ears. The creator of the *Béatitudes* couldn't disavow these broad variations or these canons wisely worked out; and the ardent author of *L'Orgue Mystique* would have quickly recognized these plainchant-like arabesques as his own, with imponderable rhythms,

<sup>65</sup> Letter in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>66</sup> Son of Jean-Charles Frochoux, who purchased the French Editions in 1983.

<sup>67</sup> There is also an optional version for choirs, orchestra and organ, edited by Marie-Louise Langlais in 2015, available through the same publisher.

<sup>68</sup> Henri Dufresse. "Messe de Jean Langlais." *Images musicales* 127 (February 23, 1951). 5.

<sup>69</sup> Pierre Denis, "Les Organistes Français d'aujourd'hui." *L'Orgue* 52 (July-September 1949). 68,72.

heightened with precious harmonic treasures. And yet, Jean Langlais, the official organist of the Basilica, only imitates himself, in these too-fleeting compositions in which one glimpses a soul imbued with a very sharp sensibility and a deep inner life that early blindness has long withdrawn into itself.

Then, asked about his preferences in organ building, Jean Langlais firmly gives his credo:

“Since I particularly like the richness of foundation stops in a well designed organ, I don’t join the movement that would suppress them in favor of mixtures. This concept is undoubtedly fine for old music, but can’t be suitable for the majority of contemporary works. The mixtures bring a superimposition of dissonances to chords, a multiplicity of the pleins-jeux renders polyphony more complex instead of clarifying it, giving it just an extra color and a more brilliant timbre. I am especially the enemy of high, frequently breaking mixtures (cymbales) which muddle the musical discourse, overlapping the alto with the tenor. That said, I praise those who make tasteful mutations. I am in favor, in a large instrument, of having plain jeux voiced differently, some for the foundations, others for the reeds.”

On the role of the organist in contemporary Catholic liturgy, Jean Langlais reveals his ideals as a believer:<sup>70</sup>

“The organist who is concerned with his role in services has a huge task in the religious domain. He must always maintain a close cohesion among the organ pieces that he has meticulously selected in advance of the day’s liturgy.

This choice, relatively easy for certain feasts (Pentecost, Assumption, Christmas), can be tricky when it comes to simple Sundays lacking very specific religious significance. One should be inspired by the readings from the Gospel or the Epistle, or the Introit, for example. Charles Tournemire understood this so perfectly, and that’s what Olivier Messiaen does every Sunday at La Trinité. ...

From Solesmes I gathered the great research into melodic purity, and plainchant has always made a big impression on me, principally in metric regularity. I am always surprised that Beethoven, for example, wrote so many masterpieces without freeing himself of the rhythmic strictures of his time. There are better things to do, it seems, than to think just in two or in three. As for Lutheran music, one can safely interchange certain chorale-preludes intended for a specific feast, but their character doesn’t always work very well with the corresponding Roman Catholic feast; certain Advent chorale-preludes can easily be played outside that season, certain austere Easter chorale-preludes, like “Christ lag in Todesbanden” are appropriate in Lent.

However, I mercilessly denounce playing certain organ masterpieces which, with rare exceptions (Christmas), should not find a place in church: some of the Bach trio sonatas (an exception for the slow movements), most of Liszt’s works. ...

The service that I think is the most essential and the most interesting for an organist is Vespers, which I am truly passionate about. Of course, it is habitually the most ignored of all of them. The organist should take to heart the truth that his interlude is a commentary on the antiphon and that it should reflect the text that it is replacing. The same is true for hymns. The organist thus truly incorporates himself into the service; from this comes the necessity that he blindly submit to the needs of the service and, especially, to stop himself at the slightest ringing of a bell, no matter what it costs him. Note that here at Sainte-Clotilde, the organist has the benefit of considerable deference because of the celebrity of his predecessors.

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<sup>70</sup> Jean Langlais would nevertheless sometimes be in conflict with certain priests in the parish, especially the one who in effect put a traffic light on the organ in the 1960s to make the organist respond instantly to the celebrants’ wishes. The present author saw this personally, and one can imagine Jean Langlais’ fury when he discovered this new device, which we described to him. He went down to the sacristy immediately and said to the priest involved, “What a brilliant idea for a blind man!” The lights were quickly removed, to the general hilarity of the numerous listeners who were in the loft that day.

I am free to play anything I want, and to improvise as long as I please in my interludes. The artistic life of the loft is continuing perfectly, thanks to the careful attention of the priest in charge.”

When Pierre Denis asked him about his repertory, Langlais answered:

“I greatly admire the old French masters in their short pieces. But they quickly run out of steam in the big compositions and spend too long in a single tonality. As for their successors in the nineteenth century, Widor, Gigout, Guilmant, etc., their works betray an aesthetic in which pathos is king, it seems to me. Who can be surprised that their contemporaries like Debussy, a wonderful orchestrator, could ignore the organ! These organists used registrations that simply offered sonic mush to the ears from which pure timbres seem deliberately excluded; and it is a harmful tendency to think of the organ only as divisions, and not details.”

The author of the interview then summarizes Jean Langlais’ musical tastes:

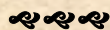
Although the composer of the *Poèmes Évangéliques* refers to Cabezon or Landino, he is naturally more closely attached to the French masters of organum, to Léonin, Pérotin, and Machaut, of whom he seems a misplaced disciple in our century. Listen to his *Hommage à Landino*, his motet “O Bone Jesu,” and see how he easily recreates Medieval polyphony. Among later classic masters, Jean Langlais claims Frescobaldi, whose *Fiori musicali* he strongly praises.

But our composer is also a musician of today who, after hearing the messages of Fauré and Ravel, turns an attentive ear to the great contemporary symphonists: Roussel, Hindemith, Stravinsky, and Bartok. He doesn’t forget his debt to Erik Satie, to whom he dedicated an “Hommage.” He thinks highly of the young school in our country, currently with illustrious members, with Olivier Messiaen at the top of the list.

“I am eclectic in my taste,” says Langlais, “and I shake off all partisanship in judging the music by others. I force myself never to judge by preconceptions, and my own sensibility comes into play when it has to do with aesthetics.”

And after detailing the catalogue of his subject’s works, Pierre Denis concludes as he began, giving a picture of Jean Langlais at his organ at Sainte-Clotilde:

The faithful leave the Basilica which is slowly enveloped in darkness. A few listeners remain to hear the last notes of the organ, whose velvet sounds fade in mysterious pianissimos. The Sainte-Clotilde nave, for a moment transfigured by the magic sonorities by Cavaillé-Coll’s masterpiece, has taken on the appearance of a splendid Gothic vessel, somber in its gloomy grayness once the final chord is reached.



## CHAPTER 6

### *The First American Tour, 1952*

#### **Concert Management for organists in North America**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jean Langlais remembered what happened next:

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>4</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Robert Lodine**, Chicago (July 4, 1951)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>7</sup> *Choir Guide* 4. 8 (November, 1951). 40-41.



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

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

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

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

TRANSCONTINENTAL TOUR OF U.S.A AND CANADA

April–May, 1952

Exclusive Management: Bernard R. La Berge, Inc.<sup>8</sup>

One can see that La Berge is using two main elements in promoting Langlais: his position as successor to César Franck and Charles Tournemire at Sainte-Clotilde, and his high standing as a composer, since his works were already known and played in the United States. On the other hand, the impresario makes no mention of the artist's blindness. The publicity establishes the tour as lasting two months, April and May of 1952; in fact, following Langlais's wishes, he stayed in North America exactly 48 days, giving 22 concerts and travelling 8,000 miles by train. Having arrived in New York on April 17th by ship, he left for France the same way on June 3rd. *The Diapason* announced his arrival and the schedule of his tour<sup>9</sup>:

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

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

<sup>8</sup> *Choir Guide*, 4. 9 (December 1951). 61

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

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

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

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

The three programs were as follows :

Program 1

Franck: *Choral* No. 3

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

Messiaen: *La Nativité* : “Les Anges”

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

Bingham: *Toccata on “Leoni”*

Langlais:

*Suite médiévale*: Prélude, Tiento

*Suite française*: Arabesque sur les flûtes, Récit de Nazard

*Première Symphonie*: Finale

Improvisation

Program 2

Mendelssohn: Sonata N° 6

Franck: Pastorale

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

Falcinelli: *Prière*

Litaize: Toccata on “Veni Creator”

Langlais: *Hommage à Frescobaldi*:

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

Improvisation

Program 3

Bach: Prelude in E-flat Major

Couperin: Benedictus

De Grigny: Dialogue

Vierne: Allegro vivace from *Première Symphonie*

Demessieux: Choral-Prelude “Domine Jesu”

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

*Neuf Pièces*: “In Dulci Jubilo”

*Hommage à Frescobaldi*: Thème and Variations

Postlude N° 2

Improvisation

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

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

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

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



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

Figure 34. (Collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

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

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

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

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

Jeannette writes:

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

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

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

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

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

The 13th is Easter Sunday, and Jean writes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

He continues on Wednesday, April 16:

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

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

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

Jean Langlais also relates the events of this arrival:

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

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

"On a bench, it seems."

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

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

This precious souvenir is now in fact at Central Presbyterian Church in New York.<sup>13</sup>

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

<sup>13</sup> We could not find any confirmation for that.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Friday, April 18 [1952]

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

Tuesday, April 22 [1952]

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

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

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

Program:

Franck, Chorale 3

Dupré, Chemin de croix: Jesus consoles

Messiaen, Nativity: Les Anges

Tournemire, Communion for Epiphany

Bingham, Toccata on Leoni

Langlais, Suite médiévale: Prelude; Tiento

Suite française: Arabesque; Récit de Nazard

Symphony 1: Finale

There need be no mental reservation because of Mr. Langlais’ blindness; he handled the organ with more familiarity and freedom than some other recitalists who have no such limitation. He had the combons set with basic registrations and also with individual colors; as this organ has many duplicate pedal studs, it gave him the advantage of being able to make changes with his feet, which he did most artfully. Just once did he slip, and that was when a cancellation had not been made at the end of the previous number. The rapidity and aplomb with which he made the change would have shamed many.

Being a wise recitalist, he had utilized several days to familiarize himself with the instrument. It was evident also he had set down in Braille his registration—we could see his fingers going over a paper to refresh his memory. The console was in the middle of the sanctuary, where he could be observed from every quarter; he was escorted to

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



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

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

Incidentally it was a large audience.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**"French Organist Brings Old Shoes for Recitals"**

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

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

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

**“Langlais’ Improvisation Stuns Audience at Columbus Debut”**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**“Blind Organist Will Play Here”**

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

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

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

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<sup>16</sup> *Syracuse Herald American*, May 4, 1952.

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

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

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

<sup>20</sup> Beth Randel Jussel, *Lincoln Star*, May 13, 1952.

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

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

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

**“Organ Recital Here Reveals Langlais as Individualist”**

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

**“Jean Langlais charming in organ recital”**

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

**“French Organist Gives Brilliant Recital at Cathedral”**

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>21</sup> Elena de Sayn, *The Evening Star*, May 29 1952.

<sup>22</sup> *Washington Times-Herald*, May 29, 1952.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Hume, *The Washington Post*, May 29, 1952.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>24</sup> H. Katherine Smith, *Buffalo Courier Express*, May 31, 1952.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

My Dear M. Langlais:

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

With cordial good wishes, Sincerely yours  
Theodore Marier

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

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

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<sup>27</sup> Letter in collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of course this mass, which didn't include a Credo, was immediately published by McLaughlin & Reilly in 1952.<sup>28</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### THE COMPOSER

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

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

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

#### THE MUSIC OF THE MASS

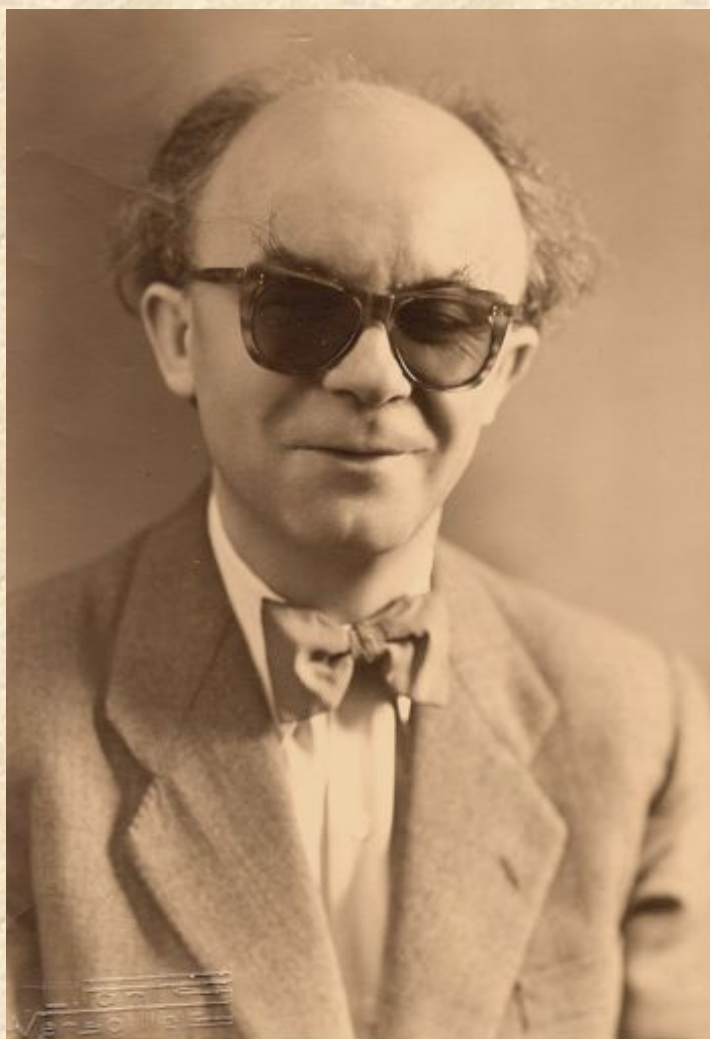
The *Mass in Ancient Syle* draws consciously on the compositional ideals of the Renaissance. In the fabric of the music are brief chant quotations, as for example in the alto line of the Kyrie. There are constantly changing voice groups, canons between various voices, and a vocabulary of rhythmic formations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

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



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



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



## CHAPTER 7

### *A Sacred Triptych, First Recordings*

Immediately upon his return to France, Jean Langlais participated, beginning on June 22, 1952, in the nation's solemn tribute to Louis Braille, as recounted in *Le Parisien Libéré*.<sup>1</sup>

#### **100 Years After His Death, Louis Braille, Conqueror of the Night, Is Laid To Rest in the Pantheon, Accompanied by Hundreds of the Blind<sup>2</sup>**

Louis Braille, who invented the tactile alphabet for the blind that freed them from darkness, was laid to rest yesterday in the Pantheon, 100 years after his death. Considered a god among the blind, perhaps no man deserved the honor more. His invention returned to them a part of their lost light and brought them more fully into the world.

The body of Louis Braille was originally interred in the cemetery at Coupvray, his birthplace. Last Saturday his cremated remains were transferred to the Institution des Jeunes Aveugles. A solemn tribute took place in the amphitheater of the Sorbonne in the presence of Helen Keller, the blind, deaf, and mute American who succeeded, through a miracle of energy, to acquire language skills and regain contact with the world. Miss Keller received the cross of the Legion of Honor on this occasion, along with several others who have devoted their lives to the blind.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the night from Saturday to Sunday the ashes of Louis Braille, attended by an honor guard bearing white canes, lay in state in the hall of the Institute for the Young Blind, transformed into a candlelit chapel for the occasion.

Yesterday morning, his coffin, draped in the tricolor, was hoisted into a hearse bound for the Pantheon. At the head of the procession were two carts laden with flowers and wreaths, followed by a hearse bearing the initials "L.B." and surrounded by a double cordon of armed soldiers.

Following the hearse were the descendants of Louis Braille, professors from the Institute and a crowd made up of the blind of all ages: men, women, and children, canes in hand or guided by others as church bells pealed.

Making its way along the Boulevard des Invalides and the Boulevard Saint-Michel, the procession reached the Pantheon, where it was welcomed by the President of the Republic Vincent Auriol and his entourage.

Braille's coffin was carried inside by six men and positioned on a catafalque in the nave. After a speech, President Auriol paused before the coffin before it was carried

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<sup>1</sup> *Le Parisien libéré*, Paris, June 23, 1952.

<sup>2</sup> This Parisian monument, atop Mont Sainte-Geneviève near the Luxembourg Gardens, is the designated resting place for individuals of great importance in the history of France. To be interred there is to receive the ultimate homage of the nation.

<sup>3</sup> Official announcement of June 20, 1952, by order of the Ministre de la Santé Publique, overseer of the National Institute for the Young Blind.

into the crypt... The greatest honor the nation can bestow was thus received by Louis Braille, who never sought such recognition.

Jean Langlais always recalled with great emotion his meeting with Helen Keller at the Institute for the Young Blind a few days later. The great lady asked him to play the *Tocatta in D minor* of Bach, a surprising request from a person without sight or hearing. Jean Langlais complied graciously. Afterwards, Helen Keller's communicated reaction was startling: "I received vibrations in my face." In the course of these ceremonies Jean Langlais was awarded the cross of the Legion of Honor, alongside Helen Keller and several others, in recognition of his devotion to his blind students.

Since the death of Albert Mahaut in 1943, Langlais had worked tirelessly for the professional placement of blind organists across France through the Association Valentin Haüy. He took this duty very seriously all his life, receiving numerous expressions of thanks in Braille, often from the most humble.<sup>4</sup>

### **A sacred triptych : Missa in simplicitate – Missa Salve Regina – La Passion**

At the end of the 1940s, Jean Langlais embarked upon a compositional path dedicated to sacred vocal music: polyphonic in the case of the *Messe Solennelle*; more intimate with the *Trois Prières* for solo voice and organ dedicated to the soprano Marie-Louise Colozier.

Premiered at Saint-Clotilde by their dedicatee on August 16, 1949 during a rather fallow period in Parisian musical life, these short pieces (only two pages each) passed almost unnoticed despite favorable reviews.<sup>5</sup> One must never underestimate these short, simple pages in Jean Langlais' output. The "Ave verum" in particular, the first of the *Trois Prières*, is a jewel that presages a masterpiece, the *Missa in simplicitate*.

#### **. *Missa in simplicitate* (1952)**

The summer vacation of 1952 afforded Jean Langlais the opportunity to compose this work for solo voice and organ. The composer recalls:<sup>6</sup>

One day in July, the rector of La Richardais, where I was spending my holiday, knowing we had invited Jeannine Collard<sup>7</sup> of the Paris Opera to join us, came by to ask me to try to persuade her to sing at mass on Sunday. Because she had not brought any sacred music along she asked me to compose something. I made a Kyrie for her, to which she replied, "It's really not enough to sing just the Kyrie at mass!" "Alright, I'll make you an Agnus Dei so you can sing a Kyrie at the beginning and an Agnus Dei at the end."

In due course I composed an entire mass, even adding a Credo in passing. The idea for its long recitative came from the monologue of the Messenger in Act II of Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, which Jeannine Collard had sung magnificently shortly before.

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<sup>4</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Sarnette, *Musique religieuse*, in *Musique et Radio*, Paris, November 1949.

<sup>6</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs".

<sup>7</sup> Jeannine Collard (born 1923), mezzo-soprano of the Paris Opera, was one of the main interpreters of the vocal music of Jean Langlais beginning in the 1950s, remaining a close friend until his death in 1991.

One evening, before composing the Credo, I said to my old friend Father Vigour, “tonight I’m going to start and finish the Credo of my mass.”

I recall it was a magnificent night. Seated at my pedal piano, an open window brought in the fragrance of a yellow acacia. I was happy because I was writing exactly what I wanted to write. Once finished, I consulted my watch, thinking it must be at least midnight. In fact it was 4:30 in the morning, yet I scarcely realized it.

In such moments a man experiences the fullness of joy when he knows he has succeeded at something.

Instead of going to bed I took my cane and went out to sit on the banks of the Rance,<sup>8</sup> where I had the immense pleasure of hearing the last songs of the nocturnal marine birds and the first songs of the birds that awaken with the dawn.

When I returned home around 6 a.m. my neighbor, a very characteristic Breton woman, said: “Well, my good man, you didn’t sleep at all last night!” “Did I bother you?” I asked. “Oh no, but I heard you working all the same. You can’t do that all the time, you’ll have a heart attack!”

I never regretted this long evening that continues to give interior light in my life.

In the preface of the work the composer specifies:

Written for solo voice and organ, the *Missa in simplicitate* aims to follow as closely as possible the Latin text, upon which it comments with deep humility, hence the title. The composer’s plan was to embody the most extreme simplicity, especially in the Credo, the centerpiece of the work which affirms the faith without which the Mass would have no reason for being. In the Agnus Dei the idea of the Kyrie returns to lend unity to the five moments, each of them based on a single theme.

This single theme is in fact a Braille transcription of the first name of its dedicatee, Jeannine Collard. Following the relationship between the letters of the Braille alphabet and musical pitches, one can deduce from “Jeannine” the following musical phrase: J(b) – E(d) – A (because it means a fingering in Braille, Langlais skips it, proceeding to the double N(c) to which he adds a sharp, followed by I(a), N(c#), and E(d). This produces b-d-c#-c#-a-c#-d, which one finds as an ostinato at the beginning and end of both the Kyrie and Agnus Dei. Langlais often employed this complicated system of letters and note names to construct melodies, retaining his artistic license as a composer to vary their duration and tessitura.

There are very few masses for solo voice and organ, the form having inspired composers to write polyphony since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Jean Langlais here proposes a counterweight to this practice, in the spirit of its title “*in simplicitate*.”

The choice of mezzo-soprano Jeannine Collard of the Paris Opera as dedicatee explains the range of the solo part, which also may be sung by a baritone. To encourage the broadest possible exposure the composer does not specify voice type in the subtitle (“pour une voix”), contenting himself with “for solo voice or unison choir accompanied by organ or harmonium.” Performance by a unison choir presents certain issues, as the *Missa in simplicitate* was clearly conceived for an operatic voice with its expected stamina and a panoply of technical resources.

The score doesn’t offer much respite, omnipresent as the voice remains throughout five movements. There are practically no pauses, especially in the Gloria and the Credo.

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<sup>8</sup> The river Rance passes La Richardais on its way to the English Channel.



**Jean Langlais and Jeannine Collard**  
Figure 37. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)<sup>9</sup>

By introducing a powerful feminine operatic voice wasn't Jean Langlais going against the *Motu proprio*, which decried theatrical style as inappropriate for church music? Reading through and listening to the *Missa in simplicitate* quickly dispel such doubts. The composer, indeed, has succeeded in domesticating the theatrical style, elevating it for the sole benefit of a sacred Latin text, whose expressivity and fervor it underlines with an often overwhelming intensity.

The designation "*in simplicitate*" refers not only to the single voice that sings the ordinary of the mass, but also to the reserved style with which the text is treated, without ornamentation or vocalise aside from the Benedictus and the final "Hosanna." Beneath this apparent simplicity an orator's fire shines forth with evocative power, particularly in the Credo. This was the first time Langlais had composed a Credo, normally sung to Gregorian chant between the Gloria and the Sanctus. It was an experiment that proved to be a master stroke. Setting the entire text without repetition, he far surpasses the original epigrammatic plainsong, unfurling a free recitative that spans nearly the entire mezzo-soprano range, from middle C to soprano G-flat. The melody ascends powerfully at the key words "Deo vero" (mm. 13-14), "et resurrexit" (m. 31), and "cum gloria" (m. 37). It concludes in dazzling light with the five final measures "et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen." Note the gripping effect

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<sup>9</sup> Photograph taken July 28, 1964, upon the presentation of the Prix François Dhuine to Jean Langlais at Dol-de-Bretagne.

produced by the sudden eruption of the organ tutti in the last two measures, a perfect V-I cadence supporting the voice at full cry. Jeannine Collard said of this Credo:<sup>10</sup>

It was hearing me sing the “Song of the Messenger” from Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* that brought about the idea of a recitative. At the time, in 1952, no one performed this music except the great Nadia Boulanger, to my knowledge. Jean Langlais was completely taken with this work upon hearing it for the first time, adopting a similar style for his Credo, a long recitative that rises step-by-step through tonalities and crescendos toward a grand affirmation of faith. I recall him saying of its composition: “in such moments a man experiences the fullness of joy when he knows he has succeeded at something.”

After the inspired concentration of the Credo, the Sanctus begins in a contemplative mood, the voice gliding melismatically over an organ ostinato. Intensity returns gradually through “Pleni sunt caeli,” followed by a powerful “Hosanna” that precedes a gentle Benedictus couched on the Voix céleste. The final “Hosanna” unleashes a cascade of virtuoso vocalizations. The composer provides a simplified alternate version in anticipation of choral performance. If the Credo marks the dramatic summit of the *Missa in simplicitate*, the Agnus Dei concludes the mass as it began, in the quiet peace of the Kyrie composed for that Sunday morning at La Richardais. The voice fades away gradually, descending to low B for the final “pacem.” In a concise form, utilizing the simplest of harmonic means, Jean Langlais succeeds in evoking supplication in this compelling vision of humanity imploring a radiant deity.

The composer and musicologist Henry Barraud, longtime director of broadcasts for Radiodiffusion Française, sent Jean Langlais the following letter after hearing the mass on the radio:<sup>11</sup>

Paris, December 19, 1956

Dear Sir,

As I was leaving home last night for one of those tedious evenings that come with the territory of my job I was stopped on my way to the door by something my children were listening to on the radio. From that moment I knew I had to stay and listen to all of your *Missa in simplicitate*.

I long ago gave up hope of experiencing such pure joy from contemporary music. It embodies a mysticism, a quality of thought and soul that moved me in the deepest part of my being. For once, I could listen to a modern work from beginning to end forgetting that I am a musician, but simply reminding myself that I am human.

I don’t know any better way of telling you how much this reveals of the man you are in addition to the composer I know. I won’t say that I congratulate you, as one does not congratulate someone for who he is, but I thank you.

Another letter came from a completely different source<sup>12</sup> :

Archiac, June 26, 1961

Dear Father,

Sunday, I was listening to the mass sung on the radio by the Jeunes Aveugles as I looked after our two young daughters. During the Credo I was preparing some green beans with our eldest, who is three years old. She was doing as one expects at that age, snapping the beans rather badly. I was especially taken by the melody in the Credo at the “Et incarnatus est,” which I found very beautiful. At that moment I noticed that my daughter had stopped working. She sat quietly with her hands folded, seemingly in

<sup>10</sup> Conversation with Jeannine Collard, Paris, August 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Barraud (1900-1997), composer and radio announcer. Letter Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>12</sup> Letter signed by Gabriel Camus and addressed to Father Avril, director of Roman Catholic broadcasting at French Radio, sent to Jean Langlais on July 15, 1961. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

another world. My wife and I feel sure that the composer of this mass would be happy to hear this marvelous anecdote. There can be no doubt that it proves his music beautiful and sacred. Who will ever know to what extent a child's soul can be close to God?

We would ask you then to communicate this little story to the composer.

Truth comes from the mouths of children, resulting in a compliment devoid of all flattery. I wish for him that his faith will inspire him to write more sacred music and that his soul will be as enlightened by it as was our child's.

Given its first complete performance in Paris at the Church of the Dominicans on December 14, 1952 by Jeannine Collard and Jean Langlais, this *Missa in simplicitate*, product of an exceptional collaboration between creator and interpreter, marks one of the high points in the career of the composer. It is certainly one of his most personal and moving compositions. The following year, the firm Ducretet-Thomson recorded the work at the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde with the same performers.<sup>13</sup> It was the first LP recording of Langlais playing his own work, along with three works by Messiaen, *L'Apparition de l'église éternelle*, "Les Bergers" from *La Nativité du Seigneur*, and the rare original version of the motet *O sacrum convivium* for solo voice and organ. These are also noteworthy as the first LP recordings of Messiaen's music. The composer Jacques Chailley reviewed the recording with great enthusiasm:<sup>14</sup>

As for the *Missa in simplicitate* for solo voice and organ of Jean Langlais (Ducretet), I consider it a masterpiece. The interpretation of Jeannine Collard with the composer at the organ is of an incomparable purity and sensitivity. The Credo in particular, along the same lines as the *Prières* of [André] Caplet cannot be heard without emotion. This LP belongs in every collection.

Another positive review from J. Bouyer appeared in *L'Echo d'Alger* under the headline "Exceptional Recording":<sup>15</sup>

The *Missa in simplicitate* is sung by Jeannine Collard, whose supple voice outlines the harmonic contour of a melodic line that is simple, noble, and moving. The organ playing of Jean Langlais evokes profound sonorities that the recording captures brilliantly. His crescendos are strong but never exceed the technical possibilities of the recording. The entire mass is glorified by this simple but fervent music, a shattering prayer.

Shortly thereafter, also in 1953, Jean Langlais made another LP recording premiere with the same firm, featuring works by César Franck: the "Grande pièce symphonique," the "Prière," and the "Final,"<sup>16</sup> reflecting his profound attachment to a composer he would love and serve all his life. On two later occasions, in 1964 for the Gregorian Institute of America and in 1975 for the Arion label, he would record the complete *Douze Pièces* of his distant predecessor, the first organist of Sainte-Clotilde. For the moment, in 1953, he was content to record three works that were the least known and least played of all of Franck's output for organ at the time. The critical reception was enthusiastic:<sup>17</sup>

The "Grande pièce symphonique" recorded complete in France at long last, is the second of the *Six Pièces* of 1860-1862. Franck was 40 years old. His mature genius

<sup>13</sup> Ducretet-Thomson 270C003 (10") recorded August 25-26, 1953, released in 1954.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Chailley (1910-1999), *La Musique religieuse*, in *Almanach des disques*, 1954. 96.

<sup>15</sup> J. Bouyer, *Disques d'exception*, in *L'Echo d'Alger*, March 16, 1955.

<sup>16</sup> César Franck, *Prière, Final, et Grande Pièce Symphonique*, Jean Langlais at the organ of the Basilica Sainte-Clotilde, 33 rpm, 12 in, LAG-1017, Ducretet-Thomson, 1953.

<sup>17</sup> C.R., *Chronique des nouveaux disques – César Franck: Grande Pièce Symphonique op. 17*, in *Disques* n° 58, 1953.

speaks authoritatively, particularly in this piece ... Ducretet offers us an admirable disk. Jean Langlais is one of the most important of our present-day organists. Having embarked on such a recording project of Franck, one hopes that he will continue ... It is superb, demonstrating an incomparable sense of style and feeling combined with brilliance of execution. The recording quality is sumptuous, faithful, and very clear, possessing an acoustic perspective of uncommon beauty.

Nor can the same critic conceal his enthusiasm for the two works on side two. Concerning the “Prière”:

The interpretation of Jean Langlais merits the same high praise as the music itself: intelligence, musicality, sensitivity. The recording is equally sensational, and it seems to be a world premiere recording of this work.

And, on the subject of the “Final”:

It’s a showy piece, extroverted in the style of a postlude at mass, which has the advantage of showing off the brilliant and robust technique of Jean Langlais as well as the beauty of the recording. This is the first time it has been recorded in France, concluding a disk that we recommend to all lovers of organ music with the greatest insistence. Taken as a whole it forms one of the most successful recordings of its type.

More than one critic expressed hope for a complete recording of the organ works of Franck from Jean Langlais, a project he would undertake 11 years later.<sup>18</sup> A photo taken at this time shows Jean Langlais at the organ of Sainte-Clotilde, concentrating intensely :



**Jean Langlais at the console of Sainte-Clotilde, 1953**

Figure 38. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

At the outset of 1954, on the eve of his second concert tour of the United States, Jean Langlais already had a considerable number of important compositions to his credit, among them several of his best such as the large suites for organ and the *Missa in simplicitate*.

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<sup>18</sup> Jean Préteselle, in *Résistance de l’Ouest*, July 9, 1953; Raymond Lyon and Pierre Guitton, in *Paris Comoedia*, July 9, 1953.



At 46 years of age, having also made two important premiere recordings, he seemed at the height of his powers. Nevertheless, the work that followed was undoubtedly the one that secured his fame: the *Missa Salve Regina*.

### **. *Missa Salve Regina* (1954)**

On April 1, 1954, Jean Langlais boarded ship to return to France, having played 27 recitals on his second tour in North America. Tucked in his pocket was a signed contract for his third American tour, planned for January through March of 1956. In the meantime, a major event would mark his compositional career, the *Missa Salve Regina*, whose creation he chronicled in his *Souvenirs*:<sup>19</sup>

One day at the beginning of November 1954 the director of religious broadcasting at Télévision Française, Father David Julien,<sup>20</sup> came to see me with the following request: “The Christmas Eve Midnight Mass will be televised live from Notre-Dame and rebroadcast in eight European countries. For this occasion we’d like to have a mass for choir and organ that involves the congregation. Could you write it for us?”

“Certainly not,” I replied. “And why not?” “Because I don’t see how one can get a congregation to sing without any rehearsal beforehand.” “But surely it can be done by writing something very simple.” “Then do it yourself, I just don’t feel able to do it.” In this manner I declined energetically.

Toward mid-November he returned so insistent that I finally said, “OK, I’m going to look for a way to do it, and if I find one I’ll write your mass.”

Given the vast size of the cathedral, Father Julien wanted a work that used both the orgue de chœur and the grand orgue, along with brass, choir, and congregation. Since Notre-Dame is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, it occurred to me to draw upon the Gregorian chants devoted to her as a unifying element. I paused over the great antiphon in the first mode, the *Salve Regina*, for which I’ve always had a special predilection. I had to find a simple melodic passage, the verses “O Clemens, O Pia” seemed particularly appropriate.

I set to work right away. Within four days the Kyrie, which seemed to me the most difficult to write because of the few words it contains, was finished. Everything was completed within thirteen days. Father Julien was right despite my initial reluctance. If the modal color of Gregorian chant formed the basis for my work, another strong influence was the School of Notre-Dame, particularly the style of Perotin le Grand. Guillaume Dufay and Guillaume de Machaut, for whom I’ve always professed the greatest admiration, were also invaluable guides. My goal was not to create a pastiche of these masters. On the contrary, through means not available to these venerable composers I sought to recreate the medieval atmosphere their work embodies.

Myself, I prefer the penetrating poetry of the music of the Middle Ages to the prodigious accomplishment of the musicians of the Renaissance. Chords without a third and the use of whole notes were indispensable to the medieval atmosphere I was looking for. The work employs two choirs: a polyphonic choir for three men’s voices that can be doubled by three women’s or children’s voices, and a unison choir intended to be sung by a congregation of men, women, and children. There are no soloists. The first choir part, aside from being more difficult to perform, has an entirely different character from the second, which can be learned simply by listening to it and committing it to memory. No known mass seems to have been written in this fashion,

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<sup>19</sup> Langlais, “Souvenirs”.

<sup>20</sup> Father David Julien (1914-2013) originated religious radio broadcasting in France and was active in promoting sacred music in the vernacular after Vatican II.

allowing the faithful to participate in a polyphonic work. I must say the idea was suggested to me. I was not its originator, but I put it into practice. The congregational part employs only two fragments of the plainsong antiphon, allowing any group to learn it quite quickly. All modulations are carefully announced in instrumental parts that don't present any serious performance difficulties.

Two organs are used. The grand orgue adds a decorative element, generally in full ensembles with an occasional solo stop, such as the Cornet in the Benedictus. The orgue de chœur plays the role of accompanist, supporting both the polyphonic and congregational parts. Eight instrumental parts complement the two organs: two trumpets and two trombones the grand orgue; one trumpet and three trombones the orgue de chœur. These instruments are almost never used alone but serve to augment the vocal effects. The four instruments associated with the orgue de chœur facilitate the congregational singing by announcing their entrances, then doubling their part.

The *Missa Salve Regina* differs significantly from its medieval models. In the men's choir, polyphony prevails over monody. The two choirs are in constant opposition, joining forces only for the "Amen" of the Gloria and the "Hosanna in excelsis" of the Sanctus. The organ and brass parts contribute to the rich counterpoint of the whole in a manner recalling the sonorities of the Venetian School, particularly the *Symphoniae sacrae* of Gabrieli conceived for the two choir lofts in the Basilica of San Marco. The instrumental harmonies are often altered chromatically. Modulations to nearby keys are the norm throughout. These anachronisms blend quite easily into the medieval texture of the mass because both the choral and instrumental parts move predominantly in fourths, fifths, and octaves.

There remained the actual performance of the mass with the cameras of Eurovision rolling. Jean Langlais knew that miscalculation was not possible under the circumstances. Would a crowd estimated at nine thousand be capable of singing their part with only one short rehearsal beforehand? The results exceeded all expectations.

He recalled:<sup>21</sup>

By 11 pm on December 24 there were no vacant seats left in the cathedral. Father Julien arrived to explain what was going to take place, and concise copies of the congregational part were distributed. The rehearsal began. From the very first minutes I was amazed. Just before midnight success seemed assured. At precisely midnight the mass began, and I could scarcely believe my ears! Our enthusiasm and our faith helped us tremendously. What I wouldn't hesitate to describe as a miracle unfolded with a perfection and a simplicity beyond words. Of the 9,000 people present it was estimated at least 3,000 took part in the premiere of this *Missa Salve Regina*. Since that occasion I have not made any changes to the work.

Live television broadcasts were still quite uncommon at the time. Across eight countries Eurovision viewers simultaneously witnessed 500 seminarians in white robes processing into the packed cathedral, an immense white wave accompanied by the music of Jean Langlais.

The enormous success of the *Missa Salve Regina* inspired André Charlin,<sup>22</sup> recording engineer of the new French recording company Erato, founded in 1953, to record it right away with the same performing forces: the Schola of the Pères du Saint-Esprit du Grand Scholasticat de Chevilly under the direction of Father Lucien Deiss, Jean Langlais at the grand orgue, Jean Dattas at the orgue de chœur, the eight brass players and congregation

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<sup>21</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

<sup>22</sup> André Charlin (1903-1983) was one of the first French recording engineers to specialize in stereophonic sound.

under the direction of Father Julien. The recording took place at Notre-Dame on the unusually cold night of February 18, 1955. A member of the congregation recalled:<sup>23</sup>

Discophiles who listen to the *Missa Salve Regina* of Jean Langlais will never know the ordeal the four hundred singers had to endure that Friday evening at Notre-Dame in order to record it for posterity. I can say with a bit of pride, as after a memorable battle, "I was there."

I came to understand on that occasion the double purpose of discreetly stomping the feet while performing: to keep time (a little) and to keep the legs warm (a lot). To say that it was merely cold is to miss the point. The vast stone vaulting launched a deep-freeze operation against us all, meeting little resistance as no serious measures against it had been foreseen and taken.

Around twenty minutes to midnight, between the Kyrie and Gloria and interruptions from the cathedral's clock, thermos bottles begin to appear surreptitiously, alongside sugar cubes and mint Schnapps.

May I betray a confidence? There were even certain cowardly defections among our ranks. After 11 pm, from the Sanctus to the Agnus Dei, our numbers shrank from four hundred to three hundred. Thanks to the skill of the recording engineer no one will ever be the wiser.

A challenging evening, but what a result! Even before the recording appeared the press took notice.<sup>24</sup>

An extraordinary recording is due out in about a month from Erato, the *Missa Salve Regina* of Jean Langlais. Having heard an advance copy I can only share the enthusiasm of its creators. Beyond the spectacular aspects of the recording, made at Notre-Dame with more than 600 singers, two organs, and a luxurious complement of brass, the LP will have important symbolic value: a modern composer, heir to all the musical developments of succeeding centuries, returns to the Middle Ages, successfully reviving the spirit of his distant predecessors.

The enormous masses of sound the composer deploys follow a very simple plan, yet their effect, recorded exactly as one would wish, leaves the listener stunned by their power and beauty.

The bare, ascetic musical architecture Jean Langlais has chosen only increases its effectiveness. Let us hope the disk appears as soon as possible.

At Jean Langlais' request the LP record united the *Missa Salve Regina* on side 1 with Guillaume Dufay's *Missa sine nomine* on side 2, in a desire to demonstrate stylistic continuity across the ages at Notre-Dame, a fact that René Dumesnil, music critic of *Le Monde*, remarked upon.<sup>25</sup>

Four centuries separate Dufay and the present-day organist of Sainte-Clotilde, yet an identical spirit inspires them and a shared popular inspiration informs their music.

Jean Langlais has evoked the poetic freshness of the Middle Ages so successfully that one could imagine him a colleague of Machaut and Dufay, if not Pérotin and Léonin, even though he was born in 1907 and studied with Marcel Dupré and Paul Dukas. His Mass possesses a singular beauty and is magnificently French; it is, in short, a masterpiece.

Elsewhere in the press the recording's reception was also unanimously positive:<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Gilbert Allan, *Confidences d'un choriste de la Missa Salve Regina*, in *Le Figaro*, February 21, 1955.

<sup>24</sup> A. R., *Une Messe de Jean Langlais*, in *Réforme*, April 9, 1955.

<sup>25</sup> René Dumesnil, *Missa Salva Regina de Jean Langlais*, in *Les Disques*, *Le Monde*, August 7, 1955.

<sup>26</sup> R. L., *Disques*, in *Guide du concert*, April 29, 1955.

Here is a recording of the Midnight Mass of 1954. José Bruyr reviewed the original live television broadcast.<sup>27</sup>

On this disk one encounters afresh the thunderous grandeur of the brass and the shared emotion of the congregation, an enormous crowd come not only to attend mass but to participate in the *Missa Salve Regina*.

Its musical style harmonizes perfectly with the architectural style of the cathedral; a musical monument has been erected inside one made of stone. In writing his Mass, Jean Langlais has not simply added to the repertory of contemporary sacred music; he has given the Treasury of the Cathedral of Paris one of its richest ornaments.

The recording, made during the course of a re-enactment on February 18, 1955, is absolutely sensational, the more so for having been made in the immense nave of Notre-Dame rather than in a recording studio.

The Académie du Disque Français, presided over by Arthur Honegger,<sup>28</sup> awarded 34 prizes on November 26, 1955. The *Missa Salve Regina* figured among them, receiving the additional distinction of the “Grand Prix Madame René Coty,” established to honor the memory of the wife of the President of the French Republic, who had passed away on November 12.

The impact of the recording, combined with the circumstances of the televised broadcast of its premiere, served to enlarge substantially the national and international audience for Jean Langlais. Conceived to increase the participation of the faithful in the sung portions of the Mass, following the Pope’s wishes, it surpassed even the hopes and expectations of the composer. The success of his formula – choir, congregation, brass, and two organs – became something of a straitjacket, in fact. He experienced some difficulty escaping from it in the commissions that followed.

The first of these was *Lauda Jerusalem Dominum* (1955) for four mixed voices, unison choir, and organ, in which the antiphon chanted in unison by the congregation alternates with nine versets of the psalm given to the mixed choir doubled by organ. It ends with a Gloria that unites choir and congregation in the final measure.

In the same vein and always on commission, Jean Langlais wrote *Dieu, nous avons vu ta gloire* (1956) for four mixed voices, unison choir, and organ, to a text by Didier Rimaud, translated into English fifteen years later as *Lord, your Glory in Christ we have seen*.<sup>29</sup> Sung in the cathedral of Strasbourg by the 3,000 attendees of the Centre de Pastorale Liturgique convention on July 28, 1957, it was recorded in both 33 rpm and 45 rpm.<sup>30</sup>

On March 1, 1955, the composer participated in a recording project at the churches of Saint-Clotilde and Saint-Merry. Entitled *Oeuvres Modernes pour l’Orgue*, it brought together music of Jehan Alain and Jean Langlais, the former interpreted by Marie-Claire Alain, younger sister of Jehan Alain.

Marie-Claire Alain, then 29 years old, had already begun a brilliant recording career with Erato. On this occasion Jean Langlais played his “Te Deum” and the “Canzona” from his

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<sup>27</sup> José Bruyr, *Messe de Minuit télévisée à Notre-Dame de Paris*, in *Guide du concert*, January 7, 1955.

<sup>28</sup> This was the last public appearance of Arthur Honegger (1892-1955), who died the day after the ceremony.

<sup>29</sup> Translation by Anthony Petti, in *New Catholic Hymnal*, London, Farber, 1971, followed by Brian Wren, in *More Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, New York, Walton, 1972.

<sup>30</sup> Vigil for the seventh Sunday after Pentecost, *Dieu nous avons vu ta gloire*, Studio SM, Paris, 1957.

*Folkloric Suite*. Marie-Claire Alain performed the complete *Suite médiévale* of Langlais<sup>31</sup> along with *Litanies*, *Postlude pour l'office des complies*, and the *Suite* of her brother. Olivier Alain, elder brother of Jehan and Marie-Claire, wrote the liner notes:<sup>32</sup>

It is remarkable to note certain parallel tendencies at the heart of a school of young French organists that began to manifest itself brilliantly around 1937. Olivier Messiaen, Jehan Alain, Jean Langlais, Daniel-Lesur, Jean-Jacques Grunewald, Gaston Litaize – a constellation of obvious talent: composers, interpreters, and improvisers whose shared esthetic evolved on the eve of World War II.

The principal themes of their orientation would appear to be the following: a renewed emphasis on the use of modes (old, exotic, or invented), an extremely refined harmonic language (whether complex or simple), a suppleness of rhythm recalling free scansion of plainchant, a certain taste for the archaic (born of a fear of decadence, a desire to revive tradition, and a need to distinguish themselves from frequent orgies of new-fangled rhythms and harmonies), and finally, intentions that are very often deliberately poetic and evocative, only signifying and suggesting.

The overall impression that comes a bit hesitantly from this sunbeam of personalities is that of a true “School of Colorists.”

A photograph from the era shows the Langlais family (Jeannette, Jean, Claude, and Janine) gathered outside Sainte-Clotilde after Claude’s solemn Communion in 1955.



**Jeannette, Jean, Claude and Janine Langlais at Claude’s solemn Communion**

Figure 39 (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

### **. *La Passion* (1957)**

In 1957 Jean Langlais realized the dream of every composer of Western sacred music since the Middle Ages: he wrote a *Passion* for chorus and orchestra (brass, woodwinds, strings, and

<sup>31</sup> This recording of the *Suite médiévale* has been re-issued as volume 18 of the collection « Marie-Claire Alain: l’orgue français » (22 CDs, Erato/Warner Classic, 2014)

<sup>32</sup> Olivier Alain, liner notes for *Oeuvres modernes pour Orgue, Jehan Alain – Jean Langlais*, Jean Langlais and Marie-Claire Alain at the organs of Sainte-Clotilde and Saint-Merry, Erato, 33 rpm, LDE 302, 1955.

percussion) to which he added eight soloists and a narrator. Certain composers in the history of music, certainly not the least important ones, have preferred to compose Requiems instead. Most were Roman Catholic, like Verdi, Fauré, and Duruflé, taking their inspiration from the Catholic Office for the Dead. Others, chiefly Lutherans, drew their inspiration from the “Passion” of Jesus Christ, the most obvious example being Johann Sebastian Bach. Jean Langlais, though Roman Catholic, preferred a Passion to a Requiem for reasons he outlined in the *Guide du concert*.<sup>33</sup>

The composer called upon the poet Loys Masson,<sup>34</sup> who augmented the traditional account of the Passion with a text rich in mysticism. A narrator intervenes several times during the course of the work to deliver passages drawn directly from the Gospels. There are eight roles: Judas, Peter, Pontius Pilate, Jesus, and Mary. Three bear no proper name (First Woman, Second Woman, A Man) but are of great importance. Provided with a text of such high quality, the task of the musician becomes simple: he must follow the sacred drama down to the last detail. Choruses, sung or frequently spoken, are invaluable for augmenting the pathos of the drama. The orchestra, by turns transparent and violent, accents and underscores the various emotional states of the drama without overwhelming it. The final part of the work could be called “Hymne à la Croix,” as it is based on a single verset, “O Crux Ave” of the Gregorian hymn “Vexilla Regis.” The theme of the Gregorian “Ave Maria” also serves to introduce certain interventions on the part of the Virgin Mary. The entire composition is freely written, the composer deliberately wishing to avoid any definite form.

The musical form of the Passion was one of the earliest to evolve in European Christianity, as we know from the numerous early documents that have come down to us. The practice of singing and dramatizing the Passion of Christ was codified across the centuries and brought to a summit by Johann Sebastian Bach in his stupendous Passions.

More than two centuries later Jean Langlais took up the form again, but with several modifications. Most notably the role of the Evangelist, usually assigned to a tenor, is given to a narrator, following the example of Arthur Honegger’s *King David*. In the same fashion certain choruses are spoken rather than sung.

If most other Passions make the most of the Gospel’s dramatic action by alternating recitatives, arias, and choruses, Jean Langlais, following the spirit of Loys Masson’s poem, emphasizes commentary rather than action, especially in the long and sorrowful meditation at the foot of the cross. Distancing himself voluntarily from the Lutheran model founded upon the Protestant chorale, he erects instead a Catholic monument that draws its inspiration from Gregorian chant.

According to the conventions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the classic structure of a Passion comprises a recitative, *secco* or accompanied, that serves to evoke the narrative of the Passion as found in the Gospels. Various ariosos, arias, choruses, and chorales are interspersed by way of commentary as the drama unfolds.

As a point of reference, the *Saint Matthew Passion* of Bach contains no fewer than 78 sections. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the majority of older Passions (Vittoria and

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<sup>33</sup> *La Passion, Jean Langlais, 1ère audition*, in *Guide du concert*, March 21, 1958.

<sup>34</sup> Loys Masson (1915-1969), French poet born in Mauritius, active participant in the French Resistance, editor-in-chief of *Lettres Françaises* after the war, devout Christian.

Byrd) adopt a more sober form, favoring recitation of the text or psalmody over vocal or instrumental commentary. It is this earlier conception, more static and austere, that Jean Langlais evokes in *La Passion*. It contains neither arias nor large orchestral or vocal movements with the brief exception of the final “O Crux Ave,” a mere 45 measures concluding an hour of music. Unlike Bach, Jean Langlais deliberately disassociates himself from the Protestant tradition by avoiding the introduction of chorales.

If *La Passion* does not draw upon the Gospels, it does adhere closely to Masson’s poem, which comments only upon certain key phrases from Saint Matthew’s chapters 26:47-75 and 27:1-50. Loys Masson’s decision to write such a text seemed completely logical in 1957. Langlais had collaborated with him shortly before on his *Cantate de Noël* radio broadcast. By following the choices the poet made for *La Passion*, Langlais deliberately deprived himself of an essential springboard for the drama related in the Gospels: the action, to which Masson makes only brief reference from a distance. Instead, he prefers to interject poetic commentary of occasionally cumbersome lyricism; for example, the exhaustive repetition of “Je suis la Mère,” or the obsession with blood and the crucifixion that compromise the story rather than magnify its drama and power. “Blood” is a recurrent theme upon which the poet insists heavily, dragging the musician along in his wake through a score of some 169 manuscript pages.<sup>35</sup>

Other obsessive themes developed at length by poet and composer include Judas (and by extension betrayal, expressed in the phrase, “forgive us, Lord, for Judas is in each of us and we know not what we do”), the Cross and its symbolism, and finally the Mother of Christ (“I am the Mother, I have bled so much I have the eyes of the dead”).

Throughout *La Passion* one cannot ignore the primary role assigned to the Virgin Mary, normally a secondary figure in the Gospels’ account. This recalibration of relative importance can only have pleased Jean Langlais, whose Marian devotion was well-known.

Here is the vocal distribution of parts established by the composer: Mary (contralto), Pontius Pilate (tenor), Jesus (baritone), Judas (bass), and two women and one man without proper names.

An important place is reserved for the chorus, who take on the double role of “turba” (an unruly crowd prone to brief and dramatic interruptions more frequently spoken than sung) and Christian commentator, as in the Passions of Bach.

The work unfolds in uninterrupted fashion, without set pieces or strong structural delineation. The excerpts from Saint Matthew assigned to the narrator are either spoken alone or with accompaniment from the darker colors of the orchestra: bassoon, cello, and double bass or clarinet, bass clarinet, and bassoon.

Masson’s poem is set to music either as expansive recitative (vocal soloist accompanied by strings and woodwinds while flutes trace arabesques in counterpoint with the melody) or sung and spoken choruses.

Whenever the dramatic action intervenes briefly, usually unornamented, the poetic commentary that follows is lengthy, diminishing the action with a certain complacency blended with the symbols of blood, treason, the Virgin Mother, and the Cross.

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<sup>35</sup> Jean Langlais, *La Passion*. 169 manuscript pages, unpublished. CD recording of the premiere made by Radiodiffusion Française, March 27, 1958, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, duration: 67 minutes. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

Because the *La Passion* unfolds without pause, lacking clear distinction between recitative, narration, and choruses, there is an undeniable sensation of monotony. The music tends toward abstract reflection rather than commentary upon the action.

From a harmonic point of view Jean Langlais juxtaposes free modality and chromaticism in a musical language quite typical of the composer. The transparency of the orchestration and the prevalence of recitative recall Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, one of Langlais' favorite scores.

In the final analysis the unusual emphasis on certain characters and symbols disoriented the public and the critics, who were expecting a more active work based on the models of the past.

The premiere took place on March 27, 1958 (Maundy Thursday) at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées with Jeannine Collard (Virgin Mary), Claudine Verneuil (First Woman), Flore Wendt (Second Woman), Bernard Demigny (Jesus), Joseph Peyron (Pontius Pilate), Jean-Jacques Rondeleux (Peter), Xavier Depraz (Judas), Jean Giraudeau (A Man), Alain Cuny (Narrator), and the Choeurs de la Radio with the Orchestre National under the direction of Manuel Rosenthal. It was a prestigious cast, not only for the singers but also the narrator. Alain Cuny was a famous actor previously chosen by Paul Claudel in 1944 for his *L'Annonce faite à Marie* and by Curzio Malaparte for the principal role in *Le Christ interdit*.

The event was highly anticipated, the critics curious to see if the composer could repeat the triumph of his *Missa Salve Regina* in a different vein.

All the major Parisian papers were represented: Clarendon (*Le Figaro*), Claude Rostand and René Dumesnil (*Le Monde*), Jean Hamon (*Combat*), Eric Sarnette (*Musique et Radio*), Jacques Vasa (*La Nation française*), and Jean Quéval (*Mercure de France*). Even the American composer Edmund J. Pendleton was present to review the work for the *New York Herald*.<sup>36</sup>

The public's reception at the premiere was plainly enthusiastic, according to Jacques Lamy:<sup>37</sup>

As far as I was concerned, and the audience shared my feeling, it was magical. Everyone was impressed by the rightness of expression, the close marriage of words and music, the dramatic brilliance of the choirs and orchestra, the tranquil melodic and harmonic sense.

The critics were more divided. If some praised "a solid work, well thought-out and obviously sincere"<sup>38</sup> others found it:

An oratorio rather old-fashioned in concept, in which voluntary limits on size make for extraordinary strength of evocative power, expressive in the fusion of diverse elements in its sonic architecture.<sup>39</sup>

Others expressed serious reservations, beginning with the text:

I confess I do not share the composer's enthusiasm for this poem, the best passages of which are borrowed from the Gospels, recast in neo-medieval garb. For my part, I find

<sup>36</sup> Edmund J. Pendleton, *Music and Musicians, Twentieth-Century French*, in *New York Herald*, April 4, 1958.

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Lamy, *Un musicien aveugle à l'honneur*, in *La Canne blanche*, March-May 1959.

<sup>38</sup> René Dumesnil, *Création d'une "Passion" de Jean Langlais*, in *Le Monde*, April 2, 1958.

<sup>39</sup> Eric Sarnette, *Musique et Radio*, November 1958.



the style of “all ye who pass by here, see if there is any sorrow like unto my sorrow” quite artificial and worn-out. It’s fake poetry.<sup>40</sup>

Even more severe:

The text of the Gospels is sufficiently descriptive without the addition of commentary in the high moral tone of the Saint-Sulpicians. This is a mistake on the part of Loys Masson, and he drags the composer along with him.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to these critiques of the text there was the music itself:

Far from composing a spectacular Passion, Jean Langlais has delivered a long meditation at the foot of the Cross. Was he correct to forgo all variety? Was this a requirement dictated by the Holy Spirit? I’m not sure, as I’m still trying to figure out what he was up to inasmuch as the text by Loys Masson incited him to a certain monotony.<sup>42</sup>

“Monotony” was a word that also flowed from the pen of other critics, notably Jean Hamon:

There are so many repetitions in this work, such as the crescendos in the choirs, that ultimately become boring.<sup>43</sup>

Or Claude Rostand :

The only serious criticism it seems possible to bring to this score concerns its weak dynamic on the one hand, and on the other a rhythmic invention without much relief, all of which risks a certain impression of monotony and lengthiness.<sup>44</sup>

The commentary and conclusions drawn by Jacques Vasa were more damning:<sup>45</sup>

The work is curiously constructed. The action and the text are stripped of all music, through a modesty that is perhaps a renunciation. Such texts clearly take pride of place in the listener’s mind, the music falling into commentary or paraphrase in its wake. Once the power of suggestion that comes from the words escapes, the music searches in vain to retrieve it. Becoming too human, it cannot avoid cliché and repetition. For better or worse, I don’t think in its present form the *Passion* of Jean Langlais adds any laurels to his already vast fame. One expects, especially after this, something better from him.

Was Jean Langlais bothered by the poem, even paralyzed by the mythic scale of the work he was attempting? Whatever the case, he reacted by making deep cuts in the score immediately after the premiere, eliminating measures here and there to reduce its duration from 67 to 53 minutes, proof that he gave some credence to the reviews. In a letter to Theodore Marier he confirmed:<sup>46</sup>

As you will see, I have made numerous cuts, the work seeming too long to me. The text has been translated into English by Emita Brady. This young woman worked hard on this long translation<sup>47</sup>.

Unfortunately, the harm was done and the work was never performed again, not even in the United States where it was planned that Theodore Marier would conduct it. The recording

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<sup>40</sup> Clarendon (Bernard Gavoty), *La “Passion” de Jean Langlais*, in *Le Figaro*, March 29, 1958.

<sup>41</sup> Renée Vollmer, *La Tribune de Genève*, n° 95, March 1958.

<sup>42</sup> Clarendon, see footnote 349.

<sup>43</sup> Jean Hamon, “*La Passion*” de Jean Langlais, in *Combat*, March 29, 1958.

<sup>44</sup> Claude Rostand, “*La Passion*” de Jean Langlais et Loys Masson, in *Le Monde*, April 3, 1958.

<sup>45</sup> Jacques Vasa, “*La Passion*” de Jean Langlais, in *La Nation française*, April 9, 1958.

<sup>46</sup> Jean Langlais, letter to Theodore Marier, December 3, 1959, copy in collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>47</sup> Unpublished English translation, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

planned by Erato was simply cancelled. Jean Langlais was all the more affected by the reception the work received in the press because he felt the performance at the premiere had been splendid.

But I console myself, he confessed later, in remembering the words of Paul Dukas:  
“In life one is often reproached for having accomplished what one set out to accomplish.”<sup>48</sup>

Never again would he undertake a work of such vast proportions. He turned the page on this aspect of his composing career, leaving behind its failure and never venturing into this domain again. Asked toward the end of his life why he had never written a Requiem or a Magnificat, he replied:<sup>49</sup>

A Magnificat after Bach? A Requiem after Fauré and Duruflé? Impossible! I have opted for discretion, and thus my *Offrande à une âme* for organ, written in 1979 in memory of my first wife, is my way of dedicating a Requiem to her, one drawn upon the Gregorian themes from the Roman Catholic rite for the dead.

In any case, he scarcely had time to reflect upon the failure of his *Passion*, having accepted a commission from Radiodiffusion Française in 1957 for a shorter religious fresco, *Le Mystère du Christ*, for narrator, soloists, chorus and orchestra, a sort of mirror image of *La Passion* in which the Virgin Mary, surrounded by a halo of happiness, implores her newborn son whom she knows to be the Savior. The first part of this oratorio, entitled “Suite des Mages,” opens with an oboe solo on the complete melody of the “Pastoral Song,” the second piece in the *Organ Book* of 1956. The theme of another old French Noël already employed by Marcel Dupré with notable success in his *Variations sur un Noël* for organ, op. 20 runs throughout large portions of the work, evoking the birth of Christ. This *Mystère du Christ*, op. 100 (duration: 21 minutes) would be the last important work commissioned by Radiodiffusion Française.

One must believe that Jean Langlais made his greatest impression upon musicians as a composer of large vocal ensembles, specifically the combination of large unison choir and mixed choir in four parts made famous by his *Missa Salve Regina*. For this reason he received a somewhat unusual commission at the beginning of 1958, from César Geoffroy, founder of the movement “A Coeur Joie,” for a cantata in French to be sung at the third Choralies de Vaison-la-Romaine<sup>50</sup>.

This would be the choral cantata *En ovale comme un jet d'eau* for large choir (women and men) and four mixed voices on a text by his friend Edmond Lequien, written from March through June 1958.

César Geoffroy specified the requirements imposed upon the composer:

The problem posed to the musician was to write a piece for 1,500 singers (perhaps 2,000) of very different backgrounds and levels of musical accomplishment. They

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<sup>48</sup> Langlais, “Souvenirs”.

<sup>49</sup> Conversation with Jean Langlais, October 1979.

<sup>50</sup> Les Choralies de Vaison-la-Romaine is an international choral festival that takes place every three years over nine days in a medieval village in the south of France famous for its Roman ruins. The 21<sup>st</sup> festival took place in August 2013, with 4,000 participants.

would rehearse two hours a day for a week before performing on the eighth day before 6,000 listeners.

The weakest among them would not know how to read music. Fortunately there would also be a core group of strong singers whom one could call upon for soloists. To succeed, the composer had to accept the rules of the game, depriving himself of competition from an orchestra. Not every composer agreed to do so. Few truly succeeded, because one must live in a choral environment all year long, as some of us do, to truly understand that the voice is not a clarinet or a bassoon. The least melodic or harmonic awkwardness applies the brakes and spoils the enthusiasm. Jean Langlais accepted this challenge right away when we proposed it. Here is his score. The single opportunity I had to read through the freshly hatched manuscript with him filled me with a musical interest that we shall all discover as we rehearse and perform it.<sup>51</sup>

This impressive event would unfold at Vaison-la-Romaine at the beginning of August 1959, uniting more than 2,000 young singers of different nationalities. The first hearing (and to this day one of the only public performances, the score being out-of-print) took place during the grand final evening, August 11, 1959, before an audience of 9,000. The press gave the following review:<sup>52</sup>

César Geoffroy, founder and director of the Choralies, ascended the podium to conduct the cantata *En ovale comme un jet d'eau*, composed for the festival that year. The text by Edmon Lequien, generally abstract in style, nevertheless contains certain passages of startling realism, for example, “SOS, firemen!” It evokes the grand cycle of the universe, of civilizations that kill their sorcerers’ apprentices, launching a call to hope and love above the chaos, tokens of rebirth in a world of tenderness and brotherhood.

On these themes Jean Langlais has composed dense and lively music, avoiding both a dreary, facile style and an unnecessarily bold one. An almost Gregorian monody alternates in striking contrast with outbursts of shouted rhythms. The final chorus, whose harmonies bear the mark of a master, is of an incontestable beauty. Under the direction of César Geoffroy, Caillat, Corneloup, Pernoud, and Martorel, the choirs gave a more than honorable performance of a difficult score.

## **New Organ Works composed for England**

We have spoken at length about the large-scale vocal works of Jean Langlais and his first recordings, but during this period (1952-1958) he never ceased composing for the organ. In late 1956, on commission from Novello for its new *International Series of Contemporary Organ Music*, he wrote a *Triptyque* (Melody-Trio-Final) dedicated “To my friend Maurice Duruflé.” The journal *Music for Organ* reviewed it:<sup>53</sup>

This opus is in three movements entitled Melody, Trio, and Final.

The first movement, “Melody,” is off-and-on a trio in itself, since the uppermost voice is doubled in the pedals, while the inner voice supplies a second motive. The piece is fairly representative of the facile technique of Langlais and leaves much to be desired in real music composition.

The “Trio” is awkward keyboard music which sometime appears as a two-part composition. It sounds clever but again this is not always the requirement for music. The “Final” would appear in print to be a scherzo by Vierne. The work is a disappointment to those who have encountered exciting rhythms in other works by this

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<sup>51</sup> Jean Langlais, *Cantate chorale “En ovale, comme un jet d'eau”*, preface by César Geoffroy to the score published in the series *A Coeur joie*, Paris: Presse de la Cité, 1959.

<sup>52</sup> Henri Dumoulin, *Les Choralies de Vaison-la-Romane*, in *Le Monde*, August 1959.

<sup>53</sup> Harry W. Gay, *Novello & Co: Jean Langlais, Triptyque*, in *Music for Organ*, October 1958, vol. 41, n° 10.

composer, for it falls into the utterly predictable and sometimes stagnantly impressive. The difficulty does not quite become the value of the music, but for those avid fans of this usually dependable composer, here is a set of three.

Jean Langlais definitely did not enjoy good luck with the severe British critics (as a case in point, see the comments on his *Suite française* in *The Musical Times* of December 1949). However, when he performed his own music the reviews were more nuanced, if not enthusiastic. That was the case when he premiered his *Triptyque* at the Parish Church of Leeds on February 11, 1958:<sup>54</sup>

Mr. Langlais reserved for Leeds the premiere of his *Triptyque*.

This, as its title implies, is in three movements, the first a serious but approachable essay in modal counterpoint (often a central tune with wide-spaced octave accompaniments and at least one glorious moment of canon), the second, an engaging movement for flutes, reminiscent of his “Arabesque sur les flûtes” he played previously in the programme but without that work’s chromatic runs, the third, a vigorous spiky toccata clearly meant as a tribute to us since it is based on the Westminster chimes.

The three movements in fact make a happy summary of M. Langlais’ style, which advances no extreme ideas but is freely diatonic and contemporary and ever inventive.

The *Triptyque* collection is in fact the result of a misunderstanding: Novello wanted three easy organ pieces but neglected to mention this detail to Jean Langlais. As a result, the second movement of the *Triptyque* is a trio very close in spirit to Johann Sebastian Bach’s trio sonatas, of exceptional difficulty. Jean Langlais considered it one of his finest works and played it in concert throughout his life. However, the publisher clung to his original idea of a collection of easy pieces. The composer complied gracefully with three new pieces, “Pastoral-prelude,” “Interlude,” and “Bells.” These were united in a collection entitled *Three Characteristic Pieces* published in 1957 as number 10 in the series *Novello’s Organ Music Club*. The *Triptyque* was not published until one year later so that the public would have the easy pieces before the difficult ones. Jean Langlais wrote the following preface for this new collection:

#### COMPOSER’S NOTE

I pay homage to John Stanley with these pieces, and the subject material of *Bells* is directly inspired by his music. Any of the pieces can be used as voluntaries or they may be played together as a suite for recitals. The music does not demand elaborate color and the suggested schemes of registration may be modified to suit the smallest organ. Paris, May 1957.

The dedication “Homage to John Stanley” requires a bit of explanation: John Stanley (1712-1786), the blind English composer and friend of Handel, was one of the musicians Jean Langlais admired the most. He especially appreciated his *Voluntaries* for their classicism and elegance, often playing op. 5, n° 8 in D minor in concert from the mid-1960s on. For Jean Langlais, John Stanley, a blind musician who could not read music, was an exemplary artist whose music it was Langlais’ duty to perform. On February 19, 1958, he performed the work again during a memorable recital at Royal Festival Hall in London. At this occasion, Basil

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<sup>54</sup> Ernest Bradbury, *Blind Organist at Leeds Recital, M. Jean Langlais of Sainte-Clotilde*, in *The Yorkshire Press*, February 12, 1958.

Ramsey wrote in *The Musical Times*:<sup>55</sup>

The cream of French organ recitalists are musicians of extraordinary ability, equipped with spine-tingling technique, highly-developed powers of improvisation, and the coolest of console manners. We are fortunate in having regular visits from them.

Jean Langlais appeared on 19 February in a programme that ranged from Buxtehude to the present day. Mr. Langlais brings tremendous rhythmic vitality to all that he plays; its effect on the Bach first *Trio Sonata* was quite electrifying...

The remainder of the programme was devoted to the recitalist's own works.

Jean Langlais writes with an uncanny knowledge of the organ's ability, a flair for unusual textures, and with a strong sense of rhythmic and harmonic colour.

His recent *Triptyque* proved a delightful exploration of three distinct moods, from the quiet contemplation of "Melody" and the incessant nervous ripple of "Trio" (with its attractive pedal tune), to the swagger and flourish of "Final."

After a short "Arabesque sur les flûtes," Mr. Langlais concluded this group with the last of *Trois Paraphrases Grégoriennes*, written in 1933-34. This stirring piece is based on the plainchant "Te Deum."

What Benjamin Britten had in mind when he wrote his theme for Jean Langlais' improvisation is a little difficult to ascertain. What is quite certain is that it became the subject of a whirlwind display that picked haphazardly at almost every contrapuntal device known to man, a *tour de force* that showed the amazing vitality of the modern French School.

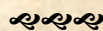
Let's look to this improvisation theme written by Benjamin Britten:



**Improvisation theme given by Benjamin Britten to Jean Langlais at the Royal Festival Hall, London, February 19, 1958**

Figure 40. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

We now follow the steps of Jean Langlais's career on another continent, North America, with his new concert tours in 1954, 1956 et 1959.



<sup>55</sup> Basil Ramsey, *Royal Festival Hall Recitals*, in *The Musical Times*, April 1958, vol. 99, 218.

## CHAPTER 8

### *American Tours in the Fifties*

Jean Langlais began receiving commissions from American publishers in the late 1940s (*Fête*, 1949, H. W. Gray). His first North American concert tour in 1952 had further strengthened his ties with America. From this time forward a certain divide began to appear in Jean Langlais' professional commitments. His Parisian career continued apace with his duties at Sainte-Clotilde, his recitals in France and elsewhere in Europe, his students at the National Institute for the Young Blind, and his French publishers, chiefly Herelle (later Philippo and, through acquisition, Combre) and Bornemann.

At the same time he drew steadily closer to North America, undertaking regular concert tours there and composing specifically for the American marketplace. Due to the slower nature of transatlantic communication before the Internet, there was a lack of awareness back home of the works he published abroad. *Fête*, for example, remains little known in France to this day, a fate shared by several other works from the 1950s and 1960s: *Organ Book*, *American Suite*, *Poem of Life*, *Poem of Peace*, *Poem of Happiness*, and *Three Voluntaries*.

Americans are an enthusiastic and decisive people. While his first tour was still underway, the Chicago publisher H.T. FitzSimons commissioned a collection of organ pieces. Jean Langlais began composing them in December 1952, taking as his point of departure themes from French folksong. As in the past (*Suite brève* and *Suite médiévale*, 1947, *Suite française*, 1948), he called his collections “Suites,” with a nod to America in the English title *Folkloric Suite*.

Aware that the five movements of the *Suite médiévale* had proven especially popular with American organists, Langlais adapted this model to the *Folkloric Suite*, scrupulously avoiding, however, any religious associations. He did not wish to offend the religious sensibilities of his new friends in predominantly Protestant North America.

As he would do so often in the future, he took as his point of departure an improvisation recorded for Radio Strasbourg many years before, in 1937, on a popular tune from eastern France, “Ils étaient trois petits enfants.” To this piece, entitled “Légende de Saint Nicolas (St. Nicholas Legend)” for the collection, he added four new ones, the first a fugue on the Easter

hymn “O filii,”<sup>1</sup> followed by “Cantique (Canticle),” a set of variations on the Breton folksong “Adoromp’holl.” At the beginning of the following “Canzona,” Langlais specified “this theme was originally a song dealing with the details of the Battle of Pavie was used by J. S. Bach in his chorale ‘Through Adam’s Fall.’”<sup>2</sup> A “Rhapsodie sur deux Noëls (Rhapsody on Two Christmas Songs)” closes the collection. This last work is dedicated to the great organist Catherine Crozier, whose talent and kindness Jean Langlais keenly appreciated.

These five pieces draw their unity not only from folksong themes but from the ease with which Langlais demonstrated the art of modal modulation. The established mode always remains intact in spite of rapid changes of key. Finally, to demonstrate that this new collection was truly destined for America, he indicated in the introduction: “The composer asks his interpreters to use his registrations unchanged insofar as possible.” By this he meant to discourage a practice that he fought against in all his masterclasses in the United States: the systematic alteration of the specific registrations indicated in his scores.

He went so far as to indicate, always in English, the keyboards desired (Swell, Great, Choir) and certain stops that he had discovered in America such as “Stopped Diapason,” “Orchestral Oboe,” and “English Horn.”

### **American concert tour 1954**

Following the success of his first American tour, Jean Langlais was immediately engaged for a second tour in February and March of 1954. Bernard La Berge, Langlais’ first agent, had passed away and was succeeded by Henry Colbert. The successor firm was known as Colbert-La Berge Concert Management. Lilian Murtagh stayed on as executive secretary for organ concerts.

The new agency devised an exceptionally busy tour for Langlais –26 recitals in 44 days – about one concert every two days between February 5 and March 30, 1954. Crisscrossing the vast North American continent from east to west and north to south, Langlais was accompanied by his wife Jeannette, as before. One can only imagine the difficulties they encountered, travelling immense distances by train for two months without really speaking English. The *Roanoke Messenger* commented maliciously:<sup>3</sup>

The French artist speaks English haltingly. His wife knows only one word: “Okay.”

Langlais recalled having brought along his Braille French-English dictionary, a considerable pile of paper that he consulted in his spare time when not using it as a pillow in hotels and on trains.

The stress of such travel never caused him to lose his sense of humor, however, as evinced in numerous press interviews. To Deborah B. Morrison of *The Baltimore Sun* he quipped:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dedicated to Claire Coci, a frequent advocate of his works in her recital programs.

<sup>2</sup> The English is his. “Canzona” enjoyed such success that it was published in an arrangement by Kenneth Dantchik for organ and brass quartet (FitzSimons, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> *Roanoke Messenger*, March 16, 1954.

<sup>4</sup> Deborah B. Morrison, *The Baltimore Sun*, March 20, 1954.

In Paris, he travels with Mrs. Langlais by car or subway and alone on foot. The trip from his home to Ste. Clotilde is a 25-minute walk. To his former church, he says, “it was a 45-minute walk when I was alone and 50 when I was with my wife.”

Remaining faithful to habits established during his first tour, Langlais devised three different concert programs for the 1954 tour. The first half of each program was devoted to the French organ school, both symphonic and modern. Franck, Saint-Saëns, Tournemire, Vierne, Dupré, Duruflé, Messiaen, Alain, and Litaize were well-represented. The second half consisted of a selection of his own works, both old and new, followed by a large-scale improvisation, usually a symphony on four themes provided by the public.

In his *Souvenirs* he recalled with scorn at least one set of themes submitted to him:

In Birmingham, Alabama, here were the themes proposed for each of movements of my improvised symphony:

Allegro: first theme of the Symphony in D minor of Franck  
Andante: the Pilgrims' Chorus from Wagner's *Tannhäuser*  
Scherzo: a Mozart piano concerto theme  
Final: Marguerite's theme from Gounod's *Faust*.

Certain commentators remarked upon the scarcity of early music in his programs, which was generally limited to J. S. Bach and C.P.E. Bach. Of his own works, here are the ones he chose for the 1954 tour:

Program 1: Postlude n°2, Cantique (*Folkloric Suite*), Antienne (*Hommage à Frescobaldi*), Fête.

Program 2: Acclamations (*Suite médiévale*), Communion (*Hommage à Frescobaldi*), Française (*Suite française*), *Incantation pour un Jour Saint*.

Program 3: Chant Héroïque (*Neuf Pièces*), Voix céleste (*Suite française*), Canzona (*Folkloric Suite*), Plainte (*Suite brève*) Epilogue for pedal solo (*Hommage à Frescobaldi*).

Jean Langlais wished to promote the diversity of his music by avoiding duplication in the tour programs. He was also careful to select works from earlier collections (*Neuf Pièces*, *Fête*, *Suite brève*, *Suite médiévale*, *Suite française*), placing them alongside more recent ones such as *Incantation pour un Jour Saint* (published as recently as 1954), *Four Postludes* (each dedicated to an American organist, Walter Blodgett, Hugh Giles, Charles D. Walker and Maurice J. Forshaw, respectively), *Hommage à Frescobaldi* or the very recent *Folkloric Suite* from which he selected the “Cantique” and “Canzona.”

Like many composers, Langlais preferred to be moving forward constantly rather than devoting time to works from the 1930s that were already well known in America, such as the *Poèmes évangéliques* or the *Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes*. “My best work,” he had a habit of saying, “is the one I just finished composing!”

In the course of this second tour the press took note of increasing interest on the part of the public, including organists and critics, in Jean Langlais' triple role as interpreter, composer, and improviser.

Here are some of the headlines he garnered:



**“Large audience hears blind French organist”**

*Delaware Gazette*, February 6, 1954

**“Langlais in fine organ concert”**

*Houston Post*, February 16, 1954

**“Pleasing organist draws full house”**

*The Nashville Tennessean*, March 12, 1954

**“Blind French composer amazes hearers with new “Symphony”**

*Roanoke Messenger*, March 16, 1954

**“His world of beauty and Braille”**

*The Sun*, Baltimore, March 22, 1954

**“Organist Jean Langlais plays at Symphony Hall”**

*The Christian Science Monitor*, March 29, 1954

**“Jean Langlais at Notre Dame: noted French organist plays own compositions”**

*The Montreal Star*, March 30, 1954

Let us examine more closely several excerpts from reviews that Jean Langlais’ management sent to him after his return to France:<sup>5</sup>

A large audience from Delaware and surrounding cities was attracted to Gray Chapel Friday evening for the Artists Series concert played by the eminent blind French organist, Jean Langlais. For this listener the latter portion of the program, comprising a varied selection of Mr. Langlais’ own compositions, was by far the meatiest and the most stimulating fare, as a whole, of the evening. The Langlais idiom is respectably contemporary, and at the same time accessible to ears accustomed to organ literature of the past. His music is possessed of a good deal of dissonance which produces no greatly startling effects because it is the logical outcome of compositional procedures. In closing, Mr Langlais improvised, with admirable skill, a “Symphony for Organ” on themes submitted from several members of the audience. His feat was so much appreciated and applauded that he played, as encores, two more of his own works. The first of these, an “Epilogue” from one of his Suites, was an amazing virtuoso piece for the pedals. The artist played it with dazzling effect.

Arriving in California on February 23, Langlais played five recitals in six days: Anaheim the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Los Angeles the 23<sup>rd</sup>, Redlands the 24<sup>th</sup>, Modesto the 26<sup>th</sup>, San Francisco the 28<sup>th</sup>; Clarence Mader wrote in *The Diapason*:<sup>6</sup>

Jean Langlais is no longer just a name to Southern California organists. By his recital at Occidental College, Feb. 23, the second in a series of three presented jointly by the Pasadena and Los Angeles Chapters in collaboration with Occidental College, he left his imprint as a composer-organist in a programme featuring his own works. Shelves in the local music stores were stripped of Langlais publications the day after his performance.

Under the title **“Pleasing organist draws full house”** the *Nashville Tennessean* wrote:<sup>7</sup>

A full house at an organ recital is by way of being news and that is what Jean Langlais, organist of Ste. Clotilde, Paris, had at Fisk University last night. Moreover, it was a

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<sup>5</sup> Tilden Wells, *Delaware Gazette*, February 6, 1954.

<sup>6</sup> Undated typed letter from Clarence Mader to Jean Langlais. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais. The review was apparently submitted but not published.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Nicholas, *Nashville Tennessean*, March 12, 1954.

warmly enthusiastic crowd. The general feeling seemed to be “This would be wonderful if a person with sight were doing it, but for a blind man – well, it is almost miraculous.” For myself, I may say that I enjoyed M. Langlais more than any other of the famous foreign organists I have heard at Fisk, and there were two principal reasons: he seemed not concerned with being a touring virtuoso and a celebrity, but with making music for which he had particular sympathy and affection; and he did not seem to chafe at the narrow limitations of the instrument on which he performed, but used its resources so skillfully that one was never reminded of its shortcomings.

This review highlights one of the most characteristic qualities of Jean Langlais’ playing: his excellence at registration. Even if the organ were limited in resources or unattractive, he was able to maximize its potential and cause the listener to overlook its faults. Even a downright abominable instrument, or one too small for recital work, found itself transformed into a credible concert organ under his fingers.

The final time he accomplished such a “miracle” was at the orgue de chœur at Ste. Clotilde on November 16, 1989, during an homage to Charles Tournemire organized by the Amis de l’Orgue on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his predecessor’s death. Weakened by his heart condition, Langlais did not feel able to climb the 72 steps to the grand orgue, going only as far as the lower gallery containing a small instrument by Convers reputed to be among the ugliest in Paris. There the intense poetry of his performance of Tournemire’s “Fioretta n° 2” (*Sei Fioretti*) and the “Communion” from n° 35 of *L’Orgue Mystique* left the audience incredulous, some believing that a special mechanism allowed the grand orgue to be played from the orgue de chœur.

As far back as 1951 the American press also noted Jean Langlais’ propensity for modern music, his desire to perform it, and to be a strong advocate for it. Langlais elaborated upon his views in the course of an interview before his recital at the cathedral in Cincinnati:<sup>8</sup>

According to Mr. Langlais, there are some critics today who believe that musical geniuses do not and cannot exist in this era, due to the influence of the modern. “This is not so,” the organist said, “the musicians of old had genius, but not all. There are many musicians living today who are as capable as those of another era, for merely bearing a modern title does not necessarily mean that the music is not good.” “Today’s critics,” the Frenchman asserted, “are too inclined to call a thing good just because it has aged over the years. Guillaume de Machaut and William Dufay of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries might be considered close contemporaries to our music today, for they had pure inspiration. Our so-called ‘modern music’ is also in the same category.”

One of the high points of the 1954 tour was his participation in Boston’s *Festival of Liturgical Music in Honor of the Marian Year*, sponsored by the American Guild of Organists under the auspices of Archbishop (later Cardinal) Richard Cushing and the Archdiocese of Boston.

In this concert, given on March 27, 1954 at Boston’s Symphony Hall,<sup>9</sup> the American premiere of Langlais’ *Messe Solennelle* took place. It was conducted by Theodore Marier, with the composer at the organ.

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<sup>8</sup> Kathryn Murray, *The Messenger*, March 21, 1954.

<sup>9</sup> The same hall where Olivier Messiaen had attended the American premiere of his *Turangalila-Symphonie* on December 2, 1949.



**Theodore Marier conducting the American premiere of Langlais' *Messe Solennelle* at Boston Symphony Hall, March 27, 1954; the composer at the organ.**

Figure 41. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

In an article entitled *Mon second voyage aux Etats-Unis* published in the *Journal de Sainte-Clotilde*, an informal parish newsletter, Langlais described the evening:

In Boston, the archbishop, upon learning I was coming, rented Symphony Hall (the equivalent of our Palais de Chaillot) with its 2,400 seats for the personal musician of the diocese. My *Messe Solennelle*, dedicated to the curate of Sainte Clotilde, was performed by a chorus of 100 singers under the direction of Theodore Marier, while I was playing both the grand orgue and the orgue de chœur parts. Before I went onstage, a charming man smoking a cigarette in an elegant suit offered me words of encouragement and handed me a check.

“Who was that distinguished gentleman?” I asked.

“That was Archbishop Cushing,” I was told.

Another special memory from the 1954 tour occurred in Milwaukee:<sup>10</sup>

My most picturesque memory is perhaps the welcome we received in Milwaukee, in a convent of Franciscans. “We unfortunately cannot attend your recital,” a nun told me, “because we are giving a concert ourselves at the same time. We have an orchestra that rehearses one hour per day in which I play the timpani.” Sister Timpanist, oh, Saint Francis, did you see this coming?

A quick detour to Canada toward the end of the tour enjoyed strong public approval, as one finds in this review from Montreal:<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> From the same undated *Journal de Sainte-Clotilde*.

<sup>11</sup> Claude Gingras, *Montreal Gazette*, March 30, 1954.

The organ recital by Jean Langlais in Notre Dame Church was remarkable in several ways, but perhaps the most remarkable and encouraging feature was the size of the audience, which was unusually large for a local music function of this kind. In part it is due to the enthusiasm and organizing ability of the Canadian College of Organists, but it is also symptomatic of a renewed interest in the organ as a musical instrument in its own right rather than an inferior copy of the orchestra.

Eric McClean wrote of the recital in the same day's *Montreal Star*:

The occasion for such interest was a performance by Jean Langlais, who is regarded not only as one of the best organists France has produced in this generation, but also as one of the most important contributors to the instrument's repertoire today... After such an exhibition of fine playing it is hoped that no further opportunities will be lost in bringing Langlais to Montreal when next he tours this continent.

Jean Langlais and his wife did not keep a diary during the 1954 tour as they had in 1952, their tight schedule permitting scarcely any free time, but a few letters survive from Jeannette Langlais to her sister-in-law Flavie, Jean Langlais' young sister. Flavie lived in Antrain, a village close to La Fontenelle, where she was in charge of the public school. The Langlais family had entrusted their son Claude, barely ten years old, to her for the duration of the tour.

In a letter dated March 11,<sup>12</sup> Jeannette described their feelings upon encountering the California landscape for the first time, poetically evocative impressions that Jean Langlais would recall as he composed his « Californian Evocation » in the summer of 1959, the third movement of his *American Suite*.

California, where snow-covered peaks are visible from the hot climate of the plains, its exotic palms and so many trees unfamiliar to us, the eucalyptus groves, what character they all have! Further north, San Francisco seduced us, a city on a peninsula indolently offered to the Pacific where one senses a real joie de vivre. Its port assumes the character of so many others. Brittany? Marseille? Fishing boats and boats from the Far East – there is a Chinatown quarter – San Francisco is like a dizzying rollercoaster, as steep sometimes as Montmartre. A spacious, open city, vast, with splendid parks where squirrels will eat nuts out of one's hand. Everywhere beautiful, magnificent, noble trees and cool, shady valleys. We didn't see the giant sequoias but I saw several giant conifers, along with mimosa bushes and tree-like ferns. Roses, azaleas, and citrus trees announced the advanced stages of spring.

For his recital in New York at Central Presbyterian Church on March 22, a week before his return to Paris (he had four concerts remaining), Jean Langlais chose his program n°1: "Final" by Franck, "Communion" from *l'Office de la Pentecôte* by Tournemire, "Les Bergers" by Messiaen and "Litanies" by Alain, followed by his own works, *Postlude* n°2, "Cantique," (*Folkloric Suite*), "Antienne" from *Hommage à Frescobaldi*, *Fête*, and finally an improvisation on four themes submitted by Charles Dodsley Walker. This concert represented for Langlais the most challenging of the tour. It's amusing to read the unsigned review devoted to it in *The American Organist*:<sup>13</sup>

It was the first time respectable themes were handed a recitalist for public improvisation. It took 22 minutes and 50 seconds, ending with a fugue (on Mr. Walker's theme) and again it was the first time a recognizable fugue was used in public improvisation which should undoubtedly be attributed to Mr. Langlais' blindness which

<sup>12</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>13</sup> *The American Organist*, vol. 36, n° 4 (April 1954).

enabled his great mind to stick strictly to its subject unannoyed by seeing a mass of keys and stopknobs in front of him. Colbert-La Berge Management has conferred a blessing on the profession – and industry – by bringing Jean Langlais to our land to stop the flood of American abuse of upperwork and mixtures.

A very strange conclusion, indeed, that to improvise a fugue well it is preferable to be blind!

When Jean Langlais boarded ship to return home on April 1, 1954, he carried with him a signed contract from Colbert-La Berge for a third North American tour planned for January to March 1956.

At this point in our narration let us turn to several informative and humorous recollections of Kathleen Thomerson,<sup>14</sup> a student and faithful friend of Jean Langlais:<sup>15</sup>

The Christmas of 1954 was an exciting time for me because I went to Paris to play an audition for Jean Langlais. At the time I studied with Flor Peeters at the Flemish Royal Conservatory in Antwerp, Belgium, and was deciding where to study next summer. Flor Peeters admired the works of Franck and Tournemire, and introduced me to the poetry in them. And I liked also the works of Jean Langlais that I have learned at the University of Texas. Flor Peeters suggested that I go to Paris to study with Langlais the next summer and arranged for my audition. I learned the *Suite médiévale* and went to Paris.

Being at the church where Franck had been the organist was thrilling, the sound of the organ was unlike any other I had played, and having Langlais the composer there beside me was a dream come true. I played several pieces for him. The hard part was the resistance of the keys when I played « Acclamations carolingiennes » (*Suite médiévale en forme de messe basse*) on full organ. Even through the Barker lever was employed when the keyboards were coupled, the Grand Orgue keys required all my strength to push down. By the final chord I was exhausted, but Langlais was pleased, and agreed to teach me privately beginning in June 1955. He also asked me to play « Acclamations » as the postlude after mass the following Sunday.

What a summer that was! I found affordable housing in the American House of the Cité Universitaire. If I remember correctly, there were only two dorms of the Cité that would accept women in the summer of 1955. My roommate was Tunisian. The American House had pianos for practice in the basement rooms. Next door, at the Canadian House, Kenneth Gilbert and Bernard Lagacé had rented a pedal harmonium and installed it in a practice room. I rented daily practice time from them, and the three of us kept that instrument busy! ... I decided to study only works of Franck, Tournemire, Langlais, and early French composers during this summer, and I worked ahead on them during the final five months I lived in Belgium.

I was determined to make the most of my limited time in Paris, and took two lessons a week. Langlais agreed to my specialized course of study, but said he would prefer that I study the early French composers with Gaston Litaize, who was excellent for these works. He wrote me a note of introduction which I took to Mr. Litaize, and it was arranged that I would go once a week to take a lesson at the organ at his apartment. That was also wonderful. I was fascinated by Litaize's instructions in musical ornaments.

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<sup>14</sup> Kathleen Thomerson taught organ at Southern Illinois University, then at St. Louis Conservatory of Music. She is the author of the first book in English on Jean Langlais, *Jean Langlais, a Bio-Bibliography* (New York, Greenwood Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Kathleen Thomerson, *Tribute to Jean Langlais*, 8 typed pages sent to the author on February 16, 2001, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

At that time Langlais did not have an organ in his apartment, so I went to the Basilique Sainte-Clotilde for my lessons. They started at 9 in the evening, when the church was closed, and continued as long as I had literature to play. I remember being amazed at the cohesiveness of the organ sound, the beautiful blend of the stops. Afterwards, we would often have a cup of tea at a café, and then walk off in different directions, he to walk home, and I to take the metro back to the Cité. The month of August he went to vacation at his home in La Richardais, Brittany, but since I did not want to stop my study, he asked me to come there to take my final lesson on the Franck Chorales. He said there was a beautiful Cavaillé-Coll organ in the nearby town of Saint-Servan where I could play for him. So, he went off to La Richardais, and I was to follow in two weeks.

I was ready for some sight-seeing after all the concentrated practice, so when two American girls who were there for a summer French language course talked about driving down in their rented car to see the châteaux de la Loire, I joined them. After a week, I was dropped at a railway station to take the train for Brittany. The only trouble was, the address and directions for contacting Langlais turned out to be back in Paris! I had written the instructions on whatever composition I was playing at the time we walked, but had brought different scores with me.

I often wrote on my music, especially French phrases I heard that I didn't know and wanted to be able to say. Bernard Lagacé was scandalized at this sacrilege, and had told me that it was no way to treat my music. I paid no attention (and now, 46 years later, enjoy playing from my old scores with their interesting notations), but now that habit presented quite an obstacle. I didn't remember the name of the village where I was to go, nor the address. I could remember that the nearest rail station was Dinard, so that's where I bought a one-way ticket. Once there, I went to the post office to call the Langlais, and was astounded to find that they didn't have a telephone! They didn't know what day I would arrive, and I could see that contacting them was not as easy as I thought it would be.

I was 21 years old, alone, and afoot in Brittany. So I went back out in the street, looked for the tallest church steeple that I could see, and set out. Surely, I thought, the organist or priest there will know the famous Jean Langlais.

I arrived at the rectory at lunchtime, and the housekeeper let me wait at the parlour. When the pastor came in, I tried to explain in French that I was to take a lesson with Mr. Langlais, and didn't know where he lived. It sounded a little strange, I admit. After some time in conversation, the good father decided to believe my story. He told me the name of the village, said it was in walking distance, and directed me to the right road out of town. It was more like a footpath most of the way, as I recall. My big suitcase had gone back to Paris with the girls' car, so I was mainly carrying my music, organ shoes, and a few clothes.

Once I got to La Richardais, I started asking at various cottages for the Langlais home. No one had heard of them. Obviously I was on the wrong side of town! Finally I found someone who knew and found their small home. No one was there, but I could see neighbors in the next yard. Off I went again. I had gotten somewhat more fluent in the often-repeated request by this time. Still, everyone seemed to think it was unusual. However, this couple said that they had just seen the Langlais drive off to the seaside for his daily walk. They let me wait in their lawnchair. I was almost as exhausted as when I played the organ Tutti. An hour later, a car drove up, and Mme. Langlais was quite surprised to see me next door. Le Maître thought it was amusing, particularly as I exclaimed: "Mr. Langlais, you are better known in America than here!"

Langlais was inspiring as a teacher. In later years I sometimes heard him scold students, but he was always kind to me. For one thing, he knew I was practicing and working hard. For another, I wrote down what he said and tried to do it. I remember one time at the organ when I stood up on the pedals, making a great racket, to reach my

pencil. He said, "WHAT are you doing?" I explained, and he commented, "You are writing down what I say. The others don't remember."

When I left, he gave me a Braille alphabet, a stylus and slate, and asked me to write him in Braille. This was not because he didn't want anyone else to read my letters, but was another example of how he wanted to be as independent as possible. If he had my letter in Braille, he could find it and read it for himself, without having to wait for someone else to tell him what it said. I regret that I usually only wrote about twice a year. Since I wrote in English, without using abbreviations, every word was spelled out, and it seemed to take forever. If I made a mistake in punching the stiff paper, I took it out of the slate, turned it over, and pushed the dot identification back level with the surface of the paper. Langlais said that my letters were clear, and he had no problem reading them.

After I returned to Austin and my senior year at the University of Texas, I was able to study with Langlais once every two years when he would make a concert tour in America. I drove to the closest city each time, bringing his compositions that I had learned in the interval. I remember taking lessons in Baton Rouge, Wichita Falls, New Orleans, Oklahoma City, Austin, Fort Worth, Denver, New York City, and Boys Town, Nebraska. Organ registration at these unfamiliar organs was more of a problem for me than for him. While I would be looking for a certain stop, his hand would go out and pull it on. Because he could not look for the stopknobs, he developed an amazing and efficient memory for their placement.

Langlais' kindness, and interest in my work as an organist, was shown in several ways. He often encouraged me, and wanted to hear about the organs and programs I played. He took time in his busy recital tours to give me a lesson, and refused to accept any money for this.

## **American Concert Tour 1956**

For his next concert tour Jean Langlais was accompanied not by his wife, as in 1952 and 1954, but by a relative, Monique Legendre. Jeannette Langlais explained the reasons for the change in a letter to Lilian Murtagh:<sup>16</sup>

December 1, 1955

Dear Miss Murtagh,

It's been a long time since I've had the pleasure of writing you.

I do so today with some sad news. Due to the fragile state of health of our son, who at 12 years of age is growing up too fast, I will not be able to accompany my husband in America this time. Our child has needed close supervision for some time now, and I would not be comfortable so far away from him. Fortunately, one of our close relatives will serve as a guide for my husband. She speaks English very well.

From this point on the guides for Langlais' tours would all be relatives, friends, or students having a good command of English or even American students: Monique Legendre (1956), Christiane Chivot (1959), Marie Villey (1962), Ann Labounsky (1964), Susan Ferré (1967), Colette Lequien (beginning of the 1969 tour) then Marie-Louise Jaquet (1969, 1972, 1975), David Lloyd (1976), Kirsten Kolling (1978) and Marie-Louise Jaquet-Langlais (1981).

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<sup>16</sup> From the correspondence of Lilian Murtagh bequeathed to the Organ Library of the Boston Chapter, American Guild of Organists, Boston University, copy in the collection of Marie-Louise Langlais.

In the course of the 1956 tour Jean Langlais dictated to Monique Legendre a group of letters to his wife, who later copied them into a manuscript journal entitled “*Troisième tournée aux U.S.A 1956.*”<sup>17</sup>

From it we are able to follow step-by-step the progress of this tour, always by train or automobile (as explained earlier, the tragic airplane accident off the Azores on October 28, 1949 that claimed the lives of the great French violinist Ginette Neveu and the world champion boxer Marcel Cerdan had made such a powerful impression throughout France that Jean Langlais refused energetically to travel by air).



**Departure for the United States, 1956 concert tour**

Figure 42. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

The result was an especially tiring itinerary that began in Boston and ended in Jamestown, New York, by way of several Midwestern states, Texas, New Mexico, California, Colorado, Utah, Chicago, Washington, D.C., North Carolina and Georgia.

All told there were 28 concerts and four masterclasses between January 7 and March 6, 1956. Especially significant was the fact that Langlais had been invited to play by the most well-known American organists: Robert Baker (New York City), Alexander McCurdy

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<sup>17</sup> 93 manuscript pages transcribed by Jeannette Langlais from the letters Jean Langlais sent her while on tour (collection Marie-Louise Langlais). Certain excerpts from this sort of logbook were published 40 years afterwards on the occasion of the centennial of the composer’s birth, translated by Kathleen Thomerson for *The American Organist: Jean Langlais, “My Organ tour of the United States 1956,” The American Organist* (February 2007). 60-65. Ten years before, they already appeared in *Hommage à Langlais*, a 143-page booklet published by Marilyn Mason and the University of Michigan School of Music, Ann Arbor, 1996, in a translation by William R. Steinhoff (*Jean Langlais and the United States; a love story*. 11-16).



(Philadelphia), Marilyn Mason and Robert Noehren (Ann Arbor), Robert Rayfield (Chicago), Alexander Schreiner (Salt Lake City), and William Teague (Shreveport).

Let us examine several characteristic passages, often humorous, from Langlais' letters to his wife during this tour:

**Wednesday, January 11, 1956, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

At 9:30 am I become acquainted with the most complicated organ that I have ever seen: 100 stops, two instruments in one console, separated by a large distance. Seven Swell boxes of which two are crescendo pedals, divisional combinations for each of the organs, general combinations for the organs separately and together.

At the intermission, Mc Curdy mentions that he is astonished I can handle the organ alone, given only a few hours to familiarize myself with it. I share his opinion. But what fear this morning when he explained the puzzle to me! The console rises by elevator at the beginning of the concert: when the organist takes his place on the bench, it rises and does not come down until one wants it to. For me, it was awful; and it took me at least fifteen concerts before getting rid of that feeling of vertigo.

**Sunday, January 15, Youngstown, Ohio**

Arrival in Youngstown at 6:40 am. Cold and foggy. No one at the train station. We go to the hotel, then to the church. We try to enter, at 7 am unsuccessfully. Return to the hotel to phone the concierge of the church. Return to the church, still unsuccessful. It was not the right church! We enter the right one at 7:50 am. The organbuilder is there. The instrument is in bad working condition. The setter for the manual combinations brings on the pedal stops. I fix without pedal stops. Then it suppresses all the pedal stops that were there before. I practice one hour and come back at noon: the organist cancelled all my combination pistons.

At four o'clock, the concert; all goes well. Very nice atmosphere.

**Monday, January 16, Akron, Ohio**

Arrival in Akron at 10:30 am. The organ has 118 stops, of which a large number are unusable strings. The crescendo pedal contains only strings. Certain reeds are also unusable. The organ works badly. Concert without trouble with good themes for improvisation. Good audience, nice environment.

**Tuesday, January 17, Ann Arbor, Michigan**

Very nice dinner in a private residence with eight students, Marilyn Mason and her husband. Marilyn Mason reminds me that I promised her a musical work. "I shall give you a commission," she says... That's the way it's done here. Of course, I refuse.

**Wednesday, January 18, Ann Arbor**

I confess that I feared this concert; I have had one of the worst cases of stage fright in my life. In the "Pièce héroïque" I really wondered if I could keep going.

We left under an avalanche of snow.

**Saturday, January 21, Kansas City, Missouri**

After a 16-hour trip, we arrived in Kansas City to cold and snow.

Horrible organ, no mixture on the Great, an unusable one in the Swell, no 4 foot in the Pedal, two general combinations that don't capture the couplers, dead notes everywhere, stops that come on when you don't want them, abominable sounding, out-of-tune instrument.

I fume openly and assert that one does not invite somebody to play such an organ.

All the same, I shall play the best I can, but without joy, and without stage fright either.

**Sunday, January 22, Kansas City**

Very bad sleepless night. Cold and still snow. Concert with stage fright (!). They placed 56 candles around me while I played ; the only thing missing was a coffin.

Cipher in one of the reed stops during the improvisation... Very long day.

We left at 9 pm to arrive tomorrow at midday in Shreveport. This snow and bad weather prevent me from taking walks, which depresses me immensely. I feel that the life of a concert artist is not for me<sup>18</sup> and I miss France and the ones I left there.

**Monday, January 23, Shreveport, Louisiana**

Fifteen-hour trip in the Pullman car of the train, where there is nothing hot to drink. Arrival at noon. Here it's better, there's no snow.

The organ is wonderful. No mechanical trouble.

I practice for two-and-a-half hours only. During the concert, I invert Dupré and Ross.

Everything goes well, yet I have continuous stage fright, despite an audience who applauds in this church. I play my "Te Deum" as an encore. The first theme given to me for improvisation is so complicated that it must have cost its composer a lot of work. The second is a folk-song... 17 days working: 10 recitals. Finally, one can go for a walk; how liberating!

**Tuesday January 24, Fort Worth, Texas**

Endless trip from Shreveport to Fort Worth. Arrival on a beautiful evening.

We stay on the university campus: 2 rooms, 4 beds, 2 bathrooms, and, above all, the countryside. I feel close to the earth in this ground-floor room facing a wide-open Texas, almost warm, and calm. So far from the artificial comfort to which I feel less and less suited! I compose until 1 am in this nice peacefulness. My *Prélude* for solo voice is begun and far along.

**Wednesday, January 25, Denton, Texas**

In Denton, Miss Helen Hewitt asked me to hear her organ students. Among other things, I listen to the chorale "In Thee is Gladness." "We tried the chimes in the Pedal, but I don't believe that we were right," Miss Hewitt said to me. "I do not believe it either, dear Miss Hewitt, nor were you right to put the tremolo in the "Prélude, fugue et variation" or the Oboe and the Voix céleste for the solo in the Choral n°1 of Franck. But you are so charming, looking for your car, which you didn't bring, and relating your cats' thoughts under various circumstances."

Return to Fort Worth; it's a nice evening. I finish my small *Prélude* for voices begun yesterday. Buxtehude gives me an idea. I am going to add a chaconne to this small piece: *Prélude, Fugue et Chaconne*.<sup>19</sup>

**Thursday, January 26, Denton**

Three pupils ask me to listen to them. The first plays the sixth Sonata of Mendelssohn with the Unda Maris and Flute 4' for the solo of the first variation. The second plays the theme of the Passacaglia with Foundations 16', 8', 4' and Voix céleste. When the third announced that he would play the "Dorian," I immediately recommended the sounds to be used.

**Friday, January 27, Denton**

The weather reminds one of the beautiful days in the South of France. Bye bye, the coat. I worked late on campus and from my open window I could hear the various horns of the trains that cross the city (E-A# or E-G-C or F#-A-C). To combat insomnia I made myself stay up past midnight.

<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, between 1952 and 1981 Jean Langlais would give some 300 recitals in America.

<sup>19</sup> This *Prelude, fugue et Chaconne* for voices was apparently never completed. No trace of it has ever been found in the papers of the composer.

I replaced my sleeping pills with the composing of *Prélude, Fugue et Chaconne* for wordless voices. This medicine surpasses the others, and I also have the impression that my little piece written entirely without instruments is not half-bad. I would add that walks outdoors are also as effective as the previously mentioned medicine.

At noon, the organists invited me to Western Hill, an excellent restaurant. It was Friday, the day for fish, but I was surprised that my neighbor ate meat. No matter, I wrapped myself in the flag of a French Roman Catholic organist and ordered halibut, which could have been anything between salmon and pike.

At 3 pm I practice, I sleep at 5 pm and Kathleen (Thomerson) arrives at 6 pm.

At 8:15 pm I start the concert. First class stage fright, both in the “Récit de Cromorne” of Couperin and in the Final of Vierne’s *Sixième Symphonie*. I don’t understand why. The Dean informs me that the audience is one of the largest seen here for several years. If, as Saint Augustine said, « humility is the truth, » I would say that I played well. 200th anniversary of the birth of Mozart, to the day. I improvise on the theme of the fugue of the *Fantaisie and Fugue* of said Mozart, in C major.

Two encores and they suggest to me one concert here per year, there being three in their series. They speak to me of my precision, of my light registration. This is definitely what I sought to show the Americans.

Everywhere I tell them bad things about their Solo (4th) manuals, showing them that I never use it except for perhaps a few notes on an English Horn.

I occupy a lower berth in the train. I fight courageously to undress in a horizontal position, to put my things away in this small space. What complicates everything is when you have a keyboard under your pillow.<sup>20</sup> And then, the prospect of reversing the process the next morning. Let’s hope that the night gives me strength for the new battle!



**Jean Langlais with his portable keyboard, 1956**

Figure 43. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

### **Saturday, January 28**

6 am. Second battle in the lower berth, crowned by a considerable victory: pulling my pants on without putting my feet on the ground, due in large part to the thickness of my pillow as augmented by my portable keyboard.

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<sup>20</sup> Indeed, during the 1956 tour Jean Langlais carried with him a mute folding keyboard, as shown in a photo from January 1956. Let us recall that for his first tour in 1952 he took along a bulky French-English Braille dictionary. Feeling more certain of his English this time, he preferred to bring along a keyboard upon which he could practice during the interminable train rides.

Got cleaned up in the men's room, surrounded by business men, presumably, who all spoke loudly and used electric razors. Alone in a corner with my \$1 mechanical razor, ought I to confess that I did not feel inferior to my neighbors in spite of my humble condition? Change of trains in Amarillo, very Mexican in character, treeless, quiet, with children hawking newspapers in voices already typically Spanish in tone.

Arrival in Albuquerque at about 7 pm after having crossed the arid desert regions, then the Rocky Mountains which circle the city from where I write.<sup>21</sup>

### **Sunday, January 29, Albuquerque, New Mexico**

For the second time since I started this tour, I can attend Mass. It feels good to go to church this morning in the sunny and cool mountains, 2.000 meters above sea level.

I played a concert at 4 pm without problems, on an interesting organ, which, however, contains on the Choir a Cornet made with Dulcianas!... Delightful reception, after the recital, where I had the pleasure of speaking French with four priests, among whom were three Fathers of the Holy Sacrament. With the Mass and the sparrows, one felt at home.

### **Tuesday, January 31, Albuquerque**

Between 10 am and noon, I settled myself in peaceful solitude in the church where I played on Sunday. There I wrote the beginning of a suite for organ that I want to construct modally. However the starting mode chosen for each piece will be transposed over the course of the piece, but never modified in its modal scale.<sup>22</sup>

Departure for California.

### **Wednesday, February 1, Fresno, California**

We left Albuquerque yesterday night one and a half hours late, arriving in Fresno with a five-hour delay. Endless trip with three hours on a bus in between two trains. A short visit to the charming town of Bakersfield.

### **Thursday, February 2, Fresno**

The organ for the concert is tiny, two keyboards, four general pistons, four divisional pistons, none in the Pedal. Ugly sonorities. While I'm practicing the priest comes to see me, a charming and courteous man. He doesn't speak French but knows France, specifically the cathedral at Poitiers and its old organ... This morning, at the church, I finished my first "Pièce Modale."

### **Friday, February 3, Fresno**

Glorious weather... Concert at 8.30 ; I play program Number 3 on this terribly ugly organ without Pedal pistons, then, no stage fright.

### **Saturday, February 4, San Francisco, California**

Up at 5:30 am. We left by car at 7:15 to arrive at 10:45 (180 miles) in San Francisco. In Mrs. Larkey's large car, we listened to the *Symphony Eroica* toward the end of the trip. This beautiful music in this beautiful country has a considerable effect on me!

### **Sunday, February 5, San Francisco**

Magnificent weather. Forshaw,<sup>23</sup> Nin,<sup>24</sup> Ann Larkey<sup>25</sup> and I go to church, where I am to rehearse at noon, after having lunch at John Forshaw's.

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<sup>21</sup> Albuquerque is actually surrounded by the Sandia Mountains.

<sup>22</sup> These are the *Huit Pièces modales* composed between January 31 and March 12, 1956 in Albuquerque, Fresno, and aboard the *Maasdam* on the return voyage. They were completed for publication by Filippo in 1957.

<sup>23</sup> John Forshaw, friend and student of Jean Langlais who invited him to play in California in 1956.

<sup>24</sup> Joaquin Nin, brother of the famous writer Anaïs Nin, composer and student with Jean Langlais in the class of Paul Dukas at the Conservatoire de Paris in 1934-1935.

<sup>25</sup> Ann Larkey, dedicatee of the *Huit Pièces modales*.

I practice a short half-hour, then we go for a walk in San Francisco... Concert with a minimum of stage fright. The organ bench, short and narrow, rocks back and forth!

**Thursday, February 9**

Up at 6:10 am. 7 to 8: A walk among the streams, birds and trees is enchanting : marvellous Californian morning's poetry. Unknown birdsongs... I love this country, though it is so far from mine. I intend to set down my memories in an orchestral work.<sup>26</sup> I began my third "Pièce Modale" yesterday. Alas, I'll only have time to work on it again on the ship going home.

**Saturday, February 11, Denver, Colorado**

At 9 am, I familiarize myself with the organ on which I will play this evening.

Incredible Pedal: three 16' stops, one huge 8', no 4'.

No mixture, for reeds: just an Oboe. Great: no mixture, an unusable Trumpet as the only reed, the only 2' in the organ is on the Choir. No general pistons. The first things the crescendo brings on are the 16'...

At 5 pm, reception at the consulate, which brought out 40 or 50 people. At the end, a guest, saying goodbye, wanted to show me that she had on an orchid.

1. she put my finger on her lighted cigarette
2. on her chest
3. on the orchid
4. of all that, I think that I preferred the cigarette...though lit. She offered to have me smell the orchid, but I quickly retreated !

**Tuesday, February 14, Salt Lake City, Utah**

Mr. Schreiner shows me the organ<sup>27</sup> : 188 stops, five manuals, 196 pistons, 20 general pistons, 8 for each manual, 5 expressive boxes and so on. This organ is marvelous, the most beautiful I have ever seen. A new thing for me: a 32' Mixture in the Pedal with a 7th; a 32' reed stop on the Swell. Nine-rank Cornet on the Positif, including the 7th and the major Tierce.<sup>28</sup>

The preparation of this recital fills me with enthusiasm. I exhaust myself without realizing it. 8.15 pm, concert. Two encores... This huge temple holds about 8,000 persons seated and the acoustic there is very special.

**Thursday, February 16, Omaha, Nebraska**

4:40 am: Arrival in Omaha; frozen, icy cold.

A staff member from Boys Town, an orphanage with 900 children, is at the train station with his car.... The ambience here is very nice, lunch with Msgr. Wegner and Father Schmitt, who conducted my *Messe Solennelle* and my *Missa in simplicitate*.

Yesterday, it was my birthday and I received greetings from Miss Hewitt and her pupils in Denton. Her cat, Quintadena, was born on February 14, so she had an important reference point from which to remember *my* birthday.

At the concert, optional for the boys, 300 out of 900 attended.

I improvised on "Puer natus est" which was intoned by the boys.

**Friday, February 17, Minneapolis, Minnesota**

Departure Boys Town: 8 am, it is very cold.

Arrival Minneapolis: 7 pm. It is even colder (-15° F)...

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<sup>26</sup> In fact, Jean Langlais wrote 3 years later, in 1959, an *American Suite* for organ in eight movements published by H. W. Gray. The title of each movement evokes a part of this American land that he loved so much: "Big Texas", "New-York on a Sunday morning", "Californian evocation", "Scherzo cats", "At Buffalo Bill's grave", "Boystown, place of peace" and "Storm in Florida".

<sup>27</sup> Alexander Schreiner (1901-1987), organist at the Mormon Tabernacle and its 1948 Aeolian-Skinner organ.

<sup>28</sup> After discovering this organ Jean Langlais decided to add a Clairon 2' to the Sainte-Clotilde Récit, to complete the battery of reeds to 16-8-4-2; it was added in 1963 during restoration and electrification.

**Sunday, February 19, Chicago, Illinois**

Departure for Chicago at 7:30 pm; arrival at 4 pm.

Rayfield is at the train station and takes us to his home, an hour by car.

It is freezing, there is some snow, but compared to the weather in Minneapolis, it seems warm.

**Wednesday, February 22, Decatur, Illinois**

At the concert, I hardly have stage fright.

During my “Arabesque sur les flûtes” there’s a sonority that I didn’t want. I searched everywhere for what was making it. Only at the end of the piece I discovered that the crescendo pedal was slightly open. No one noticed...

12:15 pm: Mass during which I play. They told me that I could practice from 1 to 2:30 pm. Asked to make a recording. I makes some trials with the microphone until 1:30.

But then I learn that there’s a silent retreat at 1:45 pm. Therefore, I cannot practice for the concert scheduled for 3 pm. So it is with Catholic churches!

2:45 pm: the organbuilder arrives, all smiles, 15 minutes before the concert. I show him what is not working. He offers to intervene but I respond, “Please, do not touch the organ, there is enough wrong with it already!” and I do not hear from him anymore.

Concert at 3 pm with a full church and people standing. Everything went as well as possible. The gods were present. It is terribly hot. I play without a jacket and it seems that I am photographed non-stop. “When one has a necktie, one is dressed,” the Cistercian priest told me.

**Monday, February 27, Washington, D.C.**

19 hours of travel. Joyful arrival in Washington without cold or snow. How good it is! Nobody at the train station. A taxi drives us to Saint Matthew’s Cathedral where I am to play. The organist says he is astonished at my English, remembering my difficulties four years ago. Finally an organ that works. I register my entire program in two and half hours. Dinner and a walk in this city that I like so much.

**Wednesday, February 29, Washington**

Happy funeral for the end of this month. My joy is hidden because I do not feel capable to express it with a bottle of Coca-Cola.

**Monday, March 5, New York, NY, Central Presbyterian Church**

The hardest day of my tour and I play this evening in New York.

Only two more days, but I feel that I have really reached my limit. Very low morale.

I practice with very little joy, though the organ is poetic...

8:30 pm: concert. The church is packed. There are many New York organists, many French people as well. The programme has no improvisation. However Hugh Giles has Bingham themes and gives me one. I felt the audience with me from start to finish.

The daughter of Paul Dukas was there, Virgil Fox also. I recalled with emotion César Franck’s organ bench.

I had stage fright. I was really on edge this afternoon. Then, something came over me, and my spirit lifted. I played with more joy than I would have thought.

I lost my beret this morning and one of my two handkerchiefs. It’s time to go home. Murtagh gently sounded me out about a new tour in two years. Nothing doing.

**Tuesday, March 6, Jamestown, NY**

Jamestown. Small city of 43,000 habitants, having 43 churches!...

Concert: after my first piece, the audience expresses itself by wildly shaking the programs. What a curious effect, the sound of the paper; it will be like that all during the concert.<sup>29</sup> It reminded me a little bit of a student assembly.

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<sup>29</sup> Certain American churches of the time forbade applause at any time.

During the “Pièce héroïque” of Franck, a bat kept flying back and forth quite near me; then it was chased and caught.

They asked for a Lutheran chorale as an improvisation theme, in C major. I thus finished my series of twenty-eight recitals on a magnificent “C” chord whose clarity was not exactly in harmony with my extreme fatigue.

10 pm, train for New York. The tour is practically finished. I find it hard to realize.

**Wednesday, March 7, New York, NY**

Meeting with Gray concerning my quintet for string quartet and organ that he will publish this summer.<sup>30</sup>

It is quite easy for me to sum up: I cannot play anymore.

In the 65 days I have been in the U.S.A, I have had three full days of rest, two in California, one in Washington.

Once again, Providence has done things well in helping me hold on until the job was done. I am thankful, but I am so tired that even my great enthusiasm at returning to France and everything I left behind there doesn't show.

May the eight quiet days of the crossing allow me to recover my equilibrium.

These are the most important excerpts from Jean Langlais' letters to his wife during the 1956 tour. One can scarcely imagine the immense fatigue he must have felt during the constant train travel, the frequently cold and snowy weather, the crowded schedule of concerts and masterclasses on occasionally inadequate organs, and the insomnia of which he rarely spoke but which left him exhausted each morning. Even so, his fundamentally optimistic disposition and fighting spirit allowed him to transcend exhaustion. There were moments of sunshine in the landscape of California, as well as in certain cities, New York, Washington, and San Francisco among them. Above all there was the pervasive feeling of friendship and admiration that he felt all around him.

Arriving in New York in January 1956, Jean Langlais was only a blind organist appreciated by connoisseurs. By the time of his departure in March, he had become one of the most sought-after concert artists, composers, and teachers from across the Atlantic. The definitive establishment of this new reputation would open a bright future for him. At the same time, he found in America a new world that would greatly stimulate his imagination, as his future compositions would demonstrate.

One recalls his first American commissions: *Fête* (Gray, 1949), *Four Postludes* (McLaughlin & Reilly, 1951), *Mass in ancient style* (McLaughlin & Reilly, 1952), and *Folkloric Suite* (Fitzsimons, 1954). Upon his return from the 1956 tour Jean Langlais began receiving further commissions from American publishers, beginning with *Organ Book* (Elkan-Vogel, 1957), a collection of ten easy pieces composed between March 27 and August 7, 1956. He dedicated it to Jacqueline Marchal, the only daughter of his first teacher, André Marchal, on the occasion of her marriage to the Swiss avant-garde composer Giuseppe Englert. “Pasticcio,” the final piece in the collection, celebrates the newlyweds with a delightful pastiche of early dance music. This collection, while originally a wedding gift, offered American organists an unpretentious selection of easy, short pieces, most without pedal, for use in a variety of church and concert situations. They are excellent teaching pieces, even for

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<sup>30</sup> This is the *Pièce en forme libre* composed in 1936 and dedicated to his wife Jeannette, one of his best works, according to the composer. It would be published by Gray, not in 1956 as planned but in 1960 under the title *Piece in free form*. Later, after its copyright was returned to Jean Langlais, it was reprinted by Combret in 1984 under its original French title.

beginners. Registration indications are provided in English alone. Their immediate success surprised both the composer and the publisher. The composer Seth Bingham noted:<sup>31</sup>

These pieces are surprisingly easy, yet richly varied in mood and treatment. They have originality, distinction and expressive power – qualities utterly lacking in hundreds of worthless attempts by “short and easy” writers.

The timid organist who nibbles warily at new music but darts away at the slightest hint of difficulty will be emboldened to gulp the tempting Langlais bait. (...)

As for the witty “Pasticcio,” it risks being played by everybody!

“Pasticcio” remained so popular that 25 years later, in 1982, Jean Langlais arranged it for two trumpets and organ as *Pastorale et rondo* (Elkan-Vogel, 1983). He also authorized the American composer Sue Mitchell Wallace to adapt it for handbells (3 octaves, 35-38 bells) and organ under the title *Paeon of Joy* (Elkan-Vogel, 1987).

Langlais’ next American commission, *Miniature*, appeared in H. W. Gray’s “Marilyn Mason Organ Series” in 1959 and was dedicated to her.

## **American Concert Tour 1959**

Jean Langlais’ exhaustion was such at the end of the 1956 tour that he confided to his journal on March 8: “At noon we leave America. God knows when I’ll return.”

The answer would come fewer than three years later, when New Year’s Day 1959 would find Jean Langlais aboard the *Queen Mary* bound for New York. This fourth concert tour would also be documented in a journal<sup>32</sup> taken down by his new guide, Christiane Chivaux.

Once again the schedule devised by his agent Colbert would have given any recitalist pause: 41 concerts in the space of 71 days, with the usual travel by train and automobile across enormous distances. Langlais’ itinerary would take him across New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Colorado, Washington, California, Arizona, Oklahoma, Texas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Kentucky, New York, and New Hampshire.

As Langlais noted with pride in his journal entry for January 4:

In the course of conversation, Colbert, who met our ship but somehow missed us, confessed that I was his artist with the most engagements in the most prestigious locales. Simply reading the ten pages of my schedule typed out by Lilian Murtagh required courage.

There was another side to this notoriety, however, as Langlais expressed in an interview in the *St. Louis Globe Democrat*:<sup>33</sup>

On his own ground, he can forget his handicap but when he travels he must take with him a companion. Probably for this reason, tours aren’t much fun for him. “I don’t like them too much but I’m obliged to make them,” he said. “This work is hard, 38 recitals in 10 weeks.<sup>34</sup> At the beginning of this tour I had seven recitals in 10 days. It is exhausting, because I must practice too. The organ is always difficult on tour because

<sup>31</sup> Seth Bingham, *The Diapason*, November 1957.

<sup>32</sup> Jean Langlais, *Relation de voyage, Etats-Unis, tournée 1959*. Typescript, 59 pages, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>33</sup> *Blind organist is one of world’s best*, *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, January 22, 1959.

<sup>34</sup> In fact, three additional recitals would be added during the tour, bringing the total to 41.



they are all different in each place: some big, some small, some in good order, some bad. So you must see what you have before the recital. Four hours of practicing is usually enough.”

How does he manage the pace? “By sleeping as much as possible,” he said with a shy smile. “Whenever there is nothing else to be done, I sleep.”

Langlais’ reception in the press was consistently favorable, where he garnered such headlines as:

“**700 here cheer blind organist**” (Frank Mulheron, *Bridgeport Post*, January 13, 1959)

“**Blind organist is one of world’s best**” (*St. Louis Globe Democrat*, January 22, 1959)

“**Langlais attracts 1400 to recital, 91 to master class**” (Nancy Ragsdale, *The Diapason*, April 1, 1959, regarding his appearances in Des Moines, Iowa)

In its January 1959 issue, just as Langlais’ tour was about to begin, *The Diapason* published a long article by Robert Sutherland Lord that included a complete list of Langlais’ published organ works from the *Poèmes évangéliques* of 1932 through *l’Office pour la Sainte Famille* of 1957, with detailed analyses. It also included several typical anecdotes:<sup>35</sup>

Another work with American associations, although it was published in France, is his *Huit Pièces modales*. This collection was begun during his last concert tour of the United States in 1956. According to the composer, the first piece was completed in Fresno, Cal., and the second in Albuquerque, N.M.

The collection is dedicated to one of Langlais’ American friends, Anne Larkey. Their chance meeting took place in Paris near Ste. Clotilde. Although Langlais is very familiar with the rather long walk from the church to his home, he became confused one late afternoon by the movement of the traffic -- not a difficult thing to have happen on Paris streets. Anne Larkey happened to be at the same corner and noted the confusion of the blind man. She went over to him and asked if she might be of assistance. From this first meeting has grown a long friendship.

Such visitors are familiar with the small leather-bound guest book which he keeps. The names of many American musicians are recorded in it – Seth Bingham, the late Richard Ross, Catharine Crozier, Harold Gleason, David Craighead, Virgil Fox and Walter Holtkamp.

As had become his custom, Jean Langlais prepared three different programs for his 1959 tour, each concluding with a large-scale improvisation. The formula included a dose of early music (Couperin, Calvière, the Bach Ste. Anne fugue, BWV 552 and *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 645), some symphonic school excerpts (“Final” from the *Première Symphonie* by Vienne, the “Final” by Franck and “Communion” from *l’Office de la nativité de la Sainte-Vierge* of Tournemire) and contemporary music (Messiaen, Bingham).

The last invariably included a selection of his own works with emphasis on the most recent (“Rhapsody on 2 Noëls” (*Folkloric Suite*), *Triptyque*, “Pièce modale” n°1 (*Huit Pièces modales*), “Scherzando,” “Pasticcio” from the *Organ Book* alongside a few earlier ones : “Prélude au Kyrie” (*Hommage à Frescobaldi*) and “Final” (*Première Symphonie*).

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<sup>35</sup> Robert S. Lord, *Sources of past serve Langlais in organ works*, *The Diapason*, January 1959. 24-25.

Lord, who studied with Langlais in Paris in 1958 on a Reynolds fellowship from Dartmouth College, was a doctoral candidate at Yale University at the time of the article’s publication. He became one of Langlais’ closest American friends and was the first American musicologist to research the organ music of Charles Tournemire.

Langlais' journal from the 1959 tour is rich in anecdotes and descriptions, but let us examine more closely the summary Jean Langlais published afterwards in the magazine *Musique et Liturgie*. In it he compared the situations of church organs in France and America:<sup>36</sup>

The organ in Long Beach, California, upon which I played<sup>37</sup> cost \$100,000, or around 100 million francs. Beneath the church in which this magnificent instrument resides there is an active oil field, which makes it easier to understand the aforementioned extravagant sum. The church has subsided four feet as a result of the oil exploration, but it possesses one of the most beautiful instruments in the country. One would be grateful for a few oil wells under our churches in France.

Still, it is to be feared that the role of the organ as it evolves today may no longer be what it once was. In spite of its intrinsic beauty and that of its repertory it must increasingly yield to religious songs in our services whose merit is highly debatable.

On the other hand, consider the following: in Boston, for the second time, His Eminence Cardinal Cushing invited me to play at Symphony Hall. Speaking before the recital to an audience of 2,000 he began, "what would you like me to sing?" Responding to the audience's amusement he continued, "what would you think of a little benediction?" which he proceeded to give: "Sit nomen Domini benedictum," to which he responded "Ex hoc nunc et usque in saeculum." His Eminence then explained that we were about to hear the premiere of my *Psaume 150* performed by a choir of 80 men. Then this prince of the Church, whose unpretentiousness was legendary, came and brought me onstage. Having presented me to the audience, he led me to the organ bench, saying aloud, "Here is your throne, Monsignore." I received a friendly tap on the head, heard him say "good luck!" under his breath and thus began the concert in a truly unusual way.

In Lansing, Michigan, I was informed that the Catholic bishop wished to meet me. What an interesting conversation we had. I related to my distinguished visitor how often I was surprised to hear bad music poorly performed in American Catholic churches. I asked him why Protestant churches held religious services that differed so markedly from the prevailing atmosphere in Catholic churches. One had to recognize, alas, that good Catholic organists and choirs are very rare, and that the majority of organ virtuosos are Protestant.

How many times have I heard Presbyterians or Episcopalians boast of the beauty of a particular Catholic church while simultaneously bemoaning the poverty of its musical resources? My friendly bishop was extremely embarrassed by my question, to which he gave no precise answer. The obvious reason for this state of affairs seems clear: some Protestant organists are paid four or five hundred dollars a month. Catholic organists are frequently dedicated volunteers. The organist who wishes to make a living from his profession has to dedicate himself fully to it, while the pastor who offers a living wage to a musician expects a commensurate level of talent from him.

How I wish this respectful observation would come to the attention of certain French clergy. If I personally heard some masses in America that were scandalous from a musical point of view, I also had the opportunity to observe, at Cambridge,<sup>38</sup> the style and perfection of a boy choir singing Gregorian chant.

Once again, I took away from America so many touching and pleasant memories.

My meeting with Darius Milhaud is far from the least of these recollections. The frenetic pace of Parisian life prevented us from meeting there last year. We promised

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<sup>36</sup> Jean Langlais, *Mon quatrième voyage aux Etats-Unis, Musique et Liturgie*, July-September 1959. 15-17.

<sup>37</sup> At First Congregational Church, Möller's opus 8800 of 1956.

<sup>38</sup> At St. Paul's Choir School, Cambridge, MA, under the direction of Theodore Marier.

one another to remedy that. Thus it was that I spent several precious hours with him near San Francisco, this great master who has mastered the art of remaining simple.

As for the organs I had to play, they were like the trains: I experienced the best and the worst. However, nowhere in America was I inconvenienced by organ pipes filled with droppings and parasites. Fortunately their poison has not spread across the Atlantic. No American organist told me that one can play the third Choral of Franck perfectly well without a Swell box, devoid of all dynamic expression. What would one think of a violinist who, inspired by such an allegation, played the *Sonata* of Franck with a similar misunderstanding of the nuances specified by the composer himself? No, gentlemen, the organ of Buxtehude will not suffice. Our contemporary music requires finesse, a thousand subtleties, and thus Swell boxes.

American organ builders understand this and have reason to believe in the future while respecting the past. There is no reason for the organ to be the only musical instrument exempt from perfection. Grigny was a great musician. Messiaen is another. By virtue of what principle should we have the possibility of playing Grigny but not Messiaen? In spite of everything, artistic reason will prevail.

Carry on then, Aeolian-Skinner and the other American organ builders. You are the ones to see this clearly.

What would Jean Langlais say today, in 2016, regarding the numerous new organs constructed in the United States, Europe, and Asia according to purely historical Germanic and French techniques? He would be extremely disappointed, but as the saying goes, “the wheel turns.”

Langlais’ diary from the 1959 American tour is more extensive than the earlier ones from 1952, 1954, and 1956. It is intended more for his family. By this time Langlais was familiar with America. He had travelled the length and breadth of it and was no longer an isolated occasional visitor. Well-known, admired everywhere, he returned frequently now to places he already knew. His thoughts turned to his relatives back home, to whom he took pleasure in recounting the details of his extremely busy schedule.<sup>39</sup>

He took special pleasure in seeing old friends again during his travels. Writing less about his concerts and the new organs encountered, he preferred to relate with no small amount of pride the reactions his appearances produced:

After my class Melvin West<sup>40</sup> said to me, “Nobody had any questions for you because they were fascinated.” (Springfield, Massachusetts, January 6)

Yesterday evening, in Des Moines, I was told that my concert drew about three times as many listeners as other recitals, with people coming from as far away as California and the Dakotas.

Everywhere I go I am the beneficiary of a favorable partiality, both beforehand and afterwards. Technically speaking, I have never felt more in possession of my powers.

On the social side, I am enjoying much more satisfaction now than on previous tours.

My compositions and a weak knowledge of the language have helped me on this point.

(Des Moines, Iowa, January 24)

In Seattle as well the organizers told me they had never seen so many people at an organ recital. (Seattle, Washington, February 2)

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<sup>39</sup> In Jacksonville, Illinois, he wrote on January 20, 1959: “Yesterday I telephoned Colbert. In the course of our conversation he asked me, ‘Where are you?’ and I could only reply, ‘I no longer know.’”

<sup>40</sup> Melvin West (born 1930), Adventist organist and Chair of the music department at Walla Walla College from 1959 to 1977.

I gave a Bach concert recorded for radio that would not have made Claude, my son, blush upon hearing it.<sup>41</sup> I was hidden at the organ, and told there would be no applause in this chapel of 500 seats. Nonetheless when I appeared with Catherine Crozier there was a long standing ovation. (Winter Park, Florida, February 26)



**Jean Langlais at the end of his 1959 American tour<sup>42</sup>**  
Figure 44. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

The 1959 tour marked an important moment for Jean Langlais from a compositional point of view, for during his transatlantic crossing home on March 19 he began to translate his “American impressions” into music in the form of a long suite (nearly 45 minutes) entitled simply *American Suite*.

He had conceived the idea for it during his 1956 tour, originally thinking it would be for orchestra. Composed in eight movements with English titles, this new suite, published in the United States by H.W. Gray in 1961, received a lukewarm reception, particularly among French organists put off by its anecdotal nature. They were especially shocked by “Storm in Florida,” whose realism they judged vulgar. These were the same organists who, unable to appreciate a modern storm scene, were the first to revive the taste for the storm pieces of Lefébure-Wely and other 19<sup>th</sup>-century composers. A French paradox!

*American Suite* marked the beginning, perhaps without full awareness on Langlais’ part, of his disengagement from the French-speaking organ world. The purists found this collection of picture postcards trivial, too far-removed from the world of sacred organ music.

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<sup>41</sup>Langlais’ 16 years old son Claude was an excellent musician in his own right, whose opinion mattered enormously to his father.

<sup>42</sup> Photograph published in *Le Télégramme de Brest* (April 29, 1959) to illustrate an article titled: “Jean Langlais, organist-composer, tells us about his triumphant tour of the United States.”

A review from Langlais's recital on April 5, 1962 in Montréal, Canada is indicative:<sup>43</sup>

The two excerpts from the *American Suite*, particularly this indescribable "Storm in Florida" (sic!) are in dubious taste and seem to me unworthy of so great a thinker.

Nevertheless the suite had its admirers, even in France:<sup>44</sup>

One is surprised at the evocative visual power of these eight pieces written by a blind musician, who takes us across the New World from the shores of the Atlantic to the Pacific. Here, first of all, is a majestic interpretation of Texas, followed by a surprising depiction of "New York on a Sunday morning" complete with pigeons cooing and church bells tolling softly in a silence the music renders tangible. After a luminous tableau of the California coast, we enter a church in Chicago to attend a confirmation. Two melodies stand in opposition before being superimposed skillfully through a modal alteration.

"At Buffalo Bill's grave" (theme and variation) transports us to the icy landscape of the Rocky Mountains, before we're invited to another church service, Roman Catholic this time, at "Boys Town, place of peace." A children's choir intones "O Salutaris hostia" and "Ave Maris stella."

The collection concludes with a realistic evocation of a "Storm in Florida," terrifying both in its effect and in the demands it makes upon the performer. A work for virtuosos and the concert hall, certainly, but also a symphonic poem in eight parts, similar in certain respects to the *Pièces de Fantaisie* of Vierne, aligning itself with a descriptive vein that runs through French organ music from the "Cloches" of Lebègue through the "Carillons" of Louis Couperin right up to Dupré's *Suite bretonne*.

The inspiration for the controversial "Storm in Florida" was recounted by the composer himself in his tour journal. Arriving at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, on February 26, 1959 to participate in the all-Bach concert with Catharine Crozier, Langlais found himself in the midst of a tropical thunderstorm :

For the first time in my life thunder actually frightened me. I attempted to portray by atypical means the unleashing of meteorological forces that began as menacing and intensified to cataclysmic. I suggested a sky in fury musically, following the precepts of Louis Vierne when he said, "he who reproduces the sound of the sea for himself is a simpleton; he who creates the atmosphere of the sea to serve as a framework for his dream is an artist."

In spite of this storm piece in the manner of Lefébure-Wély, the attentive reader will discover in *American Suite* several new developments in Langlais' musical language. By simplifying his style, a process already begun in *Organ Book*, Langlais gives free rein to verve, lyricism, and exuberance accompanied by notable rhythmic advances. These are most evident in "New York on a Sunday morning," where he incorporates polyrhythms in the form of "rhythmic personalities" that are introduced separately and then combined in subtle counterpoint. One also finds in several places, most notably in "Californian evocation," the introduction of birdsong, not in the scientific manner of Messiaen, but freely, with a voluble sense of poetry.

Jean Langlais also sprinkles these pieces with quotations that allow him to perfect his descriptions of certain places. In "Boys Town, place of peace" he incorporates two plainsong themes, "O salutaris" and "Ave

<sup>43</sup> Claude Gingras, *Jean Langlais, organiste et compositeur*, La Presse, Montréal, April 6, 1962.

<sup>44</sup> Pierre Denis, *L'Orgue*, n°100 (October–December 1961). 190-191.

Maris stella,” and the litany “pray for us” that were frequently sung in the chapel there. To this he adds the well-known Westminster carillon theme because, as the composer explained, “the grandfather clock near the room in the presbytery where I stayed at Boys Town intoned this theme day and night, which certainly did not help my natural tendency toward insomnia.”<sup>45</sup>

The descriptive character of this collection relies upon unusual sonorities as well. Flute 4' and Tierce 1 3/5' evoke church bells in “New York on a Sunday morning.” Other unusual combinations include Bourdon 16' and Voix humaine 8' with Tremolo (“Confirmation in Chicago”) and Hautbois 8', Bourdon 8', Nazard 2 2/3', and Piccolo 2' (“At Buffalo Bill's grave”).

From a harmonic point of view, *American Suite* offers a balanced synthesis of various elements deployed according to the nature of the melodic material at hand. If it is modal, the accompaniment will be also, as in the “Western” style Dorian mode transposed and harmonized with characteristic color “At Buffalo Bill's grave.” On the other hand, if the theme is chromatic (“Storm in Florida”) its harmonization will abandon all modal and tonal footing in order to devote itself entirely to chromaticism.

In conclusion, *American Suite* is one of Langlais' largest descriptive frescoes, introducing certain promising innovations (rhythmic structures, birdsong, unusual registrations) without breaking with the past. It presages his development over the coming decade. It also contained much to displease French organists of the time, who were increasingly turning their attention back to the French Classic organ and its composers: Couperin, Grigny, Clérambault, Marchand, and others.

*American Suite* was eventually abandoned by H.W. Gray, who returned the copyright to the composer in 1976. Jean Langlais then had the idea to revise seven of its eight pieces,<sup>46</sup> dividing them into two groups and consigning them to different publishers. Combre took “At Buffalo Bill's grave” and “Boys Town, place of peace,” which became parts of *Mosaïque*, volume I. The five remaining pieces became the *Troisième Symphonie* published by Universal. “Storm in Florida” was decommissioned, transformed into “Orage” and stripped of more than 50 measures, one-fifth of its original length. “Californian evocation” was also cut extensively, taking on the neutral title “Cantabile.” “Scherzo-Cats” became “Intermezzo.” Only “New York on a Sunday morning” kept its original title, although translated into French as “Un dimanche matin à New-York.”

Did these transformations engender a fundamental change in public opinion?

An examination of publishers' sales figures gives an answer:<sup>47</sup> H.W. Gray sold 703 copies of *American Suite* between 1959 and 1976, while Universal moved 1021 copies of the recycled *Troisième Symphonie* from 1981 to 2014. Proportionally the quantities are about the same, but the music itself did not disappear. One can still find “Scherzo-Cats” on recital programs

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<sup>45</sup> Related to the author on November 4, 1969.

<sup>46</sup> He did not wish to republish “Confirmation in Chicago,” a piece he considered unsuccessful.

<sup>47</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

today, the use of its original title rather than “Intermezzo” suggesting that some organists did not forget the “Cats”...

## **Boys Town Summer Liturgical Workshops – Missa Misericordiae Domini**

Jean Langlais made an acquaintance during the 1956 tour that proved to be a lasting influence on his future compositions. On February 16 he met Monsignor Wegner,<sup>48</sup> successor to Father Flanagan, the founder of Boys Town.<sup>49</sup>

Commensurate with his vision that all children could prosper if given love, shelter, education, and a trade, Father Flanagan had founded a choir at Boys Town in the 1930s. In 1941 he appointed Father Francis Schmitt<sup>50</sup> as choirmaster with the stipulation that he build “the finest boys’ choir in the country.” Father Schmitt developed an extensive musical program that led to recordings, television appearances, and concerts around the world. He was also editor of *Caecilia*, a sacred music journal for Roman Catholic musicians, in which Seth Bingham published a long and important review of the choral masses of Jean Langlais.<sup>51</sup>

In addition, from 1952 to 1969 Father Schmitt organized and directed the Summer Liturgical Music Workshops at Boys Town. They were a center of musical excellence for church music of their time, uniting some 150 musicians of all faiths. Father Schmitt led sessions on vocal technique, using his boy choir for demonstrations. The noted choral conductor Roger Wagner<sup>52</sup> prepared the participants for a large-scale choral work (for example, the Duruflé *Requiem*) to be presented in concert at the end of each two-week session. European organists were regularly invited to teach and play during the summer workshops, among them Flor Peeters, Michael Schneider, Anton Heiller, and Jean Langlais.

As he wrote in his *Relation de voyage aux Etats-Unis, tournée 1959*, it was at the conclusion of a recital in Des Moines on January 23, 1959 that Langlais met Father Schmitt, who invited him to teach at Boys Town during the last two weeks of August 1959.

I accepted, but for 1960. Naturally, Claude will be my traveling companion if it comes about. I want to introduce him to America.

Jean Langlais preferred 1960 because he judged his son Claude, 16 years of age in 1959, to be too young at the time. He encountered considerable pressure from Father Schmitt, however, and finally accepted for 1959. Claude did accompany him on that occasion, and again in 1961 and 1963. Shortly after their arrival in New York the two “tourists” boarded a train headed for California. Claude wrote to his mother:<sup>53</sup>

It’s a very comfortable train, but the trip is so long: fifty hours without stopping for air!  
Past Denver the train moved so slowly that we thought it was going to stop (and there

<sup>48</sup> Nicholas Wegner (1898-1976), executive director of Boys Town from 1948 to 1973.

<sup>49</sup> Edward J. Flanagan (1886-1948), an Irish priest who emigrated to America in 1904, founded his orphanage for delinquent boys aged 10 to 16 in Omaha in 1917, relocating it ten miles west to the present site of Boys Town in 1921. The eponymous 1938 film starring Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney won an Academy Award and spread the fame of his work.

<sup>50</sup> Francis P. “Frank” Schmitt (1916-1994).

<sup>51</sup> Seth Bingham, *The choral masses of Jean Langlais*, *Caecilia*, vol. 86, no. 2, (summer 1959). 73-82.

<sup>52</sup> Roger Wagner (1914-1992) emigrated from his native France to California at an early age, returning to study with Marcel Dupré in the 1930s. Returning to Los Angeles, he founded the Roger Wagner Chorale and later the Los Angeles Master Chorale, both widely known through concerts and recordings.

<sup>53</sup> Handwritten letter dated August 12, 1959, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

were three locomotives!). We crossed the mountains of Colorado and some very impressive canyons before coming to the desert. It took us more than 17 hours to cross it, even at 90 to 100 kilometers per hour. It's frightening! No trees, no signs of life, just a few dried-out bushes.

Arriving on time in Oakland, the train stopped in the middle of the street. As we got off I remembered I had forgotten my camera and rushed back onboard. When I got off again the train jerked suddenly and startled me.

How tiring it is, these long days passing through different time zones.

After several magnificent days in California, the two travelers made their way to Boys Town, where the weather was unbearably hot.

Jean Langlais had a compelling reason for arriving there in 1959 rather than 1960: the premiere of his *Missa Misericordiae Domini* that Father Schmitt had commissioned to close the Boys Town Liturgical Workshop of 1959. In a letter to his wife Langlais recounts his activities in detail:<sup>54</sup>

Life is very agreeable here, even if there is a bit too much work, never less than five hours per day and sometimes more. Private lessons from 9 am to noon or 12:30, plus a class in the evening from 6:30 to 7:30... Sunday I'm going to hear my *Missa Misericordiae Domini* for the first time, but during the day it's always terribly hot, at least 104 degrees<sup>55</sup> in the shade.

Further on he adds:

They have commissioned me for a *Sacerdos et Pontifex* for the jubilee of the archbishop of Omaha. I think I'll have about two hours at the most to compose it.<sup>56</sup>

In spite of the workload and the heat, Jean Langlais was very content at Boys Town. To the French journalist who interviewed him as he disembarked from the Queen Mary he said:<sup>57</sup>

Boys Town in the United States is a foundation created twenty years ago by an Irish priest, Father Flanagan, to serve disadvantaged, displaced, and mistreated children. There are about 1,000 youth from all parts of America, from California to Boston. I've had the opportunity to introduce singing and other music to these young people aged 15 to 18. The archbishop in charge, Monsignor Wegner, is very inclusive. There is a Protestant chaplain and a Jewish piano teacher and everyone cooperates freely in a spirit of mutual understanding at Boys Town.

The Boys Town Boys Choir under the direction of Alexander Peloquin gave the premiere of the *Missa Misericordiae Domini* on Sunday, August 30, 1959. It's an unusual work in that, according to the terms of the commission, it was destined for a choir of three voices (STB) and organ. Langlais explained in the preface to the 1989 Carus Verlag reprint:

For the summer sacred music workshop at Boys Town I composed my *Missa Misericordiae Domini* between September 15 and 18, 1958, on commission from Father Schmitt, to whom the work is dedicated. The work is written for three voices (soprano, tenor, and bass) at the request of Father Schmitt, as there were no altos in the boys choir at the time... Conceived for an ensemble of one hundred boys, this mass can just as easily be performed by a mixed choir of modest proportions. Registrations and

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<sup>54</sup> Handwritten letter dated August 20, 1959, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>55</sup> 40 degrees Celsius.

<sup>56</sup> The result was the *Sacerdos et Pontifex (Tu es Petrus)* for unison choir, two trumpets and organ premiered at the ninth church music workshop at Boys Town in August 1961, during a pontifical mass in the presence of Monsignor Gerald Bergan (1892-1972), archbishop of Omaha.

<sup>57</sup> M. Miquelot, *Presse de la Manche*, September 1959.



expressive nuances at the organ should take into account the size and volume of the choir.

Coming after his varied and successful works *Messe Solennelle* (1949), *Mass in ancient style* (1952), *Missa in simplicitate* (1952) and *Missa Salve Regina* (1954), this new mass could have been a repeat or a pastiche.

Instead, it's an extraordinary testament to the adaptability of the composer, who succeeds in borrowing some of the best elements of each while uniting them in a new context. From *Messe Solennelle* it retains the co-existence of different languages (modal-tonal-chromatic) and the dialogue between different layers of sound. From *Missa in simplicitate* comes the recitative style of the Credo alongside the simplicity of its harmonic progressions. Finally, from the *Missa Salve Regina* there is the idea of a polyphonic choir engaged in dialogue with a unison congregational part, adapted to three voices treated successively as soloists or sections.

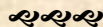
The way Langlais balances and distributes the three voices is a remarkable performance. One quite forgets the lack of alto voices. This is quite perceptible in the Kyrie when each of the voices in turn stresses "Kyrie eleison" in a stereophonic litany.

As in the *Missa in simplicitate*, the dramatic climax of the work occurs at its geographic center, the Credo. Unlike its predecessor, however, the *Missa Misericordiae Domini* abruptly interrupts the flow of the Credo twice as soprano and tenor soloists comment upon "Et incarnatus est" and "Qui cum Patre et Filio" in music of an entirely different esthetic. The polyphonic choir returns forcefully at "Crucifixus" and "Et unam, sanctam, catholicam." These sudden interruptions impart an extreme tension to the entire movement. As the composer noted, "the Credo inspires the faith without which the Mass has no reason to exist."

The *Missa Misericordiae Domini* in 1959 brought to a close the cycle of Latin masses composed by Jean Langlais over the span of a decade. The directives of the Second Vatican Council would soon throw the process of composing sacred vocal music into upheaval. In the meantime, Langlais' five Latin masses, each with its own personality and scale, form a body of work unique in the history of European sacred music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The 1950s ended triumphantly for Jean Langlais. His four successful tours of America comprised 121 recitals and masterclasses in steady crescendo: 22 in 1952, 26 in 1954, 32 in 1956, and 41 in 1959. His public had grown significantly as well, including an increasing number of students who crossed the Atlantic to study with him. From this time forward his stature as a master of the organ was affirmed.

He had found in the United States an adopted country whose affection and admiration he would never forget.



## CHAPTER 9

### *The Upheavals of the Sixties*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>Bernard B., *Bible et Liturgie, vigile du 7ème Dimanche après la Pentecôte*, in *Disques*, February 1959.

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

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

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

**1954-1960:** *Nouveaux Chants pour la messe en français* (in French, solo voice and organ): Kyrie – Gloria – Sanctus – Agnus Dei, sequel to *Chants pour la messe en français* for solo voice and organ composed in 1954, united under the title *Messe brève* in 1960.

**1960:** *Motet pour un temps de pénitence* (in Latin, SATB a cappella): Introit – Tract – Offertory – Communion for Ash Wednesday

**1961:** *Ave Maris stella* (in Latin, 3 equal voices)

**1961:** *O God, our Father* (in English, SATB and organ)

**1961:** *Psaume 150, “Praise the Lord”* (in English, SATB and organ)

**1962:** *Offertoire pour l’Office de Sainte Claire* (in Latin, 3 equal voices)

**1962:** *Missa “Dona nobis pacem”* (in English, solo voice and organ)

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

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

And elsewhere:<sup>4</sup>

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

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Gélinau (1920-2008) was a French Catholic Jesuit priest and composer of modern Christian liturgical music. Father David Julien (1914-2013) conducted the congregational part in the 1955 recording of Langlais’s *Missa Salve Regina*. The *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique* was originally a private organization, only becoming official after the Vatican Council.

<sup>3</sup> Suzanne Demarquez, *Disques*, n° 120, 1960.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Hiegel, *Discographie Française*, n° 87, 1960.

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

And finally:<sup>5</sup>

“In Simplicitate” could well serve as the motto of the composer while also describing the mood of the present *Messe*, which is not a true mass but rather a series of French prayers on the five movements of the mass. Jean Langlais has long been compelled by the discipline of Solesmes, but Gregorian chant depends upon Latin for its foundation. So directly, so clearly does this *Messe brève* derive from plainchant that it is not diminished by the French, and the French is so good that one imagines to know it already. This applies to all five sections, but especially to the first and last of them. The melody of the Kyrie is so natural, and the couplets of the Agnus Dei unite contrition with prayer.

If I could exorcise for all time the bleating conventions that weigh so heavily upon the word “song” I would use these seven *Cantiques* by Jean Langlais to do so. Listen to his “Au Paradis,” so subtly evocative of the Gregorian “In paradisum.” One can easily imagine his “Gloire à toi Marie” being sung in some Breton procession as a sea breeze rustles its banners. Is this folklore? Not at all, but it could become so.

The composer frequently explained his taste for simple popular melodies, confiding in the journalist Albert Malary:<sup>6</sup>

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

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

The Church, it is said, should not deny its traditions.

The goal of those who are currently writing religious songs is good, but the quality of the music is mediocre.

In a long letter to Father Joseph Gélineau he expanded upon his beliefs with vehemence:<sup>8</sup>

Paris, January 12, 1963

Across the centuries of our history it should be obvious that the Church has elevated the arts to a very high level. For some years now, alas, the opposite has been occurring. The causes of these regrettable errors are numerous and obvious. The recent decision regarding what may be sung at marriages and funerals, unless it is improved, risks putting an end to sacred (musical) art. Pius X, one of the most artistic popes in history, was the author of the following admirable thought: “pray upon beauty.”

What has one made of this papal desire? Personally, and I take full responsibility for my opinions, I don't hesitate to incriminate a large number of clergy whose artistic formation is far from assured in the majority of seminaries. A man can be an excellent priest and not have a sense of Art.

<sup>5</sup> José Bruyr, *Jean Langlais, Messe brève, Cantiques*, in *Disques*, n° 120, 1960

<sup>6</sup> Albert Malary, *Notre-Dame dans la musique, Jean Langlais*, in *La Médaille miraculeuse*, 1960. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Langlais, *Interview*, in *L'Est Républicain*, Besançon, November 11, 1961.

<sup>8</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

One too often forgets that artists who consecrate their lives to serve the liturgy – and thus the Church – undergo a very long period of study. For several years now these true composers of sacred music are being replaced by persons of good will who are the only ones to believe in their talent... The most surprising aspect of this sad evolution is that no one seems to take into account the fact that a church service addresses God before all else and above all else, for whom nothing is beautiful enough. Superb cathedrals have been built in his honor, his ministers are magnificently arrayed as they exercise their priestly duties, and prayer has been (I use the past tense advisedly) transcended by music. The Church was a place in which one was accustomed to enter with respect, with emotion, in order to reflect at will. The big word “communicator” is now the only one present-day clergy use when planning their religious activities, denying every Christian the freedom of his own mysticism.

There is no denying a malaise among Christian people. Gregorian chant, “that eternal child of Art,” has its enemies.

A priest actually told me that he was unable to celebrate mass when there was plainchant because that required him to wait...

May the day return when Sacred Art manifests itself freely in our churches, for the good of the faithful and for the glory of God.

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

Art. 25. The liturgical books are to be revised as soon as possible; experts are to be employed on the task, and bishops are to be consulted, from various parts of the world.

Art. 36. 1. Particular law remaining in force, the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites.

Art. 54. A suitable place may be allotted to the mother tongue. Nevertheless steps should be taken so that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them.<sup>9</sup>

Art. 114. The treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care. Choirs must be diligently promoted.

Art. 115. Great importance is to be attached to the teaching and practice of music in seminaries.

Art. 116. The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as especially suited to the Roman liturgy: therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services. Other kinds of sacred music, especially polyphony, are by no means excluded from liturgical celebrations, so long as they accord with the spirit of the liturgical action.

Art. 120. In the Latin Church the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, for it is the traditional musical instrument which adds a wonderful splendor to the Church's ceremonies and powerfully lifts up man's mind to God and to higher things. Other instruments also may be admitted for use in divine worship... on condition that the instruments are suitable, or can be made suitable, for sacred use, accord with the dignity of the temple, and truly contribute to the edification of the faithful.

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

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<sup>9</sup> The subtle differences between “may be” and “should be” are commented upon later by Jacques Chailley in *La musique sacrée devant le schisme* in *Le Figaro*, July 15, 1988.

Unfortunately, as Jacques Chailley emphasized:<sup>10</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Jacques Chailley (1910-1999), French musicologist, teacher and composer, founder and director of the Department of Music and Musicology at the Sorbonne in Paris. Director of the Schola Cantorum in Paris (1962-1981), he was the one who appointed Jean Langlais at the organ class after Jean-Jacques Grunenwald.

<sup>11</sup> Copy in collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

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

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

Where are you going, o liturgy? Or rather, where are our liturgists and pastoral leaders dragging you?

One must resist the temptation of experience with courage and non-conformity. This is certainly a temptation from the clever, not an inspiration from on high.

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

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

Dear Monsieur l’Abbé,

I have just been made aware of the documents you sent me.

I would like to know who selected the texts for the preface and the Lord’s Prayer. What does Monsignor Rigaud mean when he states, “we will permit the free creation of the Ordinary in French, strictly controlled at all times by the diocesan regional commissions for sacred music”?

I don’t see how strictly controlled freedom remains freedom.

In order to show you how totally I disapprove of this politic that consigns sacred art to priests unsuited for it, and who in consequence show a supreme disregard for true composers, I will not offer you any commentary on the musical texts of which I have just become aware. I am a self-declared enemy of militaristic pettiness in the arts.

I hereby disassociate myself from the present maneuvers of the Church to impose blind obedience as its base of operation.

Three American publishers have recently commissioned English masses from me.<sup>14</sup> I was not aware they needed to be strictly controlled. As for me, I write freely, I publish my works freely, and I do not submit my work to the untalented censors upon whom you rely.

The composer grew even more exasperated when he submitted a French setting of the Lord’s Prayer to the *Centre National de Pastorale Liturgique*, one he hoped to see published under his name. Abbé Cellier responded:<sup>15</sup>

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

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> *Missa Dona nobis pacem*, H.W. Gray, 1965; *Mass God have mercy*, McLaughlin, 1965; *Mass On earth peace*, Benziger, 1966.

<sup>15</sup> Letter in collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

Bishop Rigaud attempted to appease Jean Langlais in a letter of April 20, 1966, in which he explained:<sup>16</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Church Musicians Make Their Point Before Meeting in Chicago**

The undersigned French church musicians wish to express their opinion regarding the controversy that has arisen surrounding recent statements by R. P. Picard, secretary general of the *Union Fédérale de Musique Sacrée*.

The celebrated composer Maurice Duruflé, professor at the Conservatoire and organist at Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, expresses "the stupefaction of church musicians" in response to these statements, particularly the following: "there exists today a very broad range of musical styles covering everything from rock 'n roll to *musique concrète*."

The task of composers is to find a place within each of these styles for sacred music.

If his inspiration were religious, all one would need for the composition of a proper preface would be Georges Brassens."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Letter in collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> The episcopate seemed preoccupied at the time with increasing the number of concerts given in churches.

<sup>19</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Sacred Music took place in Chicago, IL from August 21 to 26, 1966. The article appeared between August 18 and September 1, 1966.

<sup>20</sup> Georges Brassens (1921-1981), a pop songwriter, poet and singer very much appreciated in France.



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

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

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

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

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

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

This was sufficient to unleash the full anger of Jean Langlais in an undated reply:<sup>22</sup>

I refuse categorically to submit the accompaniments of my songs to your quartet of priest musicians. One of them happens to have been a student of mine, and the others are not capable of suggesting any changes.

I feel confident in informing you that I am capable of realizing very simple accompaniments. Elsewhere I pass as a composer who knows how to write easy works. The "proposed norms" of the committee are of no use to me whatsoever. Please rest assured that I know how to avoid "contrapuntal chatter" (what a lovely expression!)

What I find shocking in your letter is that you make no distinction between a professional composer and one who composes on the side. That would mean that if Olivier Messiaen composed some songs they would receive the same consideration as those written by any old amateur priest, who would do far better to attend to his priestly

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<sup>21</sup> *France Soir* and *Presse-L'Intransigeant*, September 9, 1966.

<sup>22</sup> Letter in collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>23</sup> Its Kyrie was plagiarized by a French priest and published in official songbooks.

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

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

**1962:** *Mass Dona nobis pacem* in English, for voices in unison (or women alone or men alone) and organ (Kyrie - Gloria - Sanctus and Benedictus - Agnus Dei).

**1964:** *Mass God have mercy*, in English, for unison voices (choir and congregation) and organ (Lord, have mercy - Glory to God - The Creed - Holy, holy, holy - Lamb of God) inscribed at the top “Official Text of National Conference of Bishops, USA, approved by the Diocesan Music Commission, Boston, Mass.”

**1965:** *Mass On earth peace* in English, for voice and organ (Kyrie - Gloria - Credo - Sanctus - Agnus Dei) with the indication “English translation from the *Roman Missal* published by the authority of the Bishops’ Commission of the Liturgical Apostolate, approved by the Commission on Church Music, Archdiocese of New York.”

**1965:** *The Canticle of the Sun*, in English, for women’s chorus (SSA) and piano (or organ).

**1969:** *Solemn Mass Orbis factor*, in English, for choir (SATB), organ, congregation, brass (2 trumpets, 2 trombones) ad libitum (Lord, have mercy – Glory to God – Holy – Lamb of God).

**1969:** *Festival Alleluia*, for SATB and organ, on the single word “Alleluia.”

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

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

## **Ecumenism**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>24</sup> Jean Langlais, *Mon 7ème voyage artistique aux Etats-Unis*, in *Musique et Liturgie*, January-February 1963. 12.

<sup>25</sup> Pastor Georges Marchal (1905-1982).

<sup>26</sup> Pastor Pierre Vallotton (1917-2015).

<sup>27</sup> Jean Langlais gave a recital on this organ on November 12, 1967. Accompanying him as guide for the first time I still recall their heated discussions on the subject of predestination.

<sup>28</sup> Between 1964 and 1967 the only organ works are secular: *Poem of life* (1965), *Poem of peace*, *Poem of happiness* (1966), and *Sonate en trio* (1967).

<sup>29</sup> Preface by Jean Langlais translated in French, German, and English to *Livre Œcuménique* (Bornemann, 1968).

of short pieces of average difficulty which can be played during masses as during services. Six among these pieces have themes based on Gregorian melodies, the other six are built upon choral themes used by J-S. Bach.

It goes without saying that Roman Catholic organists will have no scruple in playing the commentaries on the chorals during the services or in recitals.

May our brothers separate from us in religion but united with us in art, do the same for the pieces of Gregorian inspiration.

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

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

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

## **The Organ World and the Baroque Revival**

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

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

Recalling that memorable evening Chapuis noted:<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Claude Duchesneau interroge Michel Chapuis, collection “Les Interviews,” *Centurion*, Paris: 1979. 98

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

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

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

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

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

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

Question 5: *Are you a partisan of mechanical action, pneumatic action, or direct electric action?*

“It’s all the same to me. A true organist ought to be able to play any organ. Pianists do it quite well.”

Question 6: *Are you in favor of electro-pneumatic or pallet-and-slider windchests?*

“The most beautiful organ I’ve played is in Salt Lake City (198 stops). I suppose the chests there are electro-pneumatic. Everything about that organ is marvelous.”

Question 8: *Do you foresee an objective return to the principles of French Classic organ building of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, or to those of German Baroque organ building of the same period?*

“The question you ask concerning a return to the Baroque style strikes me as coming down to this: ‘Are you of the opinion that all organ music after Bach is useless?’

The sad fact is that such a question could only come from a group of organists.

Even more sad is that I’m sure the question could enjoy a certain number of positive responses. Certainly, I am among those who admire our old instruments. It is always with great emotion that I hear the organ in the cathedral at Poitiers, for example.

On certain recent organs, however, so-called “classic” ones, not only does the shrill exaggeration of the mixtures seem unmusical to me, but I have to ask myself what Debussy’s reaction would have been to sonorities that drill a hole in the ear...

I favor poetry over theory, and I think the present reaction, while it contains interesting things, goes much too far...

A true organist has the right to be a true musician, but I fear that if the evolution of the instrument continues along this path that I consider dangerous, soon there will be musicians and organists.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This austere program of great spiritual devotion was very favorably received by the press:<sup>31</sup>

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

And elsewhere:<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Disques: Tournemire, Langlais*, in *Télérama*, January 22, 1961.

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

## **The Restoration of the Organ at Sainte-Clotilde in 1962**

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

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

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

The Barker lever that Cavaillé-Coll employed at Sainte-Clotilde in 1858 was not as highly developed as it became toward the end of the century. This explains why, 100 years later, the organ was so difficult to play.

In order to preserve as much of the original material as possible, Maison Beuchet-Debierre installed an electro-pneumatic pulldown of its own invention, silent and rapid in repetition, thus retaining the windchests of Cavaillé-Coll.

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

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

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

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<sup>32</sup> V. Martin, *Récital Jean Langlais, orgue, oeuvres d'inspiration grégorienne*, in *Guide du concert et du disque*, January 20, 1961.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Tournemire, *Mémoires*, typescript: 99, published in Marie-Louise Langlais : *Eclats de Mémoire*, website ml-langlais.com. 82

<sup>34</sup> Conversation of the author with Jacques Barbéris, Paris, 1983.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>35</sup> Jean Guillou, *L'Orgue, Souvenir et Avenir*, éditions Buchet/Chastel, Paris : 1978. 260.

<sup>36</sup> *Chroniques et mélanges: à Paris, l'activité des Amis de l'Orgue, saison 1962-1963* in *L'Orgue* n° 108, Oct-Dec 1963. 121.

<sup>37</sup> The choice of 1962 as the centennial was approximate, given that the holograph of the "Grande pièce symphonique" is dated September 16, 1863.

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



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

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

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

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

<sup>38</sup> *The complete organ works of César Franck by Jean Langlais on the organ of Sainte-Clotilde*, Gregorian Institute of America M-108-10, 1964, newly remastered as two CDs in 1996 (CD-272).

<sup>39</sup> C. Gendre, *Un enregistrement qui fera date dans l'histoire de l'orgue*, in *Revue et Son*, no. 127, November 1963. 497-499.

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

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

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



**Jean Langlais at the new console (1962) of Sainte-Clotilde, 1965**

Figure 46. (photograph by Claude Langlais, collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

<sup>40</sup> César Franck à Sainte-Clotilde, *Jean Langlais*, Arion, 1975, 33 rpm LPs remastered as three CDs in 2010 (ARN368813).

<sup>41</sup> Seth Bingham, *César Franck: complete organ works*, in *Caecilia* 91, n° 2 (Summer 1964). 80-82.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Van Bronkhorst, *New records*, in *The American Organist* 47, n° 7 (July 1964). 6. This review pointed out a technical fault in the sound engineering – slight changes in pitch – that greatly annoyed Jean Langlais and about which he never ceased complaining to the recording company. These imperfections were corrected only 33 years later during a second release of the CD in 1996, but this would prove too late for Jean Langlais.

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

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

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

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

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

## Avant-Garde Techniques in Music of the 1960s

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

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

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

<sup>43</sup> Marc Samson, *Le Soleil*, Québec, October 9, 1969.

<sup>44</sup> As an example listen to his recording of the “Grand Dialogue à quatre chœurs” from the *Second Livre d’orgue* of Jacques Boyvin, recorded on the Kern organ at Masevaux in the collection *Orgeln in Elsass* (Coronata 4001, 1983, 33 1/3 rpm).

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

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

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

The structure of the *Deuxième Concerto* is curious from the outset due to the disproportion between the solo interlude of just two minutes' duration and the outer movements. It was the price to pay for breathing new life into the *Thème, variations et final* of 1937, even if in so doing the composer left the new work unbalanced.

The opening theme and variations unfold as a passacaglia over a long chromatic theme, a point of departure for seven variations of progressively rapid note values, as decreed by tradition. Solo organ alternates with strings alone or a combination of the two. It is interesting to note that Langlais provided the orchestra a form more often devoted to the organ across the ages. A magnificent closing fugue intertwines organ and strings in a bold apotheosis freely derived from the richly chromatic theme.

The second movement is a brief Trio for the organ only, very short transition to the last movement, an orchestral grand Finale. Its fast-slow-fast form is practically an organ concerto in itself.

Dropped into its midst is an Adagio derived from the "Plainte" of the *Suite brève* written some fifteen years earlier; its theme introduced by the strings with the first violins and violas in unison, in harmonies identical to those of the original solo organ version, is undoubtedly one of the most lyrical passages Langlais ever penned for orchestra.

The appearance of such a traditional, if chromatic, melody seemed completely old-fashioned by the beginning of the 1960s. But Langlais himself was not troubled. At a culminating moment of tension this slow section gives way to a virtuoso cadenza in which hands and feet engage in

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<sup>45</sup> Premiered May 11, 1962 at Saint Paul's Church, Cleveland Heights, OH, with members of the Cleveland Orchestra, Fenner Douglass, organ, conducted by Walter Blodgett. The work was paired with Honegger's *Le Roi David*.

<sup>46</sup> Conversation with the author.

lively competition upon full organ.

The orchestra reappears only to announce a conclusion drawn from the opening of the movement.

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

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

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

Leonard Raver, an American champion of contemporary organ music, wrote of the work:<sup>47</sup>

The *Essai* is indeed a "trial" or "test" of an organist willing to grapple with complex rhythmic structure and lightning-quick changes of registration.

It's an atmospheric work with stark pauses which punctuate sharp jabs of sound contrasting with reflective passages of quiet beauty.

The form is free although the opening 42 measures are "developed" or repeated literally whence a brilliant 34-measure toccata intrudes to be followed by a peaceful conclusion.

This most provocative piece should find great favor in recital programs as indeed Marguerite Long to whom the work is dedicated has already proved.

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

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<sup>47</sup> Leonard Raver, *The American Organist*, vol. 41, no. 1 (January 1964).

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

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

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

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

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

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

Remembrance  
Allegretto  
Meditation  
Evocation  
As a fugue  
United Themes

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

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<sup>48</sup> Personally recounted to the author.

<sup>49</sup> “A leopard cannot change its spots”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>50</sup> It was upon Langlais’ recommendation to Lilian Murtagh that Marie-Claire Alain began her distinguished American performing career in 1961, as, later, the Duruflés and Olivier Lamy.

<sup>51</sup> The second part of this movement was arranged by the composer in 1966 for string quintet, flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, and bassoon. Entitled *Elégie*, it remains unpublished.

<sup>52</sup> Seth Bingham, *Marie-Claire Alain*, in *The American Organist*, vol. 50, no. 11, Nov. 1967. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Bernard Newman, *Organ Music, Poem of Happiness, Jean Langlais in Church Music*, December 1968.



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

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

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

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

## **Jean Langlais the Teacher**

### **• The National Institute for The Young Blind**

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

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

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<sup>54</sup> Melvin West, *The Organ works of Jean Langlais*, D.M.A. dissertation, Boston University, 1959. 243.

<sup>55</sup> These works never saw light of day.

<sup>56</sup> *Entretien avec Pierre Lucet*, audiocassette, 1984, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

The repertory comprised Janequin, Josquin des Prés, Goudimel, Vittoria, Palestrina (*Missa Papae Marcelli* in six parts), Lassus, as well as opera choruses of Gluck and Handel or cantatas of Bach. There were Renaissance songs (Costeley, Sermisy, Arcadelt) and also the *Mass in C* of Mozart, the *Mass* of Vierne, the *Messe Solennelle* of Langlais himself, and choruses by Franck, Fauré, and Debussy.

We presented a concert at the Institute each trimester, but we also performed in the Salle Pleyel, at the Sorbonne, at Sainte-Clotilde, Notre-Dame, and on radio broadcasts of Sunday masses. Jean Langlais did not make us vocalize, working most often from the music desk, neglecting to work with them part by part. The fact that we were all blind obliged us to be very ingenious when it came to entrances and expressive devices. Conventions were established in rehearsal, certain tricks of the trade such as discreet out-loud counting and tapping of hands and feet, minimalized in concert.

It was a great deal of work for Langlais, as he took particular care to explain the repertory and its style to us. He had a very personal sense of interpretation, with precise nuances and an intense musicality. Gregorian chant received his full attention, of course. The great years of the chorus were 1945 to 1955, after which the administration ceased to support it and it dwindled away bit by bit.

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

- **Private teaching at home**



**Jean Langlais's Schwenkedel house organ, 1960**

Figure 47. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

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

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

An incomplete list would include:

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

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

### ■ The Schola Cantorum

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

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

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

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<sup>58</sup> He succeeded French composer and organist Daniel-Lesur (1908-2002)

<sup>59</sup> Alain (Emile Chartier), French philosopher, wrote *Minerve ou de la sagesse* in 1939.



Concert hall of the Schola Cantorum, 1902 Mutin/Cavaillé-Coll organ

Figure 48. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

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

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

When I entered the great hall of the Schola Cantorum for the first time in November 1966, I recall how intimidated I was at the thought of meeting the composer of *Hommage à Frescobaldi*, the collection from which I played the "Fantaisie." I envisioned Jean Langlais as an unapproachable master. Naturally I was wrong, finding myself face-to-face with a small, affable, smiling man smoking his pipe and chatting with his students.

I played for him without apprehension. When I finished the *Dorian Toccata* of Bach he said, "But it's very good. You'll see, if you listen to me, we will go far together," a phrase that made me decide on the spot to abandon my law studies in order to pursue a career as an organist. His patience knew no bounds. He bestowed the same attention upon an amateur organist of modest accomplishment as upon a brilliant virtuoso. The mix of ages, levels, and nationalities enchanted him. His classes were true lessons in musical analysis. Langlais always took care to explain the pieces we were playing, while adding numerous anecdotes. Then, suddenly, he would take the organ bench to interpret some Franck and Tournemire, and the atmosphere turned magical. One of the very extraordinary qualities in this man deprived of eyesight was the exceptional finesse of his listening abilities. "Careful," he would say to one of us as we played, "you have a bad fingering in the left hand" or "use the toe rather than the heel in that passage." Nevertheless he rarely spoke of technique but frequently of style. His manner of treating everyone equally amazed us.

One of his most essential pedagogical specificities concerned improvisation; at the end of the year each of us had to play a program including an improvisation consisting of a Gregorian paraphrase or a toccata. Even the most reluctant and least gifted of us managed to take this difficult step, sometimes even with honors. He was unfailingly supportive, always finding some interesting or promising detail to encourage our laborious efforts.

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

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



**Jean Langlais organ class at the Schola Cantorum, 1966**

Figure 49. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

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

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

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

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

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas Forrest Kelly, Morton B. Knafel Professor of Music, Harvard University, letter to Marie-Louise Langlais, January 29, 2014

the Legion of Honor in his buttonhole, an unbelievable concentration when he was improvising a fugue, a sincere love of God and of Gregorian chant, and amazingly inspiring to watch and to learn from.

Like most of the major organists of Paris, he had a group of admirers at his organ of Sainte-Clotilde on Sundays morning, who gathered around the organ console high up on the back wall while he played, and then retired behind the organ case with him to smoke and talk during the sermon.

He taught me a lot about music, and about the freedom needed to improvise: one of the tricks is to profit from your mistakes: if anything sounds really terrible, do it again, and it will be art. Maybe his life was that too: something terrible, his blindness, being reinforced, and being transformed into a wonderful art.

He loved Gregorian chant, and a trip with him and my fellow-student Marie-Louise Jaquet to the monastery of Solesmes was a strong influence on my own decision to study the beauties of medieval music, and especially of Gregorian chant.

He has been an important part of my life ever since, and I owe much of my inspiration to him.

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

I recall him as a very strong musician, whose blindness had sharpened his hearing to an incredible degree, who played everything from memory without mistakes and who heard everything. Beyond that, in life he was very easygoing and liked to laugh and to make jokes. In his teaching he placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of phrasing. His own phrasing was magnificent, sensitive and full of expression.

He was Draconian when it came down to clarity and precision of playing, insisting that one should be able to follow every voice of counterpoint. It was a beautiful course in discipline. For me, he was the incarnation of clarity, light, intelligence, and sensitivity at the organ.

### • Boys Town Liturgical Music Workshops

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

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

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

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<sup>61</sup> Pascale Rouet, *Entretien avec Coline Serreau, réalisatrice...et organiste*, in *Dossier Jean Langlais*, in *Orgues Nouvelles*, Spring 2013, n° 20. 8.



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

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

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



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

<sup>62</sup> Dorothy Kincaid, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 28, 1967. 6.

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

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

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

### **Concert Tours of the United States during the 1960s**

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

In his journal the composer defended his anti-flying stance.<sup>64</sup>

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

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

Chambersburg, March 30. Saturday we left Chambersburg for Philadelphia.  
Length of trip: 1 hour and 50 minutes. Train delay: One hour and 40 minutes, and we’re not done yet.

Omaha, April 1. At the train station at 1:18 am, a pithy sign: “special information: train on time!”

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

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



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

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

“I always say the truth. I have just one opinion.” This was the blind organist from France, Jean Langlais, speaking. He was ready to teach a master class at Winthrop College the night before his 140th concert in the United States.

Composer as well as performer and teacher, he is a small man, with a bald, bulging forehead and longish gray hair. His dark glasses add to, not hide, an air of deep concentration. He seems a little gay cricket of a man in a bright red vest.

How long does it take to tell how someone plays? “About one minute.” He paused, gave a slight dry chuckle and said, “If the technique is not good, one minute is too much.” But each of the students in his master class played at least five minutes, while the blind man stood beside the complicated organ in Byrnes Hall, listening, his head down, his brows knotted a little. He reached out occasionally to pull one of the white knobs on the side panels, stopped a student to make a comment, explain the phrasing or the feeling of a piece. He prompted the students in his master class, guided them:

“Faster, faster...this is not a lullaby...use pedals, you have two feet...express these magnificent harmonies...listen to the echo...you are very young, practice...beautiful legato...my English is bad, my accent is bad” he apologized and then added, quietly, “But my ear is good.” “Everything is too fast in the United States,” he said. “For an artist, it is very important to be slow.”

Here is a photograph taken at that masterclass:



**Masterclass at Winthrop College, March 5, 1962**

Figure 52. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

<sup>65</sup> Harriet Doar, *Blind organist says Practice...Practice*, in *The Charlotte Observer*, The Arts, March 18, 1962.

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

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

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

In New York, at Saint Thomas Church, I played the "Prière" in C-sharp minor of Franck for the first time in concert. My great emotion as its interpreter was equaled only by that of an audience unaccustomed to hearing this masterpiece which, I must say, sounded almost as it does as Sainte-Clotilde. There was a big reception beforehand where I was able to meet the important organists of New York and its suburbs.

After the recital there was a gathering at the home of the organist of Saint Thomas Church,<sup>68</sup> where I had a long and friendly conversation with a former president of the AGO. It was one o'clock in the morning yet this likeable man reminded me of the beneficial effects of French influence upon America and of the gratitude his continent feels for our country and our traditions.

I was invited to teach a class at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, which totals some 30,000 students. The last student had prepared the "Final" from my *Première Symphonie*. Noting her hesitation to begin, I asked if she were ready. Her teacher Marilyn Mason responded, "Be patient, she is looking for the Great to Pedal coupler."

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<sup>66</sup> Ann Labounsky was so impressed by Jean Langlais that she wrote her doctoral dissertation and published a book on Langlais, *Jean Langlais, The Man and His Music*. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 2000, 392 pages; in addition she created a DVD, *The Life and Music of Jean Langlais* (Mist Media, 2006) and has been the only to record his complete organ works in 13 volumes comprising 26 CDs (Voix du Vent, 2012).

<sup>67</sup> Jean Langlais, *Un organiste français aux Etats-Unis*, in *Musique et Liturgie*, no 103, July-August-September 1965.12

<sup>68</sup> William Self (1908-1996), organist of Saint Thomas in New-York City from 1954 to 1971.

General laughter followed by a very beautiful performance of my work.

After my concert in New Orleans the mayor reminded me that his city was an important cultural center. “The proof,” said he, “is that you are with us this evening, and just recently it was the Beatles who were here!” This distinguished man immediately made me an honorary citizen and gave me a key to the city.

I was also very happy to play the beautiful Holtkamp organ in at the Cleveland Museum of Art again. After the concert the organizer said that many people had to stand, due to lack of seats. “You should be very happy,” I told him. “No, I had to stand, too.” Shortly afterwards, in Pittsburgh, I was very moved to play a recital dedicated to the memory of President Kennedy. At this concert an excellent chorale performed excerpts from the *Requiem* of Fauré as well as my *Déploration*.

Later, I gave a lecture-demonstration at Union Theological Seminary, a famous school in New York, on the subject, “French music is charming, but it is also much else.” Two hundred students attended.

44 concerts in 61 days, the very real joy of seeing a great number of my students again, the honor of having striven in favor of French art: *voilà* the best result of my tour.

I like this continent, I like the enthusiasm of its public, and I have not given up hope to one day appreciate its cuisine.

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

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

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

On the manner in which Jean Langlais accustomed himself to a new instrument she wrote:<sup>71</sup>

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

It usually took him less than an hour to register his program. As he quickly set the registrations, his reactions to new instruments seemed as intuitive and rapid as they were to new people.

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

**“OVATION FOR A PARIS ORGANIST”**

Thomas Putnam, *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 25, 1967

<sup>69</sup> Ann Labounsky, *Jean Langlais, the man and his music*, Amadeus Press, Portland, Oregon, 2000, 392 pages.

<sup>70</sup> That was to be noted!

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 206

**"BLIND ORGANIST'S RECITAL THRILLS TRINITY AUDIENCE"**

Doris Reno, *Miami Herald*, February 1, 1967

**"BLIND ORGANIST GIVES MASTERFUL PERFORMANCE"**

Peter Heterlenny, *Oakland Tribune*, February 11, 1967

**"JEAN LANGLAIS PROVES VIRTUOSITY"**

*Rocky Mountain News*, Denver, Colorado, February 27, 1967

Susan Ferré gave her strong impression of the tour:<sup>72</sup>

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

In his account for *Le Louis Braille*, a journal intended for the blind, Jean Langlais confirmed:<sup>73</sup>

Before my concert in Denver the organist told me the cathedral had only been filled to capacity once, for Alexander Schreiner, organist of the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City. All the Mormons had come from far and wide. He added, "Naturally, we don't expect such a crowd this evening." At intermission he stopped by to explain that one hundred chairs had been added. In spite of that a large number of listeners still had to stand. "Were you aware of that?" he asked. "I am only aware that I am not a Mormon organist," I replied. "Since applause is not allowed in the cathedral would you do us the honor of concluding your program with the Marseillaise?" he continued.

I agreed willingly and thus our national anthem was heard by more than 3,000 listeners, all standing.

At Columbus, Ohio I experienced a day such as America reserves for its guests: 7 am, arrival at the train station; 8 am, invitation to breakfast; 9 am, television interview; 10 am, reception at the church; noon, invitation to lunch; 1 pm, practice at the church; 4 pm, masterclass followed by discussion with the participants; 7 pm, invitation to dinner; 8 pm, recital; 10 pm, reception; midnight, board the train for a 23-hour ride.

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

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

<sup>72</sup> Susan Ferré, *The Skiff*, February 7, 1967.

<sup>73</sup> Jean Langlais, *Mon 7ème Voyage aux Etats-Unis*, in *Le Louis Braille*, October 1967.

<sup>74</sup> Personal remembrances of the present author.

improvisation on the *Hymne de Lourdes*.

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

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

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

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



**Messiaen decorates Jean Langlais for *Officier de la Legion d’Honneur*, October 20, 1968.**

Figure 53. (photograph by Claude Langlais. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

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



## CHAPTER 10

### *Trials and Joys (1970-1984)*

#### **The composer and concert performer between baroque and modernism**

The American tours represented only one facet, although certainly glorious, of Jean Langlais' concert career. Europe also sought and celebrated his concerts, and he performed in Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands, in Switzerland, Italy and Scandinavia. These few headlines suggest the responses:

"WONDERBAATLIJK ORGELSPEL VAN JEAN LANGLAIS IN GOUDA"

("Marvellous Recital by Jean Langlais in Gouda")

*Gerderlander*, Gouda (The Netherlands), July 18, 1969.

"A GREAT MASTER AT THE KEYS"

*Derek Robinson*, Bristol (England), June 22, 1971.

"OVATIONEN FUR GROSSEN MUSIKER"

("Ovation for a Great Musician")

*Neue Aachener Zeitung*, Aix-la-Chapelle (Germany), December 11, 1972.

True to his own aesthetic choices and sailing against the tide of current fashions, Langlais continued to honor, with brilliance, the music of his predecessors in Sainte-Clotilde, whose various anniversaries he celebrated with brilliance: in 1970, the centenary of Tournemire, and two years later, the 150th anniversary of Franck's birth. For the latter occasion, he played Franck's complete *Douze Pièces* for organ in two concerts at Sainte-Clotilde, April 26 and May 3, 1972.

As Langlais' international reputation grew, foreigners thronged around him and his popularity in Europe as well as in America was at its zenith. Nevertheless, it was not until April 15, 1970 that his first organ recital devoted solely to his work took place--at St. Severin Church in Paris, organized by the French Association for the Protection of the Ancient Organ (A.F.S.O.A, created in 1967). This concert consisted of excerpts from several of his Suites, *Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes*, *Suite médiévale*, *Livre Œcuménique*, *Folkloric Suite*, *Incantation pour un Jour Saint*, *American Suite*, *Triptyque* (including the very difficult "Trio"), *Suite française*, and *Neuf Pièces*; it concluded with *Poem of Happiness*. This was a long program, eclectic and technical, played on an organ that was not suited to it because, as a successful copy of a German baroque organ by Alfred Kern, it did not have at all the characteristics corresponding to the essence of Langlais' work.

Soon after that, he recorded the same type of program on an organ even more removed from his personal aesthetic, the great Christian Müller at Saint Bavo in Haarlem.<sup>1</sup> This was a more perilous undertaking since the instrument, having a manual compass of 51 notes and a pedal compass of 27 notes, with no coupler for manual III, was pitched a half tone higher than Kammerton (Baroque pitch). Langlais, with his perfect pitch, suffered all night during the recording session!<sup>2</sup> This was the first record devoted entirely to his works, himself playing the organ.

The same year, 1970, a new commission<sup>3</sup> from the Paris Conservatory for its year-end organ competition inspired Jean Langlais to write "Imploration pour la Joie," a short but difficult work, to which he would soon after add "Imploration pour l'Indulgence" and "Imploration pour la Croyance," thus creating *Trois Implorations*.

But this time, unlike its antecedents, "Imploration pour la Joie" shows no notable innovations. Langlais limits himself here to an a-B-a'-B' structure (lento in 3/4, then allegro in 2/4, with repetition in a different form), the short lyrical "lento" contrasting with a relentless and virtuosic allegro. Of note, nevertheless, in the final peroration, is a humorous mixture of a C major scale in the right hand and C sharp in the left hand. The work ends with a pirouette on the triad of C major in root position preceded by two dissonant clusters, a classic conclusion by Langlais-the-improviser.

If the second Imploration, "Pour l'Indulgence," in the serene vein of *Poem of Peace*, exploits a succession of harmonies in the second mode, the third Imploration, "Pour la Croyance" ("For Belief") surprises with its extraordinary aggressiveness. There, where one could expect a renewed version of the "Te Deum" of 1933 on the theme of the Faith, Langlais offers a vehement protest against what he saw as the drifting of Catholic music since Vatican II. This protest is in a new genre which uses "bad words to music" in the mischievous expression of André Marchal, and is stylized by brief dissonant tone clusters on full organ, slamming like punches in response to each phrase of the Credo IV, monophonic, then in canon for 2 and 3 voices. Note the very choppy character of the discourse; not one of the sections of this piece exceeds four measures (the length of the Gregorian Credo itself). Note also the final measures, which, after some semi-clusters, bursts, fortissimo, the chromatic total (sharps in the right hand and naturals in the left hand), "expressing what I was seeking for thirty years," explains the composer; it was a way for him to shout to the world:

"I believe with all my strength, but with all my strength but I also suffer from what I hear in the Church ..."

In the words of Canon Revert, spoken in Sainte-Clotilde during the funeral oration that he delivered May 30, 1991, at the solemn mass in memory of Jean Langlais, this "cry of suffering, vehement protest against anything that might degrade the treasure of the Catholic Creed" hurts--literally, since the dissonance strikes the ear, but also figuratively, because if "great pain is mute," the pain of Jean Langlais, too long held in, explodes here furiously.

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<sup>1</sup> *Orgelwerken van Jean Langlais, Jean Langlais bespeelt het orgel van de Grote of St. Bavokerk te Haarlem*, Microsillon 33 rpm, Citadel Recordings, Holland, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> I assisted the composer that night, alongside Wim van der Panne, a Dutch student of Jean Langlais.

<sup>3</sup> This was Langlais' third commission in eight years after *Essai* (1962) and *Sonate en trio* (1968).

According to Kathleen Thomerson:

I remember how upset Langlais was, in the 1960's, when chant and Latin were sung less in church. When I played the *Trois Implorations* for him...he spoke about how the "Imploration pour la Croyance" was his personal statement of protest in 1970 against the musical road being taken by church authorities and their control over the music. His anguish can be heard in the powerfully dissonant chords.<sup>4</sup>

He did not, however, reserve the vehemence of his indignation only for Catholic music. What he heard on the radio, which he listened to assiduously, or at contemporary music concerts, often displeased him greatly, and he readily denounced amateurism and the emptiness of some. That is why he subtitled his *Troisième Concerto* for organ, string orchestra and timpani, commissioned by the University of Potsdam, N.Y., "Reaction."

I subtitled it "Reaction" he explains, because I want to react against those who think they are writing something new for the organ by using half-pulled stops or sprinkling their scores with tone clusters for hands as well as feet. Me, I have placed at the center of this concerto a fugue in six voices. I'm not reactionary, but I wanted to prove that we could still write music for organ without falling asleep at the keyboards.<sup>5</sup>

Jean Langlais was acquainted with these "new" techniques... and opposed them with a total refusal to comply. Started on December 28, 1970, the *Troisième Concerto* was completed on Friday April 9, 1971 in La Richardais, and performed five years later, on October 22, 1976 in Pittsburgh.

Unlike the previous two concertos for organ, "Reaction" does not adopt the traditional division into separate movements, but connects discontinuous sections. Introduction-Vif-Fugue-Cadence-Conclusion: this is its structure, the central fugue forming the true backbone of the work--a morsel of bravura designed by a counterpoint specialist.

It is also distinguished by language, neither Neoclassical like the *Premier Concerto*, nor lyrical like the second, and by orchestration, since we find here timpani in addition to strings, exactly like in Poulenc's *Concerto in G minor*. But the difference from his two previous concertos is essentially rhythmic, with a constant atonal theme, and exploitation of every possible combination (inversion, transformation, augmentation, diminution), the harmonic language mingling atonality, modality and polytonality.

In the 1970s, Jean Langlais wanted to be a composer of his time and wanted to give the image of a musician who knows how to renew himself, with none of his works resembling the previous ones. Always he had in mind Paul Dukas' precept: "A composer must know how to belie his reputation."

Seeking in this way to forge a new language, Langlais, however, decided to take a break, and giving free rein to his personal aspirations, devoted an entire book of organ pieces, titled *Offrande à Marie* to the Blessed Virgin.

These six meditations are a true act of faith on the part of the composer at a time when, faced with contradictory thrusts of the musical world in general and the organ world in

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<sup>4</sup> Kathleen Thomerson, *Tribute to Jean Langlais*, sent to Marie-Louise Langlais, February 16, 2001.6. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>5</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."



particular, he feels the need to look for the radiant presence, soothing and redemptive, of Mary, mother of God. Who knows, perhaps he is calling on Mary in the face of the Church and its clergy? Composed rapidly between November 21 and December 29, 1971, these pages are covered in an obsessive way with "Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis" from the Litany of Loreto. For the titles of each of these pieces, Jean Langlais uses one of the qualities of the Virgin Mary expressed in these Litanies: "Mater admirabilis" (Mother most admirable), "Consolatrix Afflictorum" (Consoler of the Afflicted), "Regina angelorum" (Queen of Angels), "Regina Pacis" (Queen of Peace), "Mater Christi" (Mother of Christ), and "Maria mater gratiae" (Mary, the mother of grace).

## **Jean Langlais and his teaching**

Those who speak most eloquently about Langlais' teaching are certainly his many students. Among them, Lynne Davis Firmin-Didot<sup>6</sup> writes:

I arrived in France at the end of September 1971 to study with Marie-Claire Alain and Jean Langlais, who taught at the Schola Cantorum in Paris. Madame Alain was very ill that year, so lessons with her had temporarily ceased. Those with Langlais became then all the more important. The weekly class at the Schola was on Saturday afternoons. I didn't yet speak French fluently, but that was not a problem since Langlais spoke English perfectly. He was the "maître", the teaching maestro, in the strictest, formal French manner. One didn't "discuss" an interpretation, as I had done at the University of Michigan with my teacher, Robert Clark. One accepted his instruction without question. And yet, beneath this strict, almost rigid demeanor, was a very generous, gracious side that Jean Langlais exhibited to me specifically on three occasions. These three times changed my life forever!

The first time was when I played some early French music for him. He suggested that I listen to Marie-Claire Alain's new recording of the complete organ works of Nicolas de Grigny. He knew this would be beneficial to me and didn't harbor any jealousies of my hearing and learning this music from another source.

When I played the *Prelude et Fugue sur le nom d'ALAIN* by Duruflé, he immediately said, "Oh, but you must take this to Madame Duruflé and study it with her!" Thus, with a special introduction from Jean Langlais, began my long studies with Marie-Madeleine Duruflé, which transformed my playing.

The third but not the least of these almost clairvoyant suggestions by Langlais was the following. He said, "You know, there is a brand-new organ competition at Chartres Cathedral. You should contact them about it." I did, in spite of the fact that my French was not that good yet, especially on the phone. The person who answered the phone was extremely polite and invited me to come and talk with them about the competition. This person was none-other than Pierre Firmin-Didot, who became my husband in 1981.

Other memories are of discovering Franck at Ste. Clotilde through concerts given by Langlais. One particular performance of Franck's *Prière* was especially moving. I learned later that his little dog "Paf" had died that very day.

Going up to the organ loft on Sunday morning mass was very special. His improvisations were glorious. Hearing Langlais exclaim about how beautiful and colorful the stained glass windows were at Chartres, in spite of being blind. He "saw" the colors in his mind.

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<sup>6</sup> Lynne Davis Firmin-Didot, Robert L. Town Distinguished Professor of Organ, Associate Professor, School of Music, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas. She sent to the present author a letter titled "Homage to Jean Langlais" on February 3, 2016.

Laughing with the other students and visitors when he told his jokes! Watching him as he showed us how he read music in Braille and how he punched out the paper to write.

Visitors one Sunday morning at mass were Robert Sutherland Lord and Catharine Crozier. During that mass, Langlais let me play Franck's *Choral in E Major*. For some reason, he was not happy with my performance, saying that Franck would not have liked it. Yet he was truly happy and satisfied when I played it later and won First Prize at St. Albans in 1975. He said to the jury "She did everything I told her!"

I was very lucky to have studied with and to have known him. I have him to thank for so many things in how my life evolved in France during those 35 years I lived there. This life today was made better and definitely more French, thanks to him.

Merci, cher Maître et très affectueusement à votre mémoire!

Another student of Langlais, Douglas Himes<sup>7</sup>, remembers:

I was introduced to the organist-composers of The Sainte-Clotilde Tradition—César Franck, Charles Touremire, and Jean Langlais—by the late Dr. Robert Sutherland Lord, University Organist at the University of Pittsburgh from 1962 to 2006...

In the spring of 1972, at the conclusion of my second year of studies with him, Dr. Lord took me to the epicenter of The Sainte-Clotilde Tradition. I arrived in Paris in May in time to hear the first of two recitals at Ste.-Clotilde in which Langlais played all of Franck's organ works in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth. My first exposure to authentic Franck interpretation came on the evening before my first lesson with Langlais, as I sat on a kneeler in the partially dark nave of the basilica, facing the organ, listening to him play Franck using only stops from the original Cavallé-Coll organ. It was a life-changing experience.

The following day, Dr. Lord took me to Langlais' apartment in the Rue Duroc and introduced me to "Maître," with whom I was privileged to study periodically for the next four years...

The advantages of studying Langlais with Langlais are obvious, but studying Franck with Langlais was no less inspiring. Langlais' exposure to authentic Franck interpretation began in his youth as a student at the National Institute for The Young Blind in Paris when he was ten years old... He studied harmony with Adolphe Marty, and theory and solfège with Albert Mahaut, both brilliant blind organists who had won first prize in organ at the Conservatory in the class of César Franck. From these two professors and Charles Tournemire, Jean Langlais received the pure essence of the Franck tradition.

It was always with some difficulty that Langlais recalled his teacher at the conservatory, Marcel Dupré, whom he acknowledged as a "very scrupulous teacher."

Langlais told Robert Lord that Dupré had advised his students that: "The only thing you need to play Franck is a metronome in your right pocket and a metronome in your left pocket." This was starkly at odds with the first-hand testimony from Franck's pupils, who all attested that Franck played his own works "very, very freely." The conflict came to a head when Langlais played the *Fantaisie in C Major* as a pupil in Dupré's class at the conservatory. As he would indicate many years later in his edition of the Franck organ works, Dupré instructed Langlais to reverse the composer's registrations in the manual parts of the middle section, which Langlais knew to be opposite Franck's specification. Langlais recalled that he "became very courageous" and said: "I am very sorry to tell you that Adolphe Marty, who was a teacher at the School for the Blind, when he got first prize [at the conservatory] in the Franck class in 1886, he played the *Fantaisie in C*, and he played like me." According to Langlais: "Dupré became very furious, and we had a terrible, silent minute; and after that, he said to me: 'If Marty did that, do that!'"

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Douglas Himes, from a long text entitled «Recollections of Jean Langlais as a teacher of Franck,» p.5. Sent to Marie-Louise Langlais, July 2, 2015. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

Dupré's distance from the Franck tradition was evidenced not only in his teaching, but also throughout his edition of the Franck organ works, published in 1955.

Speaking of this edition, Langlais said: "Dupré did away with all fermatas and almost all dynamics, and changed almost all registrations. For me, this edition is useless, a scandal, and an assassination."

Langlais's understanding of and sensitivity toward the organ music of César Franck was visceral. He seemed to know every note, every phrase, every tempo marking, every dynamic, and every registration indication in every piece. Only on very rare occasions during his teaching did he ever consult the Braille score to confirm his recollection of a detail.

I wish that I had thought to ask him how he "saw" a score in his mind's eye, for I am certain that he "saw" it in great detail. Regardless of the density of the musical texture, he could hear and name every note in every voice: "No, G-natural in the alto." His remarkable sense of inner voices is hardly surprising when one considers his training and innate abilities... One of the most humbling—and initially amazing—experiences of studying with him was occasionally having him correct my fingering. It might seem ironic to have a blind teacher correct one's fingering, but not so, when one considers that the purpose of proper fingering is to prevent the mechanics from obscuring the music. Langlais did not need to *see* an improper fingering; he could *hear* the musical results and would correct the fingering to remove the impediment to proper expression of the music.

Sensitivity to the architecture of musical phrases is essential to authentic interpretation of Franck's organ works, and Langlais' sense of phrasing was impeccable. His playing of the E-major Chorale will illustrate. Franck had enormous hands; he could strike a tenth interval and easily span a twelfth. Like other keyboard composers, e.g. Rachmaninoff, he wrote for his own capabilities. There are many passages in Franck's keyboard writing that he doubtless could negotiate with ease, but which present daunting challenges to performers with hands of normal size. One of those passages is the opening section of the E-major Chorale. While the writing is for manuals alone, many organists couple the manuals into the pedal with no pedal stops, playing the bottom voice on the pedals to alleviate stretching in the left hand. Langlais had small hands. I have sat next to him on the organ bench at Ste.-Clotilde while he played this chorale. He never coupled the manuals to the pedal, and he did not drop a single note or phrase.<sup>8</sup>

An oft-quoted maxim among organists and organ builders states: "The most important stop on any organ is the room." For nearly 60 years, Jean Langlais made music in the room for which Franck conceived his organ works. He had first-hand knowledge of the original Franck organ, before the first major renovation of the instrument under Tournemire in 1933. His intimate knowledge of both the organ for which Franck carefully specified registrations and the acoustical space in which those registrations were intended to sound, enabled Langlais to provide unique insight into Franck's selection of certain stops and the intended results of their use...

Jean Langlais was keenly aware of and humbled by his rôle as the final bearer of The Sainte-Clotilde Tradition. In my studies with him, I was always cognizant that most of what he told me had come from his teachers who had studied with Franck, had heard Franck play his own works, and—in one singularly rare instance—had played Franck's works alongside the composer. Occasionally he would offer a suggestion for interpretation, or a particular fingering, based on his own understanding, but he was always careful to note that this was *his* suggestion. In all of his teaching, Langlais imparted not only knowledge of, but also a deep reverence for, authentic Franck interpretation, which I have always sought to impart to my students.

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<sup>8</sup> Langlais had small hands, but like Tournemire, he had a large compass, being able to reach the tenth with one hand. This is clear in the music of both.

For more than 40 years, countless organists from around the world made pilgrimage to the gallery at Ste.-Clotilde and the studio in the Rue Duroc to soak up wisdom from the last faithful oracle of this marvelous tradition. As part of that legion, I can say with profound gratitude that studying with “Mon cher Maître” was one of the greatest privileges of my life. The knowledge and insights that I received from him have shaped my musicianship far beyond organ performance, and his spirit lives on in me, as it does in others whose lives were touched by this great man.

Here is another, rather humorous, testimony, by Marjorie Bruce, a former pupil of Langlais at the Schola Cantorum between 1972 and 1974<sup>9</sup>:

Langlais’s was a powerful presence. Even now, when I practice, I can hear the words « Mais non ! » resound with awesome clarity.

With a mixture of youthful enthusiasm and naïvety I arrived at my first lesson clutching a copy of Franck’s First Choral. The music of Cesar Franck was not only an area of special expertise but was also particularly close to Langlais’ heart. To proffer the E Major Choral at one’s first lesson was akin to bungee-jumping over Niagara.

One hour into the lesson I turned the first page of the score. What an experience it was ! At no time during that first hour had he uttered a word of discouragement. He demanded precision, close attention to details, rests to be longer, the finest of legato in the inner parts, phrases to be shaped – all this in a couple of bars. I rapidly learnt that the possibilities between staccato and legato were seemingly endless.

## **Heart attack and composition of Five Meditations on the Apocalypse**

The hardships faced by Jean Langlais in the 1970s resulted not so much from quarrels about aesthetics as from serious health problems due, as might be expected, to the increase in his activities related to his rise in fame. On January 14, 1973, Jean Langlais had a severe heart attack which caused his immediate hospitalization in the intensive care unit of the Broussais Hospital in Paris. Death had passed very close... Now, by an odd premonition, Langlais had shortly before begun composing organ works from the Book of the Apocalypse (*Revelation*) of St. John.

But it was really during the long weeks of convalescence following his heart attack that he was able to read and reread the sacred text and deepen his spirit in light of what had just happened to him. So he designed a collection *Cinq Méditations sur l’Apocalypse*, each taking up a phrase or an episode that he had particularly marked during his reading. The book of *Revelation*, we recall, ends The Epistles, and thus concludes the New Testament.

It summarizes the revelations made by the angel to St. John of "the things which must shortly come to pass." Of the 22 chapters of this hermetic, fantastic, important text, Langlais retained certain phrases or images that he strove to translate into music; from these came the titles of the five component parts of his collection:

- "He who has ears, let him hear"
- "He was, He is and He is to come"
- "Prophetic Visions"
- "Come, Lord Jesus"
- "The Fifth Trumpet"

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<sup>9</sup> Marjorie Bruce, « Seeking clarity », *Choir and organ* (March/April 2007). 18.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Piece: **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”**

This introductory injunction is the conclusion of each of the addresses made to the seven churches of Asia over which the Apostle had jurisdiction: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea.

The figure of seven, as a symbol of the cosmos, represents the totality of space and time, and the universal character of the church, and Jean Langlais translates the complexity of St John's words using counterpoint (fugue with 4 voices with regular entrances from low to high each two measures, with exposition immediately followed by increasingly tightened stretto). On this, he superimposes in the pedal, seven times, the short theme of Gregorian chant in the 4th mode, on a soft clarion 4'.

For that which is fugato, played on the registration that Tournemire preferred (manuals: foundations 8, Voix céleste, Voix humaine, tremolo), the composer reuses the whole of the fugue for 4 mixed voices that he had written in 1937 to *Psalm CXXXIII* ("Unto Thee I Lift Up Mine Eyes").

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Piece: **“He was, He is and He will come”**

Based on the phrase "Grace and peace to you from him who is and was and is to come" (*Revelation* 1:4), this piece, one of the most abstract of the collection, attempts to define the concept of the eternity of Christ by means of the note F held during most of the piece, throughout the five sections that form the following theological succession:

1. "eternity": Under the held F, the melodic counterpoint voice ("He Was").
2. "The Christ whom we have crucified" (appearance of the Gregorian Passion hymn *Vexilla Regis* in heavy vertical harmonies, in a tormented chromatic mood and in a highly dramatic context.
3. "eternity": Under the held F, two-part counterpoint ("He Is").
4. "The Christ whom we have glorified" (presence of the Gregorian "Lauda Sion Salvatorem" in vertical harmonies concluding fortissimo with the following idea: The Passion has permitted Christ's Resurrection).
5. "eternity": Under the held F, one- and two-part counterpoint ("He Is to Come") involving angelic arpeggios which sound mysterious on quintaton 16', flute 4' and tierce 1 3/5', in a mystical and magical atmosphere which does not disavow Olivier Messiaen. Note that the "F" of "eternity" never appears at the same time as plain chant, and that on the contrary, the figuration of eternity is invariably linear and contrapuntal; Christ appears always vertically and harmonically, in the same spirit of opposition between monody and polyphony as in the "Te Deum" of 1933.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Piece: **“Prophetic visions”**

Until to that point, Langlais seems to prefer the preamble to the Apocalypse. But here in this third piece, he attacks the body of the subject, "what soon must take place." The vision is terrifying, because the opening of the seven seals announces death by the sword, as well as by famine, wild beasts, earthquakes and floods, the exterminating angel, the monstrous beast of the Apocalypse, and the fall of Babylon.

All this is nightmarish, but instead of detailing the horrors, Langlais brings these visions together under the single term "Prophetic Visions," which are musically summed up in a 10-measure long dissonant rondo on full organ. The contrasting

couplets linger on an image (the angel who places the right foot on the sea and the left foot on the earth, represented by a double pedal solo with left foot and right foot wide apart) or on a symbol (peace and joy of the New Jerusalem sheltering the righteous in eternal life, of course indicated by Langlais by the "Sanctus" of the XVI Mass). The last part of the piece, built in very short sections, brings together various fragments, including the harmonization of the alleluia of the service of the Birth of Our Lord, and concludes on a chord of 10 tones, fortissimo and extremely dissonant.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Piece: "Oh yes, do come, Lord Jesus Christ"

Langlais is here commenting on what is virtually the last sentence of *Revelation* and thus of the New Testament ("The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" *Revelation 22:20*). The reassurance of the Christian is here translated into a confiding prayer with a luminous mysticism, a slow meditation on the salicional and bourdon 8', which doubles as an ardent supplication, increasingly intense, as the melodic line with added rhythm reaches the organ's highest pitches. This inner page is reminiscent of the "Meditation" from the *Homage to Rameau*.

#### 5<sup>th</sup> Piece: **The Fifth trumpet**

Instead of ending the *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse* with the previous piece, promising salvation to the Christian as embodied in the phrase "Come, Lord Jesus," Langlais did exactly the opposite and went back to one of the most dramatic passage in *Revelation*, announced by the blowing of the fifth trumpet:

Then the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fall from heaven to the earth. He was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit; he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth,...and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone. (*Revelation 9:1-6*)

Totally immersed in this horrific fragment of the sacred text, Jean Langlais will transpose it into music and build a vast fantasy, as one would write an opera starting from a libretto, but without respecting the text's order of events--events which he will depict in an extremely realistic way.

First, in the introduction, the bottomless, dark "shaft of the bottomless pit," stylized with the 8' foundation stops in the swell, resounding in the low range and interspersed with silences. From the well rises smoke in spirals, illustrated by a motif of 3 notes (E-G#-A#), turning on itself in staccato. At that moment appears the famous "fifth trumpet," which gives the piece its title, an ornamental in triple 16th notes, echoed three times on the trompette 8', the clairon 4' and the mixtures of the swell,<sup>10</sup> immediately followed by the evocation of the star falling from heaven to earth (a drop of three octaves, closing on the low E b of the pedal on the bombarde 16' only.)

Then comes, twice, the evocation (measures 119 and 135) of the "*great furnace* [whose smoke was] *obscuring the sun and the air*," with fortissimo chords repeating the melodic motif of "smoke" (measure 8) on a 9th chord built on the lowest D natural of the pedal. All these elements are re-stated in the chaos that lasts throughout this first and longest section of the "Fifth Trumpet."

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<sup>10</sup> I remarked to him that on an organ with powerful reeds of 8' and 4' on the Grand Orgue, or better, a chamade, the effect for this solo would be even more terrifying, and he agreed.

Before beginning the second part, Jean Langlais introduces the key element, which the sacred text expresses as: "*Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth.*" At first, expressed simply and presented in alternation with other leitmotifs, these grasshoppers have a harmless character, and their presence does not seem in any way threatening, being announced by a commonplace "birdsong" motive, à la Messiaen. But from the beginning of the second part of the work, this fleeting picture turns into a disturbing ostinato (measure 159). Figurative locusts now monopolize the attention in a hollow sonority of bourdon 16', flute 4' and larigot 1-1/3, supported by a succession of 7th chords registered on the combination of Voix humaine, Voix céleste and tremblant, while on the pedal the theme of the "smoke" unfolds its spirals in long notes on the clairon 4' alone. Suddenly the presence of insects intensifies, the initial 16th notes turn into 32nd notes. A cinematic comparison with Alfred Hitchcock's marvelous film *The Birds* comes to mind, where the early benign presence of some peaceful birds turns into a worrisome mass of birds that ends up savagely pecking human beings to death. Then comes a long culminating silence, the ultimate calm after the storm, because, according to *Revelation* :

And [the locusts] were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

This attack on people by grasshoppers will form the third and final part of "The Fifth Trumpet," the most violent, according to the hallucinatory description of Saint John:

On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. They have tails like scorpions, with stings, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months. They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

To most closely translate this text of unusual violence, Langlais uses perpetual motion on full organ, monody in 32nd notes in the hands punctuated by violent jumps in the pedal toward the lowest pitches, simulating repeated attacks on humans by the locusts; the composer lets himself be totally guided by the epic spirit of the sacred text, which concludes:

And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

Since the supreme punishment of men will be not death but life, which Langlais translated musically by two dissonant chords which resolve into a very long and totally chromatic cluster over the pedal C, almost seeming to put a final period to the *Imploration pour la Croissance*, written two years earlier.

Thus, twice, he--the believer, the optimist--suggests through his music that the culmination of life could be tragedy, which is stunning from such a strong Christian.

This powerful work, however, demonstrates how intact was Jean Langlais' tremendous capacity to paraphrase the scriptures, at a moment in his career when he seemed to have condemned himself to repetition; we can say that henceforth/from this point on, he is revived by the power of his own inspiration.

As he himself acknowledges:

These *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse* represent the culmination of my musical aspirations and my best work.<sup>11</sup>

This kind of statement, coming from him, is sufficiently rare as to merit attention. Supporting his assertion is the commentary on this work by Joël-Marie Fauquet:

Even though, in order to paint his *Couleurs de la cité céleste*, his friend Olivier Messiaen had put together an instrumental palette as original as it is sumptuous, Jean Langlais, true to the organ through which he prayed so much, thought about these *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse* through the Cavaillé- Coll de Sainte-Clotilde where he is titular organist. They affirm the will to simplify, evident in recent years in the creative process of Jean Langlais, which can only sharpen the flavor of the modal turnings or Gregorian quotations and the sometimes bitter boldness of the harmonic language. It is therefore safe to say that these five pieces are a fundamental artistic and mystical synthesis.<sup>12</sup>

Olivier Messiaen himself sent a long letter to Jean Langlais about this new collection:

Paris, April 7, 1974

Dear Friend,

I received your *Cinq Méditations* for Organ.

Beautiful publication, and a dedication that is too kind! I just read the score with growing interest. You have magnificently understood this magnificent text. I especially appreciated the second piece with its repeated note, its "bacchian and dochmiac" rhythms, and its garlands on quintaton, flute 4' and tierce 1 3/5.

The "Prophetic Visions" are varied as they should be, and the "Fifth Trumpet" is really very astonishing, very terrifying and very original. I knew you had been very sick, and I hope you're much better now. Forgive me for not writing to you more often, but I am overwhelmed by the class, my concerts and extent of my travels and my commissions. I embrace you affectionately.

With all my admiration and affection,

Your old comrade

Olivier Messiaen.<sup>13</sup>

*Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse* was published (Bornemann 1974) and released on disk (Arion 1975) almost simultaneously. This recording was the first in France to be entirely devoted to a large organ cycle of Jean Langlais, who had to wait 68 years to see his organ music finally honored by a recording in his own country!

The following few press clippings show that the dual message, spiritual and musical, delivered by the composer, was well received by the public and critics:

. A sincere and striking work, probably Jean Langlais' masterpiece.<sup>14</sup>

. A visionary work, sometimes weighty, or more properly, classic in expression, sometimes carried along by amazing harmonic boldness. Pages of exhortation, of prayer, of consolation and of terror: a real musical Apocalypse, more upsetting than comforting, compelling one to meditate and submit.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jean Langlais, "Souvenirs."

<sup>12</sup> Joël-Marie Fauquet, *L'Apocalypse selon Jean Langlais*, note included on the record jacket of the 33 rpm record of *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*, recorded at Sainte-Clotilde by Marie-Louise Jaquet under the direction of the composer, Arion ARN 38312, 1975.

<sup>13</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>14</sup> Alain Chopin, *Jeunesse et Orgue* 28 (1976).

<sup>15</sup> Yves Millet, "Écoutez pour vous: Jean Langlais, *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*." *La Voix du Nord* (March 14, 1976).



. The most beautiful religious recording in recent months.<sup>16</sup>

. Deeply Breton, less in terms of its borrowings from the traditional music of his small homeland than in its lyricism, individualism and mysticism, Jean Langlais has put to use a long convalescence in 1973 to write the *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*, a text created to inspire a Celtic temperament.<sup>17</sup>

## New Challenges in the mid-1970s

At the time in France, organ recitals were attracting big audiences, but a particular formula was bringing even more success: the "trumpet and organ," brought to its zenith by two leading artists, the 20th century French celebrity trumpeter Maurice André, and organist Marie-Claire Alain. The Combres publishing company, knowing the public's excitement, soon began to ask Langlais to write for these two instruments.

After much procrastination (so strong was his dislike of the "fashionable" formulas), Jean Langlais nevertheless undertook the project, and wrote--one right after the other--a *Pièce*, and then *Sept Chorals* for trumpet and organ, widening the field of possible instruments to include oboe, flute and piano.

At the premiere of the *Seven Chorales*, on January 13, 1974 at the St. John Protestant church in Mulhouse, east of France, a critic made the following comment:

**A Work by Jean Langlais at St. John Protestant church, with André Bernard (trumpet) and Marie-Louise Jaquet (organ)**

The *Seven Chorales* for trumpet and organ invoke well known themes such as "Out of the Depths," "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," "Our Father in Heaven," "Wenn wir in Höchsten Noten sein," "In dulci júbilo" (Good Christian Men, Rejoice), "Jesus, Priceless Treasure," "Praise to the Lord," where the trumpet plays the chorale, the organ reserving comment, from time to time bitter, archaic, poetic, grand, in canon with the pedal (In dulci júbilo), with a tragic grandeur (I think of "Jesu meine Freude," whose extreme sonority is too big for the temple and would be wondrous in a cathedral), in order to end on the last chorale ("Lobe den Herrn"), in turn the source of variations leading to a virtuoso sequence of trumpet and organ. All of this is in the direct and frank language so particular to Langlais.<sup>18</sup>

Looking at the composer's catalog, one notices that after the *Suite Concertante* for violin and cello in 1943, for 30 years Jean Langlais wrote no more chamber music until these works for trumpet and organ. Is it a question of a change in direction?

Not really, it seems. In fact, and his *Trois Oraisons* for voice, organ and flute that follows confirms this, Langlais most of the time composes one at a time, the success of a particular formula, like the trumpet and organ formula, pushing publishers to ask him for another work. Only in the last years of the composer's life does he detach himself from the obligatory presence of a keyboard instrument, piano or organ, and compose for solo instruments (*Séquences* for solo flute, *Études* for 1, 2 or 4 cellos, or *Ceremony* for a group of 12 brass).

<sup>16</sup> La Croix, "Disques pour Pâques, Jean Langlais, *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*." (April 6, 1976).

<sup>17</sup> Patrig Le Dour, "Jean Langlais, *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*." *Ouest-France* (April 20, 1976).

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Mona, *L'Alsace*, January 15, 1974.

For now, the *Trois Oraisons* for voice, organ and flute (1973) combine two different genres: chamber music (flute and organ) and sacred vocal music (a voice over instruments in works with unambiguous subtitles: "Salve Regina," " Jam sol recedit igneus" [Now the fiery sun departs] and "Jesu dulcis memoria").

After the forced interruption due to the convalescence following his heart attack, Jean Langlais quickly resumed his activities as a composer, concert performer and teacher. Although he no longer undertook extensive and long tours in North America, for his health now made that impossible, Jean Langlais still went regularly to the USA.

The testimony of one of his students at the time, Pierre W. Whalon,<sup>19</sup> brings to life in a very detailed and vivid way the personality of Jean Langlais in the mid-1970s:

By 1972, as I was in the midst of an identity crisis, Jean Langlais came to stay at our home in Fall River, Massachusetts, for a week for a festival of his music in Providence, Rhode Island. While I was a decent physics student, it did not fill a need in my soul which I hoped music could. My father was skeptical of this great switch in college major.

All week I served as Langlais' guide, and of course I told him of my torment. Finally I acceded to his demand that I play for him, on the practice organ installed in my bedroom. Langlais informed my parents that I had some talent, and that when I finished my studies (at Boston University), he would take me as a student in Paris. Needless to say, my father's skepticism disappeared.

So in September 1974, with the ink hardly dry on my Bachelor of Music diploma, I climbed the steps to the tribune of Ste. Clotilde, where I was to be found most Sundays until July 1977... At Boston University, I had met and married Linda Lyster, also an organist, and so we both became Langlais students. (The marriage failed during that time, an event that eventually had a lot to do with my becoming an Episcopal priest. But that is another story.) I got a job in a gambling joint off place Clichy to keep body and soul together.

During this time period, Langlais was recovering from a serious infarctus, which had terrified him. The experience led him to compose one of his most important works, *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*. My work with him was always colored by his work of recovery.

That first Sunday, George Baker came up to the loft, fresh from his *Grand Prix de Chartres*<sup>20</sup>. Langlais was so excited that his student had won. I pictured a studious, conservatively-dressed man in his early 30s, speaking impeccable French. Instead, into the loft bounded this young man, 23 years old, in jeans and sneakers. "Bonjour, Maître, comment allez-vous?" George said. I had never heard French spoken with a heavy Texas accent before. He later played the recessional, a brilliant toccata, his sneakers not impeding his pedal work at all.

Welcome to the circle of Langlais students. I was to meet many truly great students of Langlais over the next three years: Pierre Cogen<sup>21</sup>, Marie-Louise Jaquet, Kathleen Thomerson, Naji Hakim, Ann Labounsky, Dorothea Fleischmannova, among many others.

Langlais was a hard teacher. While I had had piano and organ lessons, my concentrated work on the organ began only three years earlier, and my technique was heavy. He

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<sup>19</sup> Pierre Welté Whalon, presently The Right Reverend Pierre W. Whalon, Bishop Suffragan in charge of Episcopal Churches in Europe, residing in Paris, France. At Paris' Notre Dame Cathedral on Sunday, July 8, 2007, as an Anglican Bishop and as a student of Langlais, he was invited to take part in the service to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of the composer. For this special occasion, *Salve Regina Mass* was performed in the Cathedral, with Olivier Lamy playing the Grand Orgue part..

<sup>20</sup> Dr. George C. Baker, DMA, organist and composer, teaches organ improvisation at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Langlais' assistant at the organ of Sainte-Clotilde, adjunct titular in 1976 and titular until 1994.

asked me how it was possible that I had played his *Première symphonie*, when what I needed was to pound much less hard and play much more precisely. So he made me do the Bach Six *Trio Sonatas* in a row.

It was the crossing of the desert. Every lesson, this little man would sit on his sofa next to the studio organ at 26, rue Duroc, Braille score on his lap, and shout “*non!*” every few measures. Meanwhile, old Johann did what he does to every organist — make him or her play much better, or quit.

At one point Langlais said to me calmly, “If there is no improvement by the next lesson, I will have to let you go.” That was one of the lowest points of my life. My hero since age 3, the great man who had rescued my dream from my father’s skepticism, and who was giving me these precious lessons for free as a gift to my parents, was about to cut ties with me.

The next week I called in sick. The week after, in a cold sweat, I carefully played the third Trio. He was quiet. Afterward, I asked, all choked up, whether I could continue studying with him. “*Ça va,*” he said.

I studied music of de Grigny, Marchand, Clérambault, Couperin, Buxtehude, J.S. Bach, César Franck, Louis Vierne, Charles Tournemire, Olivier Messiaen, and of course his own works. He was always concerned with “*le style*” that each piece had. When I asked him how to determine these styles, he became annoyed and said that if I did not want to study these pieces with him, I could go elsewhere. I reassured him that I was only asking because there would come a day when I would need to determine such questions on my own. In the ensuing discussion, it became clear that Langlais had general rules for different periods and special individual concepts of each piece.

Overall, there were four “*touches*” possible for a note: legato, portato, staccato and piqué. These values had to be executed with precision, of course. One needed to play the piano regularly: Langlais played several Chopin *Etudes* on our piano in Fall River in preparation for his concert in Providence. “After 40, an organist who does not play his piano will soon not be able to play the organ.”

He was impatient with the fashion then prevailing of building faux-Baroque organs and trying to play in antiquated ways (no thumb in Marchand, for example). *Le style* was what made sense musically here and now. Over-ornamentation of de Grigny or Bach, for instance, annoyed him. “Play what is written,” he said. “Don’t you think the composer knew what he wanted?”

With the French Baroque composers some latitude in ornamentation was allowed, but not in Bach. The same prevailed with organ registration — follow what the composer wanted. “There is a mistake of orchestration in Franck’s *Symphony in D* that everyone knows. It is doubling a clarinet with a French horn. No conductor would dare correct Franck, however. Why should organists be different?”

On *rubato*, Langlais gave precious advice. “Make the high notes longer and the low notes shorter; make long notes longer and short notes shorter.” When playing Bach, one’s *rubato* should be such that “only the player and God know.” “The listener should only be aware that it sounds good.” He once quoted Liszt’s famous comment about Chopin: “Look at these trees,” Liszt said, “the wind plays in the leaves, stirs up life among them, but the tree remains the same. That is Chopin’s *rubato*.” But every composer needs a different *rubato*, Langlais said. Tournemire’s is the freest of all.

Tournemire was a difficult teacher — reclusive and wielding humiliation in lieu of encouragement (as with many French teachers, such as Nadia Boulanger).

Jean Langlais was the foremost interpreter of the works of César Franck in his lifetime. Even today I do not believe any organist has equaled his grasp of Franck’s music.

He credited Tournemire with imparting to him the tradition, as Tournemire himself had been a student of Franck.

Langlais also worked a bit with Louis Vierne, to whom he maintained an intense devotion, and who was also a major student of Franck. From these two masters through Langlais to us his students, the tradition has been passed on.

Langlais also studied with Marcel Dupré, whom he credited with developing his technique, and capturing a First Prize in organ performance at the Conservatory. He was much less laudatory of Dupré as a human being. Vierne was a whole other matter. Linda and I asked Langlais to accompany us to visit Vierne's grave, as our tiny flat was literally next door to the cimetière Montparnasse where he lies (as do Franck, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and many others). He thought it would be propitious to do so during the visit of Robert Sutherland Lord, the eminent Tournemire specialist.

I remember it very clearly. It was Ascension Day 1976. When we found it, dilapidated and lonely, Langlais respectfully doffed his trademark beret, touched the crumbling tombstone, and said, "Oh Maître! To think I have not returned here since we laid you in the tomb, 39 years ago! How foolish of me... forgive me."

He told many stories of Vierne. "He was a man of emotional extremes. He could not just be sad, he had to be tragic. He couldn't just be happy, he had to be ecstatic." "But he was the one all us Dupré students could go to and confess. With all he had suffered in life, Vierne was a very good counselor." "I played for him one of my *Gregorian Paraphrases*. 'Oh it's very dissonant,' he said."

Langlais was very fond of Jehan Alain, whose death he never ceased to mourn, and commemorated in *Chant héroïque*. "He wrote me a letter saying that all was well, he had his motorcycle, on which he would ride along with the troops and their tank. How foolish! What a loss!"

He was also very fond of Olivier Messiaen. One day after a lesson, he rang him up on the telephone. Instead of saying "Bonjour" or even "Salut", Langlais sang the first eight notes of that composer's *Alleluias sereins d'une âme qui désire le ciel*. "I always do that when I call." Messiaen's friendship and support were very important to him, as Langlais was convinced that his music was not worth much compared to that of the visionary Messiaen — "*le génie!*" But in fact, the opus of the poor Breton stonecutter's son has endured as well as the music of the son of the poetess and scholar.

To resume, Langlais was both a sophisticated, well-educated man, and a son of his village in Brittany. He could be crude, humorous, poetic, philosophical, and spiritual. His blindness had been his passport out of poverty. Crackling with energy, perpetually curious, at ease with "all sorts and conditions of men" — and women, no one was ever bored around him. His music has a direct quality that continues to speak to new generations.

And at exactly the same time the testimony of another of his American students, George C. Baker, adds a beautiful description of Jean Langlais at his organ of Sainte-Clotilde:

During two wonderful years (June 1973-August 1975), I had the good fortune of studying organ, improvisation and composition with Jean Langlais in Paris.

I took lessons in three locations : Langlais' apartment at 26 rue Duroc, the Schola Cantorum where I obtained the Prix de Virtuosit  in organ and improvisation, 1975, as well as Sainte-Clotilde... I vividly recall the first Sunday I met Langlais at Sainte-Clotilde. He sat down at the console, and the magic began. There were those delicious Langlais harmonies (like Vierne, he improvised in the style in which he composed), those singing harmonic flutes, that famous Voix Humaine with its endearing bleating tr molo, the Franck Trompette, and all the other colors we know from his recordings. I was mesmerized. Watching him maneuver about the console was truly a thing of beauty. His fingers caressed the stop knobs as he deftly made his registrations. Those fingers moved in a confident yet elegant fashion. His touch was crisp and neat, yet smooth and subtle. He never made any inappropriate or exaggerated gestures – his body moved only as it was needed.

After Sunday masses were over, we would descend the stone spiral staircase, and he would feed the pigeons in front of the church. Then we would go to his favorite

Vietnamese restaurant for lunch. Magical days these were for a young American organist!<sup>22</sup>

A great specialist in the music of Franck and Tournemire, an admirer of the works of his peers Messiaen, Alain and Duruflé, Jean Langlais did not neglect Baroque music, as we know. He even composed in 1973 a *Suite baroque* for organ aimed specifically at the "restored" Silbermann organ in the Protestant Church of St. John of Mulhouse, whose inauguration he had been invited to play.<sup>23</sup> He designed his new "Suite" on the classic French model, taking into account the characteristics of the instrument he was going to inaugurate (2 manuals of 51 notes, an echo and a pedalboard of 27 notes, and no swell box, with typically 18th century sonorities). Overall, the seven pieces that make up the *Suite baroque* conform to their French classic models in their forms, moving from an introductory "Plein Jeu" to a concluding "Grand Jeu," through diverse dialogues (n°3 and 5), the "Flutes" (n° 4) and a "Voix humaine" (n° 6). He takes care to specify the extremely classic registrations. We note in particular the final "Grand Jeu" which combines, as it should, cornets and reeds, the opposite of the "Grands Jeux" from his *Suite brève* in 1947, where he combines the foundations, the mixtures and the reeds. By contrast, and one can expect this, the harmonic language of the *Suite baroque*, juxtaposing atonality, polytonality and polymodality, is well accepted at the end of the 20th century and we find this from the first measures of "Plein Jeu." In doing so, he could not help slipping into this collection some touches of irony, in the foreground of which is the second piece, "Trémolo en taille" (provocative title of the second piece, which is in itself an aberration since, strictly speaking, it means tremolo in tenor. But, of course, the tremolo is only a mechanical artifice shaking the wind of the organ; it is not an organ stop.) Langlais also expands the irony by requiring in the registration a "trémolo royal," a completely made-up name. This "trémolo en taille" is in reality a "Cromorne en taille" embellished by a shaking of the wind, which does not conform to the tradition of the old classic masters.

More than a pastiche, the *Suite baroque* appears in fact to be a charge against the rigid purism of "baroquistes" that Langlais considered extreme. It is in this sense that we can understand the systematic Lombardic rhythm of "Plein Jeu," the caricature-like ornamentation and the added scales of "Trémolo en taille."

Encouraged by the success of the *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*, the composer began writing *Huit Chants de Bretagne*, whose printed score and recording were simultaneously released (Bornemann 1975 and Arion 1976), as had been true of *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*. The composer wrote the following preface on the record cover:

In composing the *Huit Chants de Bretagne*, I wanted to cleanse myself of the complex and violent style of the *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*. I turned instinctively to my Celtic origins. The result is a tribute to my homeland, to my compatriots. The Gregorian harmonizations of Tournemire, which are very dissonant but never destroy the melody, guided me in this work. Always I wanted to keep it simple.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> George C. Baker, in the booklet accompanying his CD *Jean Langlais: A Centenary*. Solstice SOCD 240 (2007). 12.

<sup>23</sup> Marie-Louise Jaquet, the titular organist, had invited him to play for the inauguration, and he had wanted to write a work specifically for that organ, whose restoration as an "historical artifact" he mocked a bit, at the same time that he admired the 1972 restoration and voicing by the Alsatian organ builder Alfred Kern.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Langlais, *Huit Chants de Bretagne*, text on the record sleeve of Microsillon 33rpm, Arion, ARN 36331, 1976.

These eight pieces, conceived between September 1 and November 10, 1974, purposely have French titles translated into Breton, such as "Ar Baradoz" (Paradise), "Lavaromp ar chapeled" (Say the rosary), "Nouel Bertzonek" (Breton Christmas) or "Jezuz, lavar of eomp pedi" (Jesus told us to pray), names given to *Chants de Bretagne* n° 1, 2, 4, and 5. It filled the composer with pleasure once again to draw inspiration from his Breton roots.

Also in 1974 Langlais radically changes inspiration and in a completely different genre, offers a diptych for piano and organ, an instrumental genre which had practically disappeared after the Widor *Duos* or the works of Dupré for piano and organ.<sup>25</sup> This was a request from his colleague Rolande Falcinelli, organ professor at the Paris Conservatory, who had been invited to give a piano and organ recital on the radio; she was looking for a new repertoire for this rare instrumental duo.<sup>26</sup> This challenge inspired Jean Langlais who, remembering his difficult *Mouvement perpétuel* for piano of 1936, still unpublished, reused it in the second part of his new *Diptyque* by superimposing a substantial organ part. Then he created from scratch a first movement for the most part alternating piano and organ, built on the theme of *Mouvement perpétuel*. This *Diptyque* for piano and organ, thus put together with fragments from two different periods (1936 and 1974), seems altogether coherent, and the single piece of this genre in the catalog of Langlais' works joins the works which Marcel Dupré or Jean Guillou in the 20th century dedicated to this original duo. The premiere of *Diptyque* took place on February 11, 1976 at studio 104 of the Maison de la Radio in Paris, with Rolande Falcinelli, piano, and Marie-José Chasseguet, organ. Since then, several recordings (concerts and disks) by prestigious performers (Marie-Bernadette Dufourcet-Hakim, Thierry Escaich, Olivier Latry, Duo Musart Barcelona most recently) show that the work has definitely entered the repertoire.

In 1974 again, Langlais transformed *Cinq Mélodies* based on poems written by Ronsard and Baillif and written in 1954 for Jeannine Collard into *Cinq Pièces* for flute (or violin) and organ (or piano or harpsichord). While he changed the accompaniment very little, taking into account the flute's range and expressiveness, he substantially reworked the solo part, which he transposed an octave higher to highlight the brilliant treble of the instrument. He also took advantage of this new score to add to a series of virtuoso flute variations that develop over unchanged accompaniment. "As the singers were not interested in my past *Cinq Mélodies* composed for voice, I preferred to transcribe them for the flute or violin; it's basically a survival operation for my works," explained the composer with humor but also a hint of bitterness vis-à-vis the singers, who were guilty, according to him, of too often overlooking the French song repertoire.<sup>27</sup>

Then came an unexpected event, which gratified Jean Langlais: the awarding, upon the nomination of his friend and former student Emmet Smith,<sup>28</sup> of an honorary Doctor of Music degree by Texas Christian University on February 1, 1975, at a ceremony which the musical press widely covered:

On Friday evening the long-awaited recital was played by the near-legendary organist of

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<sup>25</sup> Marcel Dupré, *Ballade* (1932), *Variations sur deux thèmes* (1937), and *Sinfonia* (1946) for piano and organ.

<sup>26</sup> Particularly difficult to perform in France where most churches that have an organ do not have a piano.

<sup>27</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

<sup>28</sup> Emmet G. Smith, professor of organ for 45 years at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas.

Ste. Clotilde. When Langlais was led onto the stage, both the artist and the audience experienced a moment of rare emotion as spontaneous applause burst forth for several minutes, requiring Langlais to abandon the organ bench repeatedly for bows of acknowledgment. An electrifying ambiance was created for what followed...Throughout the recital<sup>29</sup> the huge audience maintained a spell-bound silence as each work was set forth with complete authority. To watch a blind man handle all of his registrations on a large organ was fascinating to those who had not seen it done, but Langlais had the organ clearly in mind and carried it off without a slip.... At the conclusion the audience was on its feet, and only an encore would satisfy them. Langlais wisely chose his earlier work, *Te Deum*. After the *Te Deum*, Langlais, now vested in academic regalia, a present to him from the Fort Worth AGO Chapter, was brought to center stage for the reading of the citation by Chancellor James M. Moudy. Dr. Langlais stepped to the microphone and asked to make a statement. In the still room came words both simple and eloquent, expressing appreciation for this distinguished honor :

"I do not know whether or not I deserve this degree, but the Faculty Senate seems to think I do. I am thankful to my friend and colleague Emmet Smith for helping me to bring my work to the attention of this public, and I thank God for having made the possibility for me to be an artist."

The 1,300 persons reluctantly left the hall and several hundred of them adjourned to the Faculty Center for a gala reception. Friends of Langlais had come from New Jersey, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, California, New Mexico, Arkansas and Texas.<sup>30</sup>

A photograph taken that night shows Jean Langlais in his doctoral robes receiving the degree:



**Jean Langlais receives the honorary degree from Chancellor Moudy at Texas Christian University, February 1, 1975. On the left, Emmet G. Smith.**

Figure 54. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

The composer was so proud of this distinction that he afterwards would wear the cap and

<sup>29</sup> He played Franck (Final), Tournemire, Langlais ("Scherzo Cats," "Choral N° 3" dedicated to Emmet Smith, N° 3 and 5 from *Cinq Meditations sur l'Apocalypse*) and improvised.

<sup>30</sup> "Langlais Week at Texas Christian University," *Music Magazine* (June 1975): 26-27.

gown to official events in Paris, such as the 150th anniversary of the invention of Braille at the National Institute for Blind Youth on May 22, 1975. Such an award seemed to him to honor--through him, who had never been to university--the world of the humble and the blind...

Ariane Segal, director of Arion disks, then put the idea in his head to record at Sainte-Clotilde the *Douze Pièces* for Organ by César Franck. The composer, although strongly reluctant at first ("*the undertaking*, he underlined, *is tiring, and, moreover, I have done it for the Americans*"), nevertheless finished by letting himself be convinced. The recording took place in May 1975 in three evenings of only two hours each. It was important to Jean Langlais to explain his musical decisions on the record sleeve for the set of three 33 rpm LP records entitled: *Jean Langlais: César Franck at Sainte-Clotilde*:

I did my best to respect scrupulously the registrations that Franck indicated...because I believe that he fully knew his organ, and that he wanted this color and not another.

We would not replace, in one of his orchestral works, a horn with a bassoon or an oboe with a trumpet. It is therefore necessary to be as faithful [to his score] in the case of his organ works... I may be criticized because of the tempos and freedom of style I have used to record these pieces, but I am sure I am right because all of Franck's students who were my teachers told me the same thing: "We have no idea of the freedom Franck took in the interpretation of his works."

I have brought together the pure Franck tradition of Albert Mahaut, who was the first to play all of Franck's works in concert, of Adolphe Marty, and then of Charles Tournemire, of course... I think therefore with certainty that I uphold the tradition of Franck.

Langlais had heard so many falsehoods about Franck that he later wrote an article entitled: "About the Style of César Franck in his Organ Works." The entire article is worth quoting, but we will content ourselves with the following excerpts:

I heard some people complaining about the length of the "Fantaisie en La." This impression was probably due to the mistake of the performer who played this work andante while it requires the tempo andantino... There is an edition of the organ works of Franck<sup>31</sup> in which half of the nuances do not appear, all of the fermatas have been deleted, and most of the registrations changed. In a large American magazine, I described this edition as "assassination." With infinite sadness, I say it again here.

I remember, indeed, that one of my distinguished colleagues told me one day that the swell box was not needed to interpret Franck. What would one say of a pianist who performed the *Variations Symphoniques* without nuances and without use of the damper pedal?

Let me conclude by recalling a personal memory: one day I had the extreme audacity to task the great Albert Mahaut to play me "Prière,"<sup>32</sup> a work whose style has always seemed to me extremely difficult to express.

"You're too late, dear friend," he replied, adding "I always promised myself not to play it after the age of 75, and that has passed."

- So, I say, will you allow me to play you this work?

- No, my dear, and for the same reason that I have outlined; I no longer recognize in myself the right to give advice!

What regrettable and admirable wisdom ...

I am not yet 75 years old; so before disappearing from the organ scene, I thought that perhaps the message I have just communicated could be of some interest to artists in

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<sup>31</sup> He is referring to the revised edition by Marcel Dupré, published by Bornemann.

<sup>32</sup> This is the work that Mahaut played in 1889 at the Conservatory, which got him his first organ prize in Franck's class.



search of the truth.<sup>33</sup>

However, the composer allowed a degree of freedom within this "truth," as evidenced by his successive recordings of Franck's works. It is interesting, in this regard, to compare the lengths of the "Grande Pièce Symphonique" that Langlais recorded three times between 1953 and 1975:

- Ducretet-Thomson (1953): 23 minutes, 52 seconds (Jean Langlais aged 46)
- G.I.A. (1963): 26 minutes, 12 seconds (Jean Langlais aged 56)
- Arion (1975): 27 minutes, 42 seconds (Jean Langlais aged 68)

There are nearly four minutes difference between the first version (the fastest) of 1953 and the last, slower version from 1975. As he aged, Jean Langlais enlarged his style and expanded the breathing time between phrases. Did César Franck do the same? No one will ever know...

With his "Unabridged Franck" [*Douze Pièces*] Langlais established himself as one of the best specialists in the work of his illustrious predecessor in Sainte-Clotilde, which is why, throughout the world, he was asked to play and teach these organ pages that he had known so well for so long.

However, great performer that he was, Jean Langlais did not forget that he was a composer first. In 1975, he also began to write a series of important cycles devoted to the king of instruments: In response to a commission from the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs in honor of "the Roman year," he wrote *Trois Esquisses Romanes* [Three Roman Sketches] for two organs, where he tried to recreate the musical atmosphere of the time with all sorts of strategies : melodic, using themes from the 10th to the 12th centuries ("Haec clara Dies," "Tu autem" by Saint-Martial de Limoges or "Jerusalem mirabilis," the basis of the call to the Crusades); harmonics, with the use of fourths and open fifths; and rhythms. The composer also took special care that the two organs never played at the same time, an especially dangerous practice in cathedrals, where the two instruments are located at opposite ends of the nave and where the reverberation time can be up to 8 seconds.

No sooner was this collection completed successfully than the same Ministry of Cultural Affairs commissioned the composer to write a sequel. This would be *Trois Esquisses Gothiques*, again for two organs. The essential difference from the previous work: the choice of themes, all post-13th century ("Veni Creator," "Virgo Dei genitrix," "Inviolata," Prose de la Dédicace des Eglises, and "Jerusalem et Sion filliæ").<sup>34</sup>

In "Esquisse Gothique No. 3," writes Joël-Marie Fauquet, we are introduced to a world of movement. The core spirit of the "Sketch," the deliberate harshness of harmony, emphasizes the dancing character and the popular verve of the theme of Prose de la Dédicace des Eglises. It is significant that this outline plan adopts the estampie, the medieval form foreshadowing that of the rondo, where each verse brings a new idea and a new development of the initial idea. The impressive sound of the ten sequences that the

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<sup>33</sup> Jean Langlais, "Propos sur le style de César Franck dans son œuvre pour orgue." *Jeunesse et Orgue* 37 (Autumn 1978).

<sup>34</sup> With respect to the "Esquisse Gothique N°1," Langlais had his American Student Douglas Himes' request that he compose a piece for his future wedding coincide with the Roman style piece that the French State had asked him to compose. This is why Douglas Himes titled an article he had published in *The Diapason* "A New Wedding Processional by Jean Langlais" (*The Diapason* (January 1978):1,16.). Once published, Langlais' new piece actually became "Esquisse Gothique No. 1."

two organs divide between them is interrupted by a stanza in which the theme of "Salve Regina" appears in all its luminous purity. The two organs join forces to conclude.<sup>35</sup>

Three successive recordings in 1978 and 1979, testified to the interest in these pieces.<sup>36</sup> Continuing with his organ works, Jean Langlais decided in 1976 to re-use part of his 1959 *American Suite*, whose copyright had just been returned to him by the publisher Gray, which closed its business. He chose two pieces he liked, "At Buffalo Bill's Grave" and "Boystown, Place of Peace," and incorporated them into a new collection, together with two new pieces, "Stele for Gabriel Fauré" (transcript of his 1932 Motet *Ave Mundi Gloria*) and a very original "Double Fantaisie" for two organists, all of which justified the general title of the volume: *Mosaïque*, Volume 1. The "Double Fantaisie" for two organists in particular, won great success as a curiosity:

The novelty in the volume is the « Double Fantaisie » for two organists. Organ duets have never been very common or very popular, but Langlais has now provided a work that may be added to those by Samuel Wesley, Merkel and a few others. Langlais' piece is full of difficulties and even requires both players to play with both feet in one passage...<sup>37</sup>

Encouraged by the score's favorable reception, the publisher, Combrel, asked Jean Langlais to write a suite for them. This will be *Mosaïque*, Vol. 2, written between January and April 1976; the collection brought together five pieces of the most dissimilar character imaginable: "Gable," "Images," "Trio," "Complainte de Pont-Kalleg" and "Salve Regina."

The nearly simultaneous recordings of the Unabridged Franck (*Douze Pièces*), the *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse* and the *Huit Chants de Bretagne* by Arion focused the interest of the public and the critics on Jean Langlais, and other record companies became interested in him. One was the young French firm Solstice, created by François and Yvette Carbou, whose first catalog listing is entitled: *Langlais joue Langlais* (33 rpm LP recorded in March 1976 in Sainte-Clotilde).

Meanwhile, Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania awarded Jean Langlais an honorary Doctor of Music degree on October 21, 1976, during a week dedicated to his works. This was his second honorary degree awarded in the United States. On this occasion, an interview was conducted with him, in which the following passage appears:

Whenever he hears his compositions being played by others, he feels "very happy and modest." He would like to spend more time composing but whenever he is asked to perform, he does. "I like to compose. They are always asking me to play and I always accept," he said.

Langlais has no plans to stop composing. "A composer never retires, except when he loses his life. When I pass away, I hope to have another job," he said with a smile.<sup>38</sup>

While he keeps his promise to tour in the US, preferring stays of a week or two, he returns to composition at the first opportunity. Thus he writes, at the request of trumpeter Maurice André, a very difficult *Sonatine* for trumpet and organ in three movements (Allegro-

<sup>35</sup> Joël-Marie Fauquet, from the booklet accompanying the 33rpm LP record *Les Orgues de Masevaux*. Arion, 1979.

<sup>36</sup> This work's "world premiere" recording was made by Jean Langlais and Marie-Louise Jaquet playing the two Beckerath organs in the Aldstädter Nikolai-Kirche in Bielefeld, Germany. Motette Ursina, 1978.

<sup>37</sup> Gwilym Beechey, *Reviews-Scores*. Vol. 102 (July 1979).

<sup>38</sup> Matthew Monahan, "Blind Musician-Composer Gets Honorary Degree." *The Duquesne Duke*, 21 October 1976, p.6.

andantino- mouvement perpétuel).

This work is in turn virtuosic and melancholy (the central andantino uses the nostalgic Breton theme "Jesus told us to pray" already used in the "Chant de Bretagne " n° 6); the *Sonatine* ends with a diabolical perpetual motion where the soloist barely has time to breathe between two avalanches of sixteenth notes. Maurice André himself complained to Jean Langlais, after having recorded the work for *Erato*,<sup>39</sup> nevertheless adding with a laugh, "But I did it anyway!"<sup>40</sup> It is certain that, thinking about the greatest trumpet player of his time, Langlais had multiplied the piece's pitfalls without fear that because of this challenge, his *Sonatine* risked finding few proficient enough players. Three simultaneous recordings of this difficult work proved him wrong...

In the mid 70s, Langlais was not idle in terms of composition, and ideas came from everywhere. Thus, as the Bishop Pierre Whalon recalls:<sup>41</sup>

Pierre Cogen, who was to record brilliantly the *Première Symphonie* at Sainte-Clotilde,<sup>42</sup> routinely asked Langlais when he was going to compose a second symphony.

Having played the *Première Symphonie* myself, I seconded Pierre in asking several times. Langlais invariably answered, "If I write a second symphony, it will be à la Webern and last only 30 seconds."

One day, he surprised me by saying that he had actually started the piece. "But it is very short, and the titles are simple: prelude, postlude and a middle piece." I replied jokingly that he could call the central piece "Interlude." Langlais laughed.

When I returned the next week for my lesson, he said that he had added a fourth piece named "Lude" because "between Prelude, Interlude and Postlude, you need a 'lude'!" Soon thereafter I accompanied him to his transcriptionist, to whom he proudly announced that all his students could leave him alone, and there would be no third symphony!<sup>43</sup>

This curious work, the *Deuxième Symphonie*, was composed at the same time as Volume 2 of *Mosaïque*, in late 1976. Before even reading a note, one is struck by its small number of pages (seven), its brevity (five minutes) and subtitles of its four movements (Prelude-Lude-Interlude-Postlude), all of which play on the common root Latin *ludus* (game), for the word "lude" does not exist in French. All these elements together with the subtitle of the work, "Alla Webern," suggest that Langlais tried to caricature, with certain irony, the massive century-old "Symphony" for organ, a genre he claimed to have sufficiently illustrated 36 years ago in his own *Première Symphonie*.

In addition, while an admirer of Anton Webern and his brief *Pièces pour orchestre*, Langlais wanted to shake up from top to bottom all the principles that govern the organ symphony. For complex construction where development is the keyword, he creates a suite of four tiny pieces (the "Prelude" has 28 measures, "Lude" only 13, "Interlude" 29 and "Postlude" 31) where what dominates is a constant rejection of development; everything is fragmentary, no measure resembles the previous one. Several phrases appear without there ever being any connection between them: theme (DIEU-MARIE) without accompaniment, virtuosic monodic passages, groups of chords with no connection or any tonal or modal

<sup>39</sup> *Trompette et orgue*, vol. 10. Maurice André, trumpet; André Luy, organ. 33rpm LP. Erato, 1979.

<sup>40</sup> Langlais, "Souvenirs."

<sup>41</sup> Pierre Whalon, written testimonial, June 15, 2013. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>42</sup> *Pierre Cogen aux grandes orgues de la Basilique Sainte-Clotilde, Musique française*, Cybelia CY 867, 1976.

<sup>43</sup> This will indeed prove false. As we will see later, there will be a Third Symphony!

reference, fragments of trios, constantly modified rhythms, atonality, unusual registrations (see the solo of "Interlude" on the bourdon, tierce 1  $\frac{3}{5}$ , and tremolo), alternately strong and gentle.

In this work, Langlais seems to be searching for a new kind of contrast, based on a subtle interplay between timbre, melody, intensity, rhythm, harmony, with none of these elements giving a pretext for development nor taking precedence over any other. This new attitude marks a true shift for him, who never ceased listening to the music of his time, whose tendencies that most conformed to his own sensibility he tried hard to capture, but not in a systematic way. Hearing this new work where there is an obvious desire for non-development, for fragmentation and chaos, listeners were completely disoriented. It was probably the provocative goal that he desired.



**Jean Langlais, 70 years old, at the Ste Clotilde console**

Figure 55. (photograph by Jean-Louis Loriaut. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

At the dawn of 1977, the composer is about to celebrate his 70th birthday, and certain commentators are already able to take stock of his entire life. Robert Lord, in the American magazine *The Diapason*, sums up the career of Jean Langlais in a long article entitled "Jean Langlais - On the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday." He describes the Professor always seeking the perfect style of execution of the works of others, particularly Franck and the internationally renowned improviser, Tournemire, and adds:

I do not think that Langlais would best like to be remembered as a performer. His most important role is that of a composer. I would characterize the style of much of his music as classic. In other words, his music contains no excessive elements. His harmonies are clear and his melodic ideas well-defined. This results in a performance style which, unlike Tournemire, is uncomplicated and direct. The art of Langlais, then, is one of an economy of notes with a preference for concise forms, resulting often in rather short pieces. The climax is often achieved through the polyphonic combination of several themes which have been introduced earlier in the piece.

In summary, Jean Langlais remains an independent. He has put his own particular stamp on his musical legacies from the past. These are my impressions of the musician...  
So, maître, all your American friends join me in wishing you good health, peace, joy and many more years of creative energy!<sup>44</sup>

It seems that the artist, in this period of his life, has been touched by the retirement idea. Had he not, a few months earlier, resigned from the Schola Cantorum, because of excessive fatigue, at a time when his organ and improvisation class had 42 students of all ages and all nationalities? And did he not tell anyone who would listen that the concert tours wore him out? In those days, more and more frequently, he left Paris to sit in his little house in Plaisir, a suburb of Paris; there, with his wife, his children and grandchildren, he passed peaceful days, composing, reading, taking long walks in the neighboring woods. In the general opinion of his students and friends, he gradually seemed to step back from the hectic life that had always been habitual...

Yet his life as a composer continued, supported by various commissions from his editors. Thus, shortly after celebrating his 70th birthday, at the request of the publisher Combre, he began the third volume of *Mosaïque* in the spirit of diversity that had governed the development of the two previous collections in 1975 and 1976.

Of the six pieces that form *Mosaïque* Vol. 3, "Parfum," "Lumière," "Printemps," "Thèmes," "Pax" and "2ème Fantaisie pour 2 organistes," the latter is without doubt the most original. With nothing in common with the "Double Fantaisie" of *Mosaïque* Vol. 1, except that it is for two organists playing the same organ--four hands and four feet, this "2ème Fantaisie" is written without a theme, without tonality, without stable rhythm. Constructed in a single movement, it is difficult to play because neither performer has a landmark, particularly in the treatment of the final double pedal solo.

Another extremely difficult piece for the performer is "Thèmes," dedicated to his old friend, New Yorker Charles Dodsley Walker. Here, Jean Langlais multiplies at will the lines of sixteenth notes in double octaves in the feet and hands in added values, as he had done in his earlier *Poem of Happiness*. It takes as themes (the title of the piece) the first names of Charles and his wife Janet transcribed into Braille music according to the correspondence between the letters of the alphabet and musical notes, a process he will use all his life. Simpler are the other four extracts in *Mosaïque* Vol. 3 ("Lumière," "Parfum," "Printemps," "Pax"), from a technical point of view as much as from a conceptual point of view, taking their inspiration from trips, encounters or feelings.

On August 6, 1977, the composer lent his support to the closing concert of the Congress of the GDO (Gesellschaft der Orgelfreunde, the German "Amis de l'Orgue"). That day, at the organ of Sainte-Clotilde, he gave a memorable recital in front of over 700 organists, organ scholars and organ builders mostly from Germany, the majority of whom were hearing him for the first time in concert. It was a revelation to them, and from that time on, Langlais would be constantly invited to Germany to play and record. To give an idea of the impression he produced, here are some excerpts from an article entitled simply: "A MASTER"

Sometimes one wonders what the difference is between a high quality organist and "a

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Sutherland Lord, "Jean Langlais - On the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday." *The Diapason* (February 1977).

very great master" of the organ. The instrument itself does not specifically highlight the artistic personality of the performer as is the case with the pianist and his touch, the violinist and his bowing.

And yet... when one finds oneself in front of a great performer, the question is immediately answered. Jean Langlais is one of "these absolute greats" and his Sunday concert at the Church of the Holy Trinity (in Wiesbaden) demonstrated that without question. What serenity in his playing, what expansive space for phrases to breathe, what incredible distinction in his phrasing! He is a true master of nuanced legato at the same time that he is a poet of sound and a creator of a colorful atmosphere... It is in the improvisation on three themes that were given to him that Jean Langlais made us reach the summit of his art. Instead of a series of poorly defined variations that usually characterize improvisations, listeners heard a presentation of these themes and of their musical and religious content that was dense and extremely rigorous in its form.

The presentation ended with cascading chords whose virtuosity was never superficial. In this improvisation, Langlais took us back to a time when organ playing and the art of composition were one.<sup>45</sup>

After the GDO Congress, its president, Dr. Wolfgang Adelung, wrote Jean Langlais a long letter of thanks in French, in which he showed himself to be particularly appreciative. Here are some excerpts:

Master,

You kindly gave your support to the International Congress of the Association "Die Gesellschaft der Orgelfreunde" which was held in Paris from July 31 to August 6, 1977, and which brought together over 700 organists, organ scholars, experts, master-builders, church musicians and friends of the organ from many countries.

The representativeness of the instruments featured on the program and the participation of eminent titular organists of the great Parisian organ lofts placed this conference at a level of a cultural event of such magnitude and density as it had never before attained.

This encounter with the cathedrals and churches of France, with organists, and with the very rich literature of your country was also - for most of us - our first direct contact with an aesthetic which we had only learned about in books. The truly exceptional days we have experienced will be written about extensively in academic journals and they certainly will prelude to many exchanges in the years to come...<sup>46</sup>

The true cultural shock that the German organists experienced, especially the discovery of the art of Jean Langlais at Sainte-Clotilde, initiated for the composer a period of constant requests for concerts. Everything happened as if--the era of the great tours in America being ended--Germany and the Germanic countries took over. One of the first things Langlais did was to record for the German company Motette his *Six Esquisses* for two organs. It is this recording that the *Bielefelder Zeitung* is referring to in its article under this headline:<sup>47</sup>

**Für die gotisch-romanischen « Skizzen » wählte Langlais die Beckerath-Orgeln**

*Schallplatten-Aufnahmen mit der Priser Komponisten in der Nicolaikirche.*

(For the recording of his Gothic-Roman "Sketches" Langlais chose the Beckerath Organs at St Nicolas Church)

Meanwhile, in 1978, Thomas Daniel Schlee, young Austrian organist and composer responsible for the collection "Universal-Orgel Edition," a disciple of both Messiaen and Langlais, offered the latter a collaboration that would bear fruit with the appearance between 1978 and 1989, of five great collections for organ, various pieces (including *Prélude et fugue*,

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<sup>45</sup> Pr. Dr. GH, "A Master." *Wiesbaden Kurier*, November 8, 1977.

<sup>46</sup> Dr. Wolfgang Adelung, President of the G.D.O. Letter to Jean Langlais, October 10, 1977. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>47</sup> *Bielefelder Zeitung*, April 5, 1978.

opus 1, for organ) and two of the three *Concertos* for organ and orchestra, the n° 2 and 3.

To add new pieces to this series, the composer wrote *Triptyque Grégorien* for organ ("Rosa Mystica," "In Paradisum," "Alleluia") inspired by plain-song tunes like "Salve Regina" (solemn tone), "In Paradisum" and two "Alleluias" for the Feast of the Ascension.

Changing to Bornemann publishers, Langlais undertook another kind of exercise, the development of an organ book following an increasing number of voices, from which came the title of the collection, *Progression*.

He starts with a "Monodie" which is very difficult even though throughout its seven pages it only has a single melodic line, but often distributed in sixteenths and double octaves divided between the manual and the pedal. The composer continues this style exercise with a piquant "Duo" and then a "Trio" subtitled "Tears" (because dedicated to "my very sweet friend whom I mourn, my little dog Paf"), in which he uses the expressive interval of the tri-tone (B-F), contained in the name of his dog (PAF : B-F-A). From the next piece, "Offering" (four voices), the composer escapes some of the constraints that he had found necessary when he did not follow strictly the requirements for writing four and five parts. Because he was repelled by rigid systems, he does not hesitate to violate his own rules. In this way, his "Fugue et Continuo" abandons writing for five voices, and instead embraces a new form of a fugue in three voices (soprano-alto-bass), supported by a succession of continuo-type chords. This completely original version of the free fugue proves that Langlais' creative curiosity was always engaged.

In early 1979 the Worcester Cathedral Choir Association (Great Britain) asked Langlais to write a polyphonic English Mass for four voices and organ. This will be his thirteenth and last vocal mass, divided into five movements (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei). This mass, titled "Grant us thy Peace," will be premiered two years later on August 23, 1981, at the Cathedral of Worcester (GB).

The overall design of this Mass is new, since it is far from evoking the atmosphere of a defined era, as the *Missa Salve Regina* and the *Mass in Ancient Style* do. Instead, the composer mixes styles, introducing the Kyrie in a clearly modal atmosphere (in D) in order to suddenly branch off on a melodic fragment in the second mode, abandoning that just as abruptly to connect without transition modality - chromaticism - atonality - succession of tri-tones, so that there is never a center, no dominant pole, each new fragment appearing without any resolution or predictable rhythm. The last chord of Kyrie, in a pure minor, is however embellished with "B," which is completely strange, unless one considers a natural 9th as a consonance...

We note the suppleness of melodic and rhythmic phrases, the melodic figures passing freely from whole notes on the white keys to 8th notes on the black, which proves that, contrary to what we might have thought in the earlier *Solemn Mass "Orbis factor,"* the English language did not pose a particular problem of prosody to Jean Langlais, and it did not prevent him from writing soft and flowing music. These multiple changes make this *Mass "Grant us thy Peace"* a work at once both new in design, notably in its bold harmonies and in its failure to resolve chords, but still in the logical line of his earlier Masses. Historically and structurally, it represents the culmination of the composer's research on the matter.

Reviewing the period 1973-1979, one notes the importance of organ music in the catalog of Langlais. The reputation of the composer as organist was of course a factor, but Jean Langlais had a personal reason for favoring organ performance: the desire not to impose on his wife, the copyist of most of his works since 1931, these efforts necessitating--in the scores for choir or orchestra--that she write innumerable separate parts.

But inexorably, Jeannette Langlais' health was deteriorating. In May 1979, she was suddenly struck down by a stroke which, a few weeks later, would prove fatal.

She was 74 years old.

## **Widowhood and Remarriage**

The sudden and unexpected loss of the person who, for nearly 50 years, had been his most loyal support, overwhelmed the composer, who sank into deep despair.

"My life is over," he said, "and I only want one thing: to rejoin at the earliest moment she who is departed. For how can I go on totally alone?"<sup>48</sup>

Such distress and such devastation in a man usually so strong in the face of pain, deeply upset the people around him. What to do with him? What to do for him? Jeannette's funeral took place at the church of Escalquens, and she was buried alongside her parents in the small adjoining cemetery.

Upon his return to Paris, I went to pick him up at the airport, and at Plaisir where he had been living since Jeannette's stroke, we took a short walk outside his house. He told me of his turmoil, and I told him: "I will not leave you alone." He proposed marriage. I accepted.

Given the circumstances and his recent widowhood, the ceremony took place August 28, 1979 at St. François-Xavier church in Paris in the strictest privacy.

Gaston Litaize, the organist, was on vacation, so there was no organ or even music for that matter; as for the celebrant, Father Aubin, he had in the past officiated at the wedding of... Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod at Saint-Germain-des-Prés!

Life took its course, and with it new works were born: *Trois Noëls avec variations*, then a *Prélude grégorien*, dedicated to his American pupil George C. Baker.

But Jean Langlais resolved very quickly to raise to the memory of his first wife a musical monument which he entitled *Offrande à une âme, Diptyque pour orgue*, composed in three different places and in three periods of time: Escalquens, Plaisir and Paris, between September and November 1979. This work, of an unusual length of about 25 minutes, consists of two parts of substantially equal dimensions, subtitled "Vers la Lumière" (Towards the Light) and "Dans la Lumière" (In the Light.) The initial idea behind the construction of this long diptych is the passage of the soul from death to eternal life, according to the commentary on each of the two movements in the score:

"**Vers la Lumière**" : "Like the bird of the great mystery, one evening her soul flew away... (toward the Light)

"**Dans la Lumière**": "Lord, grant her eternal rest (... in the Light)."

This work, demanding and difficult to access, in the catalog of Langlais undoubtedly takes

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<sup>48</sup> A statement he made several times to his family and close friends.



in the catalog of Langlais the place of the Requiem that he never wanted to write... The composer seems to have thrown all his strength and creative power into this farewell message, written under the sign of faith, and he would not leave it to anyone else to play the premiere of *Offrande à une âme* at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris on March 28, 1981. As he had done in "The Fifth Trumpet" (*Cinq Méditations sur L'Apocalypse*), where he had followed to the letter the scriptural verses and transformed into leitmotifs various images (bottomless pit, smoke, locusts), similarly here, Langlais follows the two "key ideas" of the ascent of the soul "Towards the Light" and the peace of the soul "in the Light," successively presenting these key elements of this Diptyque in memory of his wife.

First, there is the "bird of great mystery," evoked in measure 1 by a bird singing in the treble, without accompaniment, on flute 4' and tierce 1 3/5' in the swell; then immediately after, the representation of death appears in descending chromatic long note values on the 8' flute, voix humaine and tremolo.

Then come several elements of the Gregorian Mass for the Dead; first, the response "Subvenite" (sung at the entrance to the church before the Mass for the Dead begins), accompanied very simply by open fourths and fifths.

That motive, quickly abandoned, gives way to the Introit of the Mass for the Dead, "Requiem aeternam," immediately following the "Kyrie," of which he keeps only the first phrase.

Then, passing over the gradual, the sequence and the offertory, which normally follow the "Kyrie," Langlais goes directly to the "Sanctus" and "Agnus Dei" which he treats fully before returning to the motive of the "bird of great mystery," which precedes two new elements, completely foreign to Gregorian chant: the carillon of the church of Escalquens in whose cemetery she is buried, and the first name, "Jeannette," set to music according to the usual Braille method. All the non-Gregorian leitmotifs (birdsong, representation of death, carillon, first name) will be freely connected in the most elaborate fantasy, leading irresistibly toward the "thème de la Lumière" (theme of the Light), figured, as required, by the "Lux aeterna" (communion of the Mass for the Dead), announcing the second part of the work, "Dans la Lumière." The second part of the diptych, "Dans la Lumière" (In the Light), will be the exact counterpart of the first.

This time the composer again focuses on describing the arrival of the soul in the Light, always using leitmotifs: the name Jeannette, the complete "Lux aeterna," the unexpected arrival of "Lumen Christi" of Holy Saturday treated almost exactly as in the 1949 *Incantation pour un Jour Saint*. The triple call of "Lumen Christi" leads to a large toccata whose first notes form the theme Jeannette, accompanied, in long pedal notes, by the Gregorian antiphon "In paradisum" sung at the Absolution in the Mass for the Dead.

This brilliant toccata (interrupted by a new triple call of "Lumen Christi") ends on a tone cluster formed exclusively by the white keys of the organ, the ultimate Christian symbol for Jean Langlais of the Divine Light that now surround his departed wife, her soul now resting with God.

Langlais here expresses once again his Christian faith, putting together the human emotion of grief with his faith in resurrection; his sadness over the loss of his beloved wife being directly followed by joy at her passage into heaven.

After this personal and painful work, Jean Langlais picks up the thread of his life as a concert artist and composer, especially since many commissions were coming to him. For Universal Edition (Wien), first, he had the idea of reusing five of the eight movements of his 1959 *American Suite* (now that he had the copyright back) to form a *Troisième Symphonie* for

organ with different subtitles: "Big Texas" changes to "Introduction," "Californian Evocation" to "Cantabile," "Scherzo-Cats" to "Intermezzo," and "Storm in Florida" to "Orage" the latter movement, moreover, being reduced by 50 measures. In and of itself, this *Troisième Symphonie* initiated a new phase in his career -- the composer's ultimate snub of the organ Symphony!

At the request of the director of Portsmouth Boys Choir, Father Whitehead, Jean Langlais then wrote a *Corpus Christi*, group of six vocal parts for 4 equal voices and organ on Latin texts of Gregorian melodies of the "Office of the Most Blessed Sacrament." Exactly at the same time, he composed for the monks of the German abbey at Marienstatt short harmonisations for 4 mixed voices and organ<sup>49</sup> on themes suggested by Father Gabriel Hammer, organist of the abbey and one of his most ardent supporters. In the text accompanying the four CDs published by the German firm Motette in 2007,<sup>50</sup> its director, Johannes Ricken, wrote:

Now in 2007, on the 100th anniversary of Langlais' birth, we feel that it is an obligation to pay homage to the legacy of this great master, who worked closely with our label and often travelled in Germany in order to perform memorable recitals, such as those he gave in Marienstatt Abbey in the Weterwald region, organized by our friend, Cistercian Father Dr. Gabriel Hammer. Some of the recordings featured here were made, with Langlais' permission, during these recitals.<sup>51</sup>

This renewed activity, after such a trying period of his existence, was undoubtedly for Jean Langlais the direct consequence of his new life and of the birth on May 25, 1980, the day of Pentecost, of our little Caroline. At 73, the composer, who only a few months earlier had appeared headed for semi-retirement, started reconsidering his life and began to envision all kinds of future projects. With great confidence, he accepted the responsibility for this new child who had entered his life "as a miracle," he used to say. In a letter full of humor written to his Canadian student Jan Overduin, he says, amused:

As you can imagine I am very happy of my new child, Caroline. Now I have two daughters, one is 45 years old, the second one only 10 months!<sup>52</sup>

His new life was, of course, very different from the previous one because of the baby... and the new dog, Scherzo, an abandoned one he adored and who will be his best companion until his death. Extremely undisciplined, this very intelligent animal knew very well how to guide his master on the street, steering him around all obstacles even though he had never been trained for that. Then, the apartment was filled with hectic life, especially at mealtimes, when everyone was crying to be fed at the same time: Jean, Caroline and Scherzo. Of course the dog always came first, although his favorite meal was bread crusts; then the crispy crusts lay all around the apartment, and it was necessary to vacuum after every meal! All the students coming for their lessons at this time remember that...

This new family situation was coupled with an upsurge of new works, primarily *Rosace*

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<sup>49</sup> In *Marienstatter Orgelbüchlein*, Breitkopf & Härtel Nr. 8293, Wiesbaden, Germany, 1987.

<sup>50</sup> *Jean Langlais Centenary Celebration, 1907-2007*. Motette, MOT 50821. Germany, 2007. Text from p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Including "Jean Langlais spielt J.S.Bach," a very rare all-Bach recital, and "Jean Langlais improvisiert in Marienstatt," both played on the Rieger organ of Marienstatt Abbey.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Jean Langlais to Jan Overduin, dated March 20, 1981, cited in "Jean Langlais as Teacher" in *Hommage à Langlais*. The University of Michigan School of Music, 1996, p. 20.

(Rose Window), a collection of four organ pieces, the last two of which celebrated his new life. Of "Croquis" (Sketch), embroidered around an old popular lullaby "for my daughter Caroline," Rolande Falcinelli wrote:

Tenderness, humor, yes; with the finest and most authentic psychological insight, the portrait of a young child through her games and unpredictable reactions, sketched in a few pencil strokes of astonishing accuracy.<sup>53</sup>

As for "Feux d'artifice" (Fireworks), the concluding piece in *Rosace*, Kathleen Thomerson explains the character of the work in this way:

The final piece, "Feux d'artifice" (Fireworks), commissioned by the French Ministry of Fine Arts, is a tour de force, and well deserves the designation "Fireworks." Combustible and explosive passages cascade from the organ keys when Marie-Louise Langlais-Jaquet, to whom the incendiary display is dedicated, performs this work. Prestissimo full organ sections alternate with slower measures of predominantly 8' flue work. A surprisingly cool moment is presented twice in brief references to a French old folksong associated with moonlight, with organum first of fourths and then of sevenths (!); Langlais has said that after the fireworks are over, the moon is still in the sky. In the organ version, however, fireworks have the last words: cadenza and fermata. The premiere was given by Mme. Langlais on February 22, 1981, at the Riverside Church.<sup>54</sup>

Fireworks being described by a blind person, that was Langlais!

A tumultuous end of the year 1980 for Jean Langlais, marked also by a comeback in his life as a concert artist, as this list of engagements between April and October 1980 shows:

- April 13: Lausanne (Radio Suisse Romande)
- May 27: Weert (The Netherlands)
- May 16: Beaume-les-Dames (France)
- June 1: Marienstatt (Germany)
- June 2: Bonn (Germany)
- June 3: Bad Nauheim (Germany)
- June 4: Giessen (Germany)
- June 6: Wien-Saint-Augustin (Austria).
- August 3: Masevaux Festival (France)
- August 10-17: Competition and concerts at Bayreuth (Germany)
- August 11: Salzburg (Austria)
- September 7: Knechtsteden (Germany)
- October 5: Stuttgart (Germany)

The year 1981 will see Jean Langlais' final short trip to the United States, from September 19 to October 1, with the highlight being the presentation of a third honorary degree, a Doctor of Music, by Catholic University in Washington, D.C. on Saturday, September 19, 1981. The architect of this week honoring Jean Langlais in Washington was George C. Baker, who became organist at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and professor of organ at the Catholic University.

The ceremony was, as always, magnificent and moving, and Langlais was very proud to learn that the next day, September 20, his music would be played in all the churches in Washington, including the Cathedral, where we went. To our amazement, the Archbishop

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<sup>53</sup> Rolande Falcinelli, concert program of July 22, 1983, part of the "9th Week of Music at Belley" (July 18-22, 1983), dedicated to Jean Langlais music.

<sup>54</sup> Kathleen Thomerson, *The American Organist*, February 1982.

stopped the procession to come shake the hand of the composer and thank him for the quality and value of his music ...

"MUSICAL MASTER," "LANGLAIS SHOWS MASTERY IN MUSEUM ORGAN RECITAL," "ORGANIST JEAN LANGLAIS LIVES UP TO HIS LEGEND" were some of the headlines the press gave to their articles about the recitals Langlais performed on this trip to Washington, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Utica, NY, thus saluting for the last time an artist who had been, from 1952 to 1981--up to the end of his strength--tirelessly carrying the message of French music from one coast to the other of this vast North American continent.

Each of these final recitals in the United States ended with the "Double Fantasy for two organists" (*Mosaïque*, Vol. 1), which we played together at the organ and which enchanted the American public:



**Jean and Marie-Louise Langlais playing the "Double Fantaisie" (*Mosaïque* 1), USA, September 1981.**

Figure 56. (photograph by Laura Petrie. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

Upon his return from the United States, several commissions were waiting, especially from Thomas Schlee of Universal Edition. At Schlee's insistence, the composer again picked up some early works which he had almost forgotten about, in particular his *Prélude et fugue*, opus 1, as well as the sole survivor of *Six Préludes* (1929), the "Adoration des bergers" (Adoration of the Shepherds). These two pieces would be published in 1982. The title "Adoration des bergers" became "Chant des bergers," but a printer's typographical error turned it into the "Song of the Shepherdesses" (!). To this piece Langlais added "Prière des mages" (Prayer of the Magi), an unused fragment from his *Troisième Concerto "Réaction"* for organ and orchestra.

But Thomas Schlee also was waiting for Jean Langlais to compose a new large scale organ work. This would be *Prélude et allegro*, about which the editor wrote the following in the preface:

*Prélude et allegro* was composed at the present editor's instigation in response to a commission by the Welsh Arts Council. It was completed in Paris on July 1st, 1982.

This work represents the culmination of Langlais' sequence of large-scale, free (i.e. not exclusively chorale-oriented) concert pieces, such as *Essai*, *Poem of life*, *Offrande à une âme*. Structurally it may also be regarded as a counterpart – belonging to a much later period – to Langlais' first organ composition, the *Prélude et fugue* (UE 17462). In both cases a typically French harmony is the foundation of the "Prelude."

Whereas in the early work an unequivocal thematic link<sup>55</sup> with the "Fugue" was established by the anticipation of the fugal subject, in the present work the theme which underlies the "Allegro" makes episodic appearances in the "Prélude"... A virtuosic coda provides the work with an effective "concert-style" close.

A new diptych, this time for two trumpets and organ, *Pastorale et Rondo* saw the light of day soon after. It contains reminiscences of earlier pages, like the Breton theme "Jesus told us to pray" or in "Rondo," a reworking of the "Pasticcio" from the 1956 *Organ Book*. The publisher Elkan-Vogel was more than happy to publish for instrumental training this work that was so popular with the public.

The end of 1982 brought the composer a lovely surprise. A letter from the Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, informed him of his accession to the rank of Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters. Meanwhile, he learned that he had made his entrance into the very exclusive columns of the "Petit Larousse Illustré" (1983 edition) with the following entry:

*Langlais (Jean), French composer, born in La Fontenelle (Ille-et-Vilaine) in 1907. Organist of Ste. Clotilde in Paris, he continues the tradition of Tournemire.*

While giving recitals and composing new works, Jean Langlais did not forget "his" organ at Sainte-Clotilde, and he wished to add two modifications that went along with the history of the organ: restore the Swell to Great suboctave coupler which he had had removed in 1962 at the time of Beuchet's restoration, and, especially, to put the Cromhorne (Clarinet) of Cavallé-Coll back on the Positif division, where it had been during the time of Franck. Recall that in 1933 Tournemire had placed it in the Swell division so that it would be expressive. The organ builder Jacques Barbéris carried out these changes at the request of Langlais.<sup>56</sup>

Two concerts took place before a large audience, to demonstrate the importance of this restoration. Here are some excerpts from the report:<sup>57</sup>

During the year 1983, the builder Jacques Barbéris and colleagues proceeded to rebuild the internationally famous pipe organ in Sainte-Clotilde. The work involved removing dust and restoring the pipes, restoration of Swell to Great suboctave coupler (especially required for the performance of Franck's "Grande Pièce Symphonique"), and the return to the Positif division of the clarinette 8'--originally a Cromhorne, as written on the 19th

<sup>55</sup> Thomas-Daniel Schlee, Preface to *Prelude et Allegro pour orgue*. Universal Edition N° 17475, Wien, 1985.

<sup>56</sup> See Jean Langlais' letter of April 8, 1982 to Jean Cau, consulting engineer to the Monuments Historiques.

<sup>57</sup> Pastor Claude-Rémy Muess, "Restoration of the Great Organ at the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde in Paris." *Jeunesse et Orgue* (November 1983). 12.

century pipes—which had been transferred to the Swell. No other changes were made to the instrument. It was inaugurated at two concerts on November 15 and 22, 1983.

The first concert was performed by the titular organist, his wife, Marie-Louise Jaquet-Langlais, and by Pierre Cogen, co-titular,<sup>58</sup> who interpreted works by composers whose organistic work was—or is—at the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde. There was one exception, the chorale "Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele" designed to showcase the restored sound quality of the Cromhorne on the Positive division,<sup>59</sup> which Marie-Louise Jaquet-Langlais played in addition to the "Fantaisie en La" by César Franck.

The second concert, the following Tuesday, was a tribute to Jean Langlais. Homage was paid by two of his former students, greatly talented young organists with promising careers, Naji Hakim and his wife Marie-Bernadette Dufourcet...

At the end of the program, Jean Langlais climbed the steps of its platform to improvise. To the great joy of the listeners, he chose to comment on two Gregorian themes: "Te Deum Laudamus" and "Virgo Dei genitrix." All of Jean Langlais' piety as well as all his marvelous skill as an improviser, his wealth of invention and the consummate art of his rhythms, volumes, timbres and their combinations, burst forth during those all-too-brief moments.

You could not wish for better rededication of the instrument of which Jean Langlais has been titular since 1945 ...

In the second inaugural concert, on November 22, 1983, Naji and Marie-Bernadette Hakim played the two new pieces that Langlais had dedicated to them, "Midi" and "Matin," part of a cycle of *Cinq Soleils* ("Matin," "Midi," "Soir," "Etoiles," "France") a commission by the Festival Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges for its 1983 and 1984 seasons. Pastor Claude-Rémy Muess commented :

One can say incandescent, radiant, of the first of these two works. Without doubt, only a blind man is able to sing such a vibrant hymn to light. The second exudes gentleness, serenity, the peace of twilight. And we think of the "Hymne au soleil" (Hymn to the Sun) by Vierge, this other richly inspired non-seeing man.

Having reached this stage of his life, Jean Langlais, aged 76, yielded to repeated solicitations from certain of his publishers and finally agreed to write texts with educational scope. He had always refused to write a treatise on improvisation, citing the complexity of the undertaking, even though, according to experts, he was one of the best teachers in this demanding discipline. But Universal Edition knew how to convince him to explore the possibilities of the pedal board, a musical game that he will take up as a challenge, as he wrote in his "Preface" to this volume:

In composing the seven pedal studies, I attempted to combine virtuosity and music. The pieces focus on seven specific techniques. This constitutes the pedagogic element. However, purely musical considerations are at no time neglected. Herein lies the justification of the chosen title: seven concert studies – in other words, compositions written equally with the virtuosos and the audience in mind.<sup>60</sup>

The *Sept Etudes de concert* comprise a veritable catalog of difficulties specific to the pedal player, from pure velocity ("Chromatic," "alternation," "trills") to a polyphony requiring the simultaneous use of the heel and toe ("Counterpoint

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<sup>58</sup> After the retirement of Pierre Denis from his position of assistant to Jean Langlais at Sainte-Clotilde, Pierre Cogen, one of Langlais' former students, took the job.

<sup>59</sup> And on this occasion, the audience could discover the magnificent color and the power of this stop as a result of its relocation to the Positif.

<sup>60</sup> Jean Langlais, Preface to *Sept Etudes de concert pour pédale seule*. Universal Edition. Vienna, 1984.

I", "Counterpoint II"), through speed in the movements ("Staccato"), and finally, all elements juxtaposed in a rhapsodic way in the concluding piece of the score, "Alleluia," which even adds new difficulties with glissandi and octaves. Lovers of "walking acrobatics" will profit from the sixth study, "Trills," which, in five pages, severely tests the flexibility of the ankles, separately and together, to the point of exhaustion. But in doing this, Langlais combines virtuosity and music. His virtuosity is never in vain, and he proves it once again by using, for example, Gregorian chant, especially in "Alleluia" in which the lead melody is the song of the Easter season "O Filii et Filiae," already present in the "Fugue on o filii" of his *Folkloric Suite* (1952).

The response to this new collection, in which critics discerned only technical prowess, was hardly gentle, as this description by Guy Bovet suggests:

Langlais, whose famous "Epilogue" of *Hommage à Frescobaldi* already made his career in the concert hall where skilled pedal technique still passes for a virtue, commits another offense with this group of pieces, in which he asserts that "... pure music was not neglected." The listener will judge.

One finds in it ... an amusing but very difficult piece in staccato, "Trills", that will give you cramps in the ankle, and a majestic final "Alleluia." Lovers of acrobatics will find something worthwhile, but frankly and in all friendship, the author of these lines does not really see the musical interest that may lie in renouncing what is still the base of the organ: the manual keyboard.<sup>61</sup>

Not concerning himself with these comments, Jean Langlais continues his educational research and focuses this time on a "method"; he will give Combres publishers the *Méthode d'Orgue*, co-written with the present author.<sup>62</sup>

He divided this "Method" into three parts: 1: Study of the pedals (36 pages of music out of 50 pages), 2: Supplementary ideas about the organ, 3: Overview of improvisation (one page only); the remaining pages consist of translations (in German and English) of the different texts. The whole, apart from the "Study of the pedals," was short, according to the express wish of the publisher who had set the maximum length at 50 pages. Criticism rained down, immediately condemning the brevity of the text and the disproportionate length of the "Study of the pedals." Specialists who expected a great "Improvisation Method" felt misled, and one of them wrote:

*Méthode d'Orgue* seems to promise a thorough presentation of the training procedures used by this influential teacher. This title suggests that we will be let into the special, if not secret, techniques which are the basis of Langlais' influence. What the 50 pages contain is surprisingly less... The subtitle lists a "Survey of Improvisation." This turns out to be one page of epigrams without any musical notation.

How disappointing from a master of improvisation! The reader by this time has recognized that this is no complete method of organ instruction but rather a collection of pedal exercises with appended observations on other matters.<sup>63</sup>

Right! W.P. Eifrig was perfectly correct, except that he probably did not know that the publisher Combres had commissioned from Langlais a short instruction book aimed primarily at beginners; thus one where the pedal part was supposed to predominate, which was the

<sup>61</sup> Guy Bovet, "Nous avons reçu..." in *La Tribune de l'Orgue*, December 1985.

<sup>62</sup> Jean Langlais et Marie-Louise Jaquet-Langlais. *Méthode d'orgue*. Editions Combres, 1984.

<sup>63</sup> W.F. Eifrig, "Book Reviews." *The Diapason*, December 1986.

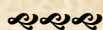
case. In this section, in fact, Jean Langlais very cleverly proposes a method adapted to both baroque technique (alternate toes) and symphonic technique (heel and toe), with great economy of means and especially in a rapid progression that allows a beginner to use the pedals with ease after a few weeks. While I was saddened that this rather negative review appeared in a major American magazine with a large circulation, the composer had this sly quip: "This will sell the Method."

He was right, as sales doubled between 1987 and 1988 and have not stopped since! In any case, this anecdote reveals his profound indifference toward criticism in general...

To illustrate in music his *Méthode d'Orgue*, Langlais devised, in parallel, *Huit Préludes*, progressing from 1 to 8 voices, conceived in the same spirit as *Progression* in 1979, but in a much simpler form. He sticks strictly to the number of voices expected for each part ("one voice," "duet," "trio", "four voices," "five voices"... up to "eight voices," subtitled "Troisième Fantaisie pour 2 organistes," which can be played by one or two organists at the same keyboard in a style close to the double choir).<sup>64</sup>

During this time, concert tours intensified. Extremely painful osteoarthritis of the shoulder, however, made his May 23, 1984 recital given at the organ of the Grand Auditorium of Radio-France in Paris<sup>65</sup> particularly excruciating. Handicapped by this, at the last minute the composer had to cancel a planned trip to Germany which was to combine, in the space of eight days, seven concerts and the recording of a disc.

In June he left Paris for La Richardais, in a state of extreme fatigue. One can easily understand this when one realizes that, in terms of composition, between April 1971 and June 1984, he went from opus 166 (*Troisième Concerto*, "Réaction" for organ, strings and timpani) to opus 224 (*Méthode d'Orgue*), a total of 58 works composed, dictated and published in a 13-year period.



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<sup>64</sup> Curiously, although the *Méthode d'Orgue* was published by Combre, the practical exercises, the *Huit Préludes*, were published by Bornemann. The two publishers competed with each other to pressure Jean Langlais, each with the goal of obtaining educational works.

<sup>65</sup> At this concert, he played, between other works, his *Pièce en forme libre* for string quartet and organ with Quatuor Novalis.



## CHAPTER 11

### *The Last Years (1984-1991)*

#### **July 1, 1984, Stroke**

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



**Cathédrale of Dol-de-Bretagne**

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

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

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

Then, very quickly, all language disappeared.

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

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

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

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

Should we interpret this as evidence of fragmentary memory loss of this work?<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Crucial questions, of course.

## A new life (1984-1991)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 5: 22-43

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 25, 1985  
Dear Mr Langlais,

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

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

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

I hope that we might someday meet in person.

Sincerely,

Fred Bock<sup>5</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>5</sup> Fred Bock, letter to Jean Langlais, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

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

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

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

March 31st, 1986

Dear Mr Langlais :

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

Sincerely,

Fred Bock<sup>6</sup>

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

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup> Fred Bock, letter to Jean Langlais, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

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



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

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

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

October 27th, 1986

Dear Mr Langlais :

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Fred Bock<sup>8</sup>

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

November 24th, 1986

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

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

Sincerely,

Fred Bock

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<sup>8</sup> Fred Bock, letter to Jean Langlais, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

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

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

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

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

#### **Music Recognition**

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

Most often he moves to the organ to play the selection. The execution is perfect. The student plays the "Prière" by Franck. Jean L... says "Yes, I know, it is the great Lady<sup>11</sup> saying to God, I pray, I pray...."

#### **Reading of Notes, Reading of Words**

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

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

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

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

<sup>11</sup> This was his name for the Blessed Virgin Mary.

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

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

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



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

Figure 58. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

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

At a session on November 11, 1986<sup>13</sup>, without any editing and without a break, he improvised at length (over 20 minutes) on both the simple and solemn tones of the "Salve Regina" all in one movement. During the same session, he improvised on the "Alleluia" from the *Mass of the Holy Sacrament* and on the Offertory "Confitebor tibi" from the *Mass of the*

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<sup>12</sup> Recorded by Michel Coquet

<sup>13</sup> Recorded by Robert Martin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Figure 59. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dear Maître Langlais,

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

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

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

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

At the same time, he wrote for--and at the request of-- his son, an important work of chamber music, *Vitrail* ("Stained Glass") for clarinet and piano. Drawing his inspiration from the death knell rung by the bells of La Fontenelle<sup>17</sup> and Escalquens<sup>18</sup> interspersed in an almost obsessive way through the eight continuous movements of the work, sounded by either the clarinet or piano, these two themes blend the indelible memory preserved by the composer from his childhood in La Fontenelle with the memory of his adulthood in Escalquens, the home village of his first wife. Moreover, with this persistent theme of the death knell, how can we not think of an obsession with death, which Jean Langlais, in his eightieth year, feels drawing more and more close?

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

<sup>17</sup> The three notes E flat- F- G.

<sup>18</sup> The four notes E flat- D flat- B flat- G.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

December 7th, 1987

Dear M.Langlais,

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

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

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

Sincerely

Fred Bock

Ps : Could you do this by March 1st ?<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Rosemary Porter, "Organ Recitals" in *The Musical Times*, January 1988.

<sup>20</sup> Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

<sup>21</sup> Fred Bock letter to Jean Langlais, collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Epilogue, Wednesday, May 8, 1991**

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



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

Figure 61. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Funeral Oration**

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



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

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

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

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

The musical program was composed of the following works:

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

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

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

And what greater tribute to Jean Langlais could there be than the moving funeral oration given by Mgr. Jehan Revert<sup>26</sup> during the solemn Mass, of which the following is the entire text:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*"Oh! Yes, come Lord, Lord Jesus"*





# Chronological Catalog

(Unpublished works are *in italics*)

For more details about this catalog and for updates to it, go to: [www.jeanlanglais.com](http://www.jeanlanglais.com).

For scores, click on the publishers' websites that are listed below or go to either of these two distributors: [www.di-arezzo.com](http://www.di-arezzo.com) or [www.sheetmusicplus.com](http://www.sheetmusicplus.com).

Date	Title	Category	Publisher (date of first publication)
1927	Prélude et fugue	Organ	<a href="http://www.universaleditions.com">www.universaleditions.com</a> (1982)
1929	<i>Six Préludes</i> Prélude sur une antienne <i>Thème libre</i>	<i>Organ</i> Organ (In « 9 Pièces ») <i>Organ</i>	<i>Unpublished</i> Bornemann (1945) <i>Unpublished</i>
1930	<i>Tantum ergo</i>	<i>STB choir and organ</i>	Hérelle (1933) – <a href="http://www.jeanlanglais.com">www.jeanlanglais.com</a> (2014)
1931	Deux Chansons de Clément Marot	SATB choir a capella	Hérelle (1933)
1932	Poèmes évangéliques	Organ	Hérelle (1933)
1932-42	Cinq Motets	2 Equal voices and organ	Hérelle (1933-1944)
1933-34	Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes	Organ	Hérelle (1934)
1933-39	24 Pièces, in 2 volumes	Harmonium or organ	Hérelle (1939-1943)
1934	<i>La Voix du Vent</i> Essai sur l'Évangile de Noël Te Deum <i>Une dentelle s'abolit</i> Suite	<i>Choir, soprano solo and orchestra</i> Orchestra and organ Orchestra and organ <i>Soprano and piano</i> Piano 4 hands	<i>Unpublished</i> <a href="http://www.editionbonnorgue.de">www.editionbonnorgue.de</a> (2016) <a href="http://www.editionbonnorgue.de">www.editionbonnorgue.de</a> (2016) <i>Unpublished</i> Combre (1994)
1935	Trio <i>Cloches de Deuil-Menuet</i> Humilis, 6 Melodies Piece in free form <i>Adagio from "Piece in free form »</i> Messe d'Escalquens	Flute, violin and alto <i>Wind and strings</i> Soprano and piano String Quartet and organ <i>Piano</i> 2 Equal voices and organ	<a href="http://www.editions-delatour.com">www.editions-delatour.com</a> (2007) <i>Unpublished</i> <a href="http://www.jeanlanglais.com">www.jeanlanglais.com</a> (2014) Gray (1960) – Combre (1984) <i>Unpublished</i> <a href="http://www.voixnouvelles.online.fr">www.voixnouvelles.online.fr</a> (2006)
1936	Symphonie concertante <i>Symphonie concertante</i> <i>Quatre mélodies</i> L'Arbre (n°2 of the 4 Melodies) Mouvement perpétuel <i>Nocturne-Danse</i>	Cello and orchestra <i>Piano and orchestra</i> <i>Soprano and piano</i> Soprano and piano Piano <i>4 Female voices a capella</i>	<a href="http://www.carus-verlag.com">www.carus-verlag.com</a> (1999) <i>Unpublished</i> <i>Three Unpublished</i> <a href="http://www.jeanlanglais.com">www.jeanlanglais.com</a> (2013) Combre (1987) <i>Unpublished</i>
1937	Légende de Saint-Nicolas Ligne Deux Psaumes (in French) Thème, Variations et Final Choral Médiéval	Organ (in « Folkloric Suite ») Cello and piano SATB choir and organ or piano Strings, Brass and organ Brass (3trp, 3trb) and organ	FitzSimons (1954) Combre (1987) <i>Unpublished</i> <a href="http://www.doblinger-verlag.com.at">www.doblinger-verlag.com.at</a> (2016) <a href="http://www.carus-verlag.com">www.carus-verlag.com</a> (2004)
1938	Suite Armoricaïne	Piano	Les éditions du clavier (1948)- Combre (2007)

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	<i>Parfums</i> Suite Bretonne	<i>Soprano and piano</i> Strings	<i>Unpublished</i> Combre (1999)
<b>1940</b>	Tantum ergo <i>Quatre Mélodies</i>	8 Mixed voices and organ <i>1 Voice and piano</i>	<a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1990) <i>Unpublished</i>
<b>1941-42</b>	O Salutaris Première Symphonie	2 Equal voices and organ Organ	<a href="http://www.editions-delatour.com">www.editions-delatour.com</a> (2007) Hérelle (1945)
<b>1942</b>	<i>Histoire vraie pour une Môn</i> Deux Pièces	<i>Piano</i> Flute and piano	<i>Unpublished</i> Combre (1998)
<b>1942-43</b>	Neuf Pièces	Organ	Bornemann (1945)
<b>1943</b>	<i>Mystère du Vendredi Saint</i> Miserere Mei (« Deux Déplorations ») Deux Offertoires pour tous les temps Suite Concertante <i>Pie Jesu</i> Trois Motets <i>O Salutaris (Motet n°1)</i> Oremus pro Pontifice (Motet n°3)	<i>SATB choir and organ</i> SATB choir and organ Organ Violin and cello <i>Soprano, strings and organ</i> <i>Soprano and orchestra</i> <i>Soprano and organ</i> 2 Equal voices and organ	<i>Unpublished</i> Combre (1991) Durand (1943) Combre (1987) <i>Unpublished</i> <i>Unpublished</i> <a href="http://www.jeanlanglais.com">www.jeanlanglais.com</a> (2015) <a href="http://www.editions-delatour.com">www.editions-delatour.com</a> (2007)
<b>1944</b>	Trois Danses <i>Suite</i>	Wind, percussion and piano <i>Harpichord</i>	<a href="http://www.carus-verlag.com">www.carus-verlag.com</a> (1999) <i>Unpublished</i>
<b>1946</b>	<i>Paroles (8 Melodies)</i> <i>Cantate à Saint Vincent</i> <i>Le diable qui n'est à personne</i> Fête <i>Pour Cécile</i>	<i>Soprano and piano</i> <i>SATB choir, strings or organ</i> <i>Orchestra</i> Organ <i>Soprano and piano</i>	<i>Unpublished</i> <i>Lost, unpublished</i> <i>Unpublished</i> Gray (1949) – <a href="http://www.sheetmusicplus.com">http://www.sheetmusicplus.com</a> <i>Unpublished</i>
<b>1947</b>	Cantate en l'honneur de LM de Montfort Suite brève La Ville d'Ys Légende de la Ville d'Ys Suite médiévale <i>Au pied du Calvaire</i> <i>Légende de Saint Julien l'hospitalier</i>	3 Female voices, 3 trp, organ Organ SATB choir a capella 1 voice and piano Organ <i>Soprano and piano</i> <i>Orchestra</i>	Combre (2008) Bornemann (1947) Hérelle (1947) Combre (2007) Rouard et Lerolle (1950) <i>Unpublished</i> <i>Unpublished</i>
<b>1948</b>	Suite française <i>Passe-temps de l'homme et des oiseaux</i> Premier Concerto Libera me, Domine (« 2 Déplorations »)	Organ <i>4 Melodies for soprano and piano</i> Organ or Harpsicord and orchestra STB choir and organ	Bornemann (1948) <i>Unpublished</i> <a href="http://www.butz-verlag.com">www.butz-verlag.com</a> (2004) Combre (1991)
<b>1949</b>	Incantation pour un Jour Saint Trois Prières	Organ 1 Voice and organ or piano	<a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1954) Bornemann (1949)
<b>1950</b>	<i>Le soleil se lève sur Assise</i> Four Postludes <i>Trois Mélodies</i> Messe Solennelle Messe Solennelle	<i>Orchestra</i> Organ <i>1 Voice and piano</i> SATB choir and 1 or 2 organs SATB choir and orchestra	<i>Unpublished</i> Mc Laughlin&Reilly (1951) <i>definitely out of print</i> <i>Unpublished</i> <a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (2015) <a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (2015)
<b>1951</b>	Hommage à Frescobaldi <i>My heart's in the Highlands</i> <i>Deux Pièces</i> <i>Cantate de Noël</i> <i>Hommage à Louis Braille</i>	Organ <i>Soprano and piano</i> <i>Violin</i> <i>Soloists, SATB choirs and orchestra</i> <i>3 Melodies for 1 voice and piano</i>	Bornemann (1952) <i>Unpublished</i> <i>Lost and unpublished</i> <i>Unpublished</i> <i>Unpublished</i>

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<b>1952</b>	Mass in ancient style Missa in Simplicitate Folkloric Suite <i>Armor</i>	SATB choir and organ ad libitum 1 Voice or unison choir and organ Organ <i>1 Voice and piano</i>	Mc Laughlin & Reilly (1952)-Combre (1985) <a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1953) FitzSimons (1954) <i>Unpublished</i>
<b>1953</b>	Caritas Christi	SATB choir and organ	<a href="http://schola-editions.com">schola-editions.com</a> (1953)
<b>1954</b>	Dominica in palmis Trois Chansons populaires bretonnes Missa "Salve Regina" Cinq Chants d'amour (5 Melodies)	Organ 4 Female voices a capella 2 Choirs, brass and 2 organs 1 Voice and piano	<a href="http://schola-editions.com">schola-editions.com</a> (1980) Henry Lemoine (1955) Costallat (1955) Philippo (1957)
<b>1955</b>	Lauda Jerusalem Dominum	2 Choirs (SATB, unison) and organ	<a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1957)
<b>1956</b>	Huit Pièces modales Organ Book Cantique Eucharistique « Dieu, nous avons vu ta Gloire » Prélude à la Messe "Orbis Factor" Triptyque	Organ Organ 1 Voice and organ 2 Choirs (SATB, unison) and organ Organ Organ	Philippo-Combre (1957) Elkan-Vogel (1957) <a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1956) Philippo-Combre (1957) De Praestrant (1956) Novello (1957)
<b>1957</b>	Three Characteristic pieces Office pour la Sainte Famille Office pour la fête de la Sainte-Trinité <i>La Passion</i> <i>Le Mystère du Christ</i>	Organ Organ Organ <i>Choir, 8 soloists, narrator, orchestra</i> <i>Choir, soloists, narrator, orchestra</i>	Novello (1958) Christophorus (1959) Christophorus (1961) <i>Unpublished</i> <i>Unpublished</i>
<b>1958</b>	Regina Cœli Cantata « En ovale comme un jet d'eau » Psaume 150 "Praise the Lord" Venite et audite Missa Misericordiae Domini Deo Gratias (in « 13 Pièces d'orgue ») Miniature	2 Female voices and organ SATB and 1 Voice choir 3 Male voices choir and organ SATB choir a capella STB choir and organ Organ Organ	Pro Organo (1992) Presses de l'Île de France (1958) Mc Laughlin (1958) <i>out of print</i> <a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1961) GIA (1959) - <a href="http://www.carus-verlag.com">www.carus-verlag.com</a> (1990) <a href="http://www.editions-delatour.com">www.editions-delatour.com</a> (2007) Gray (1959)
<b>1959</b>	Sacerdos et Pontifex (Tu es Petrus) <i>Trois Noël's</i> American Suite <i>L'Errante</i>	Unison choir, 2 trumpets, organ <i>SATB choir a capella</i> Organ <i>1 Voice and piano</i>	WLSM (1961), Pro Organo (1992) <i>Unpublished</i> Gray (1961) - <i>definitely out of print</i> <i>Unpublished</i>
<b>1960</b>	<i>Rhapsodie Savoyarde</i> 2 petites pièces dans le style médiéval Sept Noël's populaires anciens Neuf Chansons folkloriques françaises	<i>Organ</i> Organ Choir and piano Choir and piano	<i>Unpublished</i> <a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1960) Philippo-Combre (1960) Philippo-Combre (1961)
<b>1961</b>	<i>Sonnerie (Intrada)</i> 2 <sup>nd</sup> Concerto <i>O God, our Father</i> <i>Praise the Lord (Psalm 150)</i> 2 Chansons populaires de Hte-Bretagne A la claire fontaine Essai (Trial)	<i>4 trumpets, 4 trombones, tuba</i> Organ and Strings <i>SATB choir and organ</i> <i>SATB choir, organ and Brass</i> 4-6 Mixed voices a capella 6 Mixed voices a capella Organ	<i>Unpublished</i> <a href="http://www.universaleditions.com">www.universaleditions.com</a> (1980) <i>Unpublished</i> <i>Unpublished</i> Philippo-Combre (1971) Philippo-Combre (1971) Bornemann (1962)
<b>1962</b>	Trois Méditations sur la Ste Trinité 12 Petites pièces Offertoire pour l'office de Ste Claire Missa Dona nobis pacem (in English) Homage to Rameau	Organ Organ or harmonium 3 Female voices a capella Unison choir and organ Organ	Philippo (1962) <a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1962) <a href="http://www.editions-delatour.com">www.editions-delatour.com</a> (2007) Gray (1964) - <a href="http://www.birettabooks.com">www.birettabooks.com</a> (2014) Elkan-Vogel (1965)

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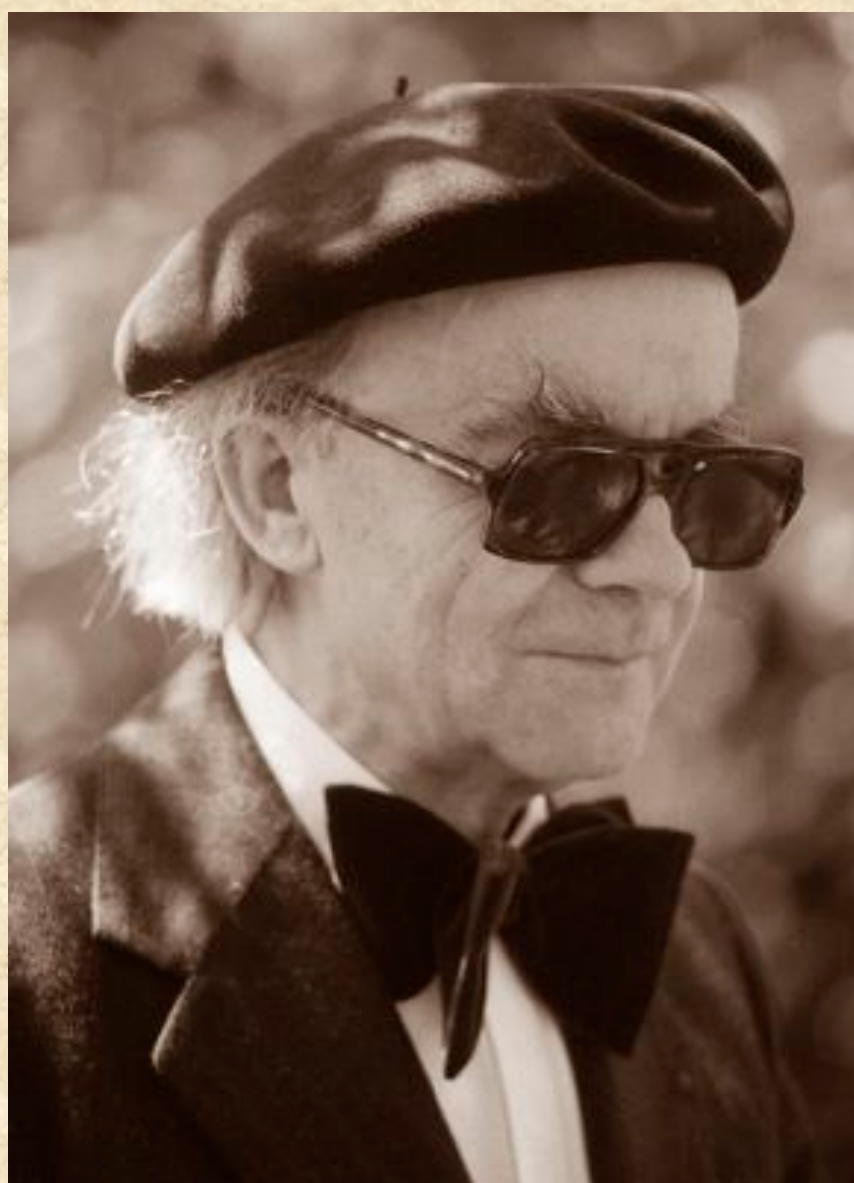
	Psaume Solennel n°1 (Psalm 150)	SATB, unison choirs and organ (2 trp, 2trb and tympanies ad lib.)	<a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1964)
<b>1963</b>	Prélude on coronation <i>Deux Mélodies</i> Psaume Solennel n°2	Organ <i>1 Voice and piano</i> SATB, unison choirs and organ (2 trp, 2trb and tympanies ad lib.)	Oxford Univ. Press (1964) <i>Unpublished</i> <a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1965)
<b>1964</b>	Psaume Solennel n°3 Mass « God Have Mercy »	SATB, unison choirs and organ (2 trp, 2trb and tympanies ad lib.) Unison voices and organ	<a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1965) Mc Laughlin (1965), <i>definitely out of print</i>
<b>1965</b>	Messe « Dieu prends pitié » Poem of life Mass « On Earth Peace » The Canticle of the Sun <i>Elegie</i>	SATB or unison choirs and organ Organ 1 Voice and organ Women's chorus (SSA) and organ or piano <i>Dixtuor</i>	<a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1965) Elkan-Vogel (1966) Benziger (1966), <i>out of print</i> Elkan-Vogel (1966), <i>out of print</i> <i>Unpublished</i>
<b>1966</b>	Poem of peace Poem of happiness	Organ Organ	Elkan-Vogel (1967) Elkan-Vogel (1967)
<b>1967</b>	Carillons (Bells) Sonate en trio	Handbells (37 and 53) Organ	Gray (1968) Bornemann (1968)
<b>1968</b>	Livre Œcuménique Adoration <i>Psaume 122</i> Solemn Mass "Orbis Factor" Festival Alleluia	Organ Organ <i>SATB choir and organ</i> 2 Choirs (SATB and unison), organ SATB choir and organ	Bornemann (1968) Eulenburg (1970) <i>Unpublished</i> Elkan-Vogel (1969) Elkan-Vogel (1971)
<b>1969</b>	Cortège Three Voluntaries	2 organs, 4 trp, 4 trb and organ Organ	<a href="http://www.carus-verlag.com">www.carus-verlag.com</a> (1992) FitzSimons (1970), <i>out of print</i>
<b>1970</b>	<i>Le Prince de la Paix</i> Trois Implorations	<i>SATB choir and organ</i> Organ	<i>Unpublished</i> Bornemann (1970)
<b>1971</b>	Troisième Concerto (Réaction) Cinq Chorals Pièce Offrande à Marie	Organ, strings, tympanies Organ Trumpet (or oboe or flute) and organ Organ	<a href="http://www.universaleditions.com">www.universaleditions.com</a> (1980) Barenreiter (1975) Philippo-Combre (1972) Philippo-Combre (1972)
<b>1972</b>	Supplication (in « 13 Pièces d'orgue ») Sept Chorals Petit prélude sur 2 thèmes grégoriens	Organ Trumpet (or oboe or flute) and organ Organ (in « 13 Pièces d'orgue »)	S.I.O (1972) - <a href="http://www.editions-delatour.com">www.editions-delatour.com</a> (2007) Philippo-Combre (1972) <a href="http://www.editions-delatour.com">www.editions-delatour.com</a> (2007)
<b>1973</b>	Hymn of Praise "Te Deum" Trois Oraisons Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse Suite Baroque	2 Choirs (SATB and unison), organ 1 Voice, flute (or violin) and organ Organ Organ	Pro Organo (1992) Combre (1974) Bornemann (1974) Combre (1975)
<b>1974</b>	Diptyque (piano et orgue). Cinq Pièces Huit Chants de Bretagne (orgue). Vocalise	Piano and organ Flute or violin and piano or organ Organ 1 Voice and piano	Combre (1983) Combre (1976) Bornemann (1975) Combre (1975)
<b>1975</b>	<i>Hommage à Louis Braille</i> Quatre Préludes (in « 13 Pièces d'orgue ») Trois Esquisses Romanes Trois Esquisses Gothiques	<i>1 Voice and piano</i> Organ 1 or 2 Organs 1 or 2 Organs	<i>Unpublished</i> <a href="http://www.editions-delatour.com">www.editions-delatour.com</a> (2007) Bornemann (1976) Bornemann (1976)

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<b>1976</b>	Six Petites Pièces (in « 13 Pièces d'orgue »)	Organ	Lissett (1990) – <a href="http://www.editions-delatour.com">www.editions-delatour.com</a> (2007)
	Mosaïque 1	Organ	Combre (1977)
	Mosaïque 2	Organ	Combre (1977)
	Sonatine	Trumpet and piano or organ	Combre (1976)
	<i>Cantique en l'honneur d'A.de Bretagne</i>	SATB choir and orgue ad lib.	Unpublished
	Psaume 116	6 Mixed voices choir, 3 trp. and organ	Fitzsimons (1998)
	Deuxième Symphonie "alla Webern"	Organ	Combre (1977)
<b>1977</b>	Mosaïque 3	Organ	Combre (1978)
	Psaume 111	SATB choir and organ	<a href="http://www.schola-editions.com">www.schola-editions.com</a> (1985)
<b>1978</b>	Triptyque Grégorien	Organ	<a href="http://www.universaleditions.com">www.universaleditions.com</a> (1979)
	Progression	Organ	Bornemann (1979)
	Three short anthems	1 and 4 mixed voices a capella	Hinshaw Music (1979)
<b>1979</b>	Mass "Grant us Thy Peace"	SATB choir and organ	Basil Ramsey (1981)
	Noëls avec variations	Organ	<a href="http://www.universaleditions.com">www.universaleditions.com</a> (1981)
	Prélude Grégorien	Organ	Fred Bock (1996)
	Diptyque, Offrande à une âme	Organ	Bornemann (1980)
	Troisième Symphonie	Organ	<a href="http://www.universaleditions.com">www.universaleditions.com</a> (1980)
	Corpus Christi	4 Equal voices and organ	Combre (1982)
<b>1980</b>	<i>Réminiscences</i>	String orchestra, 2 fl or 2 trp, harpsichord	Unpublished
	Rosace	Organ	Combre (1981)
<b>1981</b>	Chant des bergers - Prière des mages	Organ	<a href="http://www.universaleditions.com">www.universaleditions.com</a> (1982)
	A la Vierge Marie	1 Voice and piano or organ	<a href="http://www.jeanlanglais.com">www.jeanlanglais.com</a> (2013)
<b>1982</b>	Pastorale et Rondo	2 trumpets and organ	Elkan-Vogel (1983)
	Prélude et Allegro	Organ	<a href="http://www.universaleditions.com">www.universaleditions.com</a> (1983)
<b>1983</b>	Cinq Soleils	Organ	Combre (1983)
	7 Etudes de concert pour pédale solo	Organ	
	Deux Pièces brèves	Organ	Combre (1983)
	Petite Rhapsodie	Flute and organ	Billaudot (1984)
<b>1984</b>	Huit Préludes	Organ	Bornemann (1984)
	Méthode d'Orgue	Organ	Combre (1984)
	Miniature II	Organ	Combre (1984)
<b>1985</b>	Talitha Koum (Resurrection)	Organ	Combre (1985)
	Trois Pièces faciles	Organ	Pro Organo (1986)
	A Morning hymn	1 Voice or SATB and organ	TAO (1986)
	B.A. C.H	Organ	Bornemann (1985)
<b>1986</b>	American Folk-Hymn settings	Organ	Fred Bock (1986)
	In Memoriam	Organ	Combre (1987)
	Petite Suite	Piano	Combre (1987)
	Ubi Caritas	SATB choir and organ	Fred Bock (1986)
	9 Pièces	Trumpet and organ	Combre (1987)
	12 Versets	Organ	Bornemann (1988)
	Hommage à Rameau	Organ	Bornemann (1987)
	Expressions (with Naji Hakim)	Organ	Fred Bock (1987)
	Fantasy on two old scottish themes	Organ	Novello (1988)
	<b>1987</b>	Trumpet Tune	Organ
Mouvement		Flute or hautbois, or violin and manual	Pro Organo (1990)
Vitrail		Clarinet and piano	Combre (1988)

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	Trois Antiennes à la Sainte Vierge	1 Voice or unison choir and organ	Pro Organo (1992)
<b>1988</b>	Christmas Carol Hymn settings Contrastes	Organ Organ	Fred Bock (1988) Combre (1989)
<b>1989</b>	Séquences Etudes Ceremony	Flute or violin solo 1, 2 and 4 cellos Brass ensemble (6 trp, 4 trb, 2 tubas)	Combre (1989) Fuzeau (1990) Combre (1991)
<b>1990</b>	Mort et Résurrection Moonlight Scherzo Trois Offertoires Trio Suite in Simplicitate	Organ Organ Organ Organ Organ	Leduc (1990) Combre (1990) Combre (1990) Billaudot (1991) <a href="http://www.europart-diffusion.com">www.europart-diffusion.com</a> (1991)



**Jean Langlais, Marbella, Spain – 1977**

Figure 63. (photograph by Michäel Reckling)



## *Marie-Louise Langlais*

Born in 1943 in Casablanca, Morocco, Marie-Louise Jaquet-Langlais was awarded the *diplôme de virtuosité* in the organ class of Jean Langlais at the Schola Cantorum in Paris in 1969, and later the doctorate of musicology from the Paris-Sorbonne University in 1992.

Successively organist of the Silbermann organ at the Protestant church of Saint Jean in Mulhouse and assistant organist of the Cavaillé-Coll organ of Sainte-Clotilde in Paris, she held positions as professor of organ and improvisation at the Conservatory of Marseille, the Schola Cantorum in Paris and the Paris Regional

Conservatory. In 2012, she served as Distinguished Visiting Professor of Organ for the fall semester at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music (Oberlin, Ohio, USA).

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, Motette, Lyrinx, Solstice, Festivo, Koch International).

She has frequently given lectures and classes, mainly on her favorite topics, “The Sainte-Clotilde Tradition” (Franck, Tournemire and Langlais) and the “French Organ School of the 1930s.” In 1999, she was awarded a special prize by the Institute of France for her book *Jean Langlais, Ombre et Lumière* (Paris: Combre, 1995). Another book on a modern French composer, *Jean-Louis Florentz, Témoignages Croisés* (Lyon: Symétrie, 2009) and the recent 2014 Internet publication of *Eclats de Mémoire, Charles Tournemire*, which features Tournemire’s unpublished *Mémoires*, preceded the present work.

This 2016 Internet publication was written to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the death of her late husband, Jean Langlais (1907-1991).

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