

# EPIPHANYTIDE

THROUGH THE WORK  
L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE BY CHARLES TOURNEMIRE



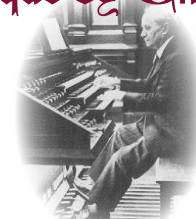
ABINGTON  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

ABINGTON, PENNSYLVANIA

TUESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2021



## L'Orgue Mystique by Charles Tournemire



IN THE TIME BETWEEN THE TWO GREAT WORLD WARS —or as the historian Eugen Weber termed the entire era, the “Second Thirty Years War”—there emerged a musical monument that the critic Pierre Girit called a “sonorous *Summa Theologica*.” It was the culmination of great musical, religious, and philosophical movements that thrived and vied for attention in the Christian Church and through French society.

THIS MONUMENT WAS “L’ORGUE MYSTIQUE” BY CHARLES TOURNEMIRE.

This recondite magnum opus of two hundred fifty-three movements composed from 1927 to 1932 is fifteen hours in duration and employs over three hundred chants both as an act of devotion and as musical exegesis based upon a chant libretto with the goal of celebrating fifty-one Sundays and Liturgical Feasts throughout the Church Calendar. Its haunting transcendent beauty and musical allegory, written by a pious, unassuming genius, constitutes one of the greatest single liturgical achievements in music history, and yet its utterances were little heard in the maelstrom of its time.



### PROGRAMME

XI. PURIFICATION BEATÆ MARIE VIRGINIS • Pièce terminale: *Diptyque*

IX. DOMINICA SECUNDA POST EPIPHANIAM • Pièce terminale: *Fantaisie-paraphrase*

VII. EPIPHANIA DOMINI • Pièce terminale: *Fantaisie*



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## XI. PURIFICATION BEATÆ MARIÆ VIRGINIS

PIÈCE TERMINALE: DIPTYQUE

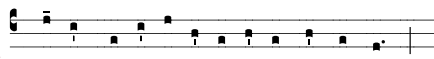
(DATE OF COMPLETION: 15 DECEMBER 1928)

À son ami Henri Mulet (1878–1967), *Organiste de Saint-Philippe du Roule*



ANTIPHONA • LUMEN AD REVELATIONEM GENTIUM

L

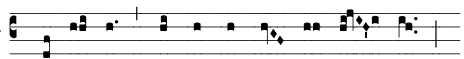


U-men \* ad re-ve-la-ti-on-em gen-ti-um, ☩.

**A**LIGHT to lighten the Gentiles, said he, and the glory of thy people Israel. —*Lauds ☩*  
—*Second Vespers Psalm Antiphon (Saint Luke ij)*

ANTIPHONA • ADORNA THALAMUM TUUM SION

A



- Dor-na \* tha-la-mum tu-um Si- on, ☩.

**O** SION, adorn thy bride-chamber, and receive Christ thy King; greet Mary, who is the gate of heaven, for she beareth the King of the glory of the new light. She remaineth a Virgin, yet beareth in her arms a Son begotten before the morning star, whom Simeon took in his arms declaring to all nations that he is Lord of life and death, and Saviour of the world. —*Antiphon during the Candlemas Procession*



## IX. DOMINICA SECUNDA POST EPIPHANIAM

PIÈCE TERMINALE: FANTAISIE-PARAPHRASE

(DATE OF COMPLETION: 10 JUNE 1929)

À son ami et élève Révérend Mossen Josep Muset i Ferrer (1889–1957),  
*Prevère Organista de la l'Església de la Puríssima Concepció de Sabadell*



ANTIPHONA • HODIE CÆLESTI SPONSO

h

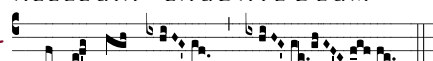


O-di-e \* cæ-le-sti spon-so ☩.

**A**S on this day is the Church espoused to her heavenly Bridegroom, forasmuch as in Jordan Christ hath cleansed her iniquities: therefore do the Wise Men hasten with their offerings to the royal nuptials where the guests are regaled with water made wine, alleluia. —*Epiphany Lauds Benedictus Antiphon*

ALLELUIA • LAUDATE DEUM

A

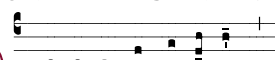


L-le-lu-ia. \* ☩.

**A** LLELUIA, alleluia. ☩ Praise the Lord, all ye Angels if his: praise him all his host. Alleluia. —*Alleluia (Psalm cxlvij)*

ANTIPHONA • DEFICIENTE VINO

D



E-fi-ci-en-te vi-no,\* ☩.

**A**ND when they wanted wine, Jesus commanded then to fill the water-pots with water; and straightway was the water made into wine, alleluia. —*Second Vespers Magnificat Antiphon (Saint John ij)*

ANTIPHONA • NUPTIÆ FACTÆ SUNT IN CANA GALILÆÆ

N



Up-ti-æ \* factæ sunt ☩.

**N**OW there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee: and Jesus himself was there with Mary his mother. —*Lauds Benedictus Antiphon (Saint John ij)*

ANTIPHONA • EGO DORMIVI, ET SOMNUM CEPI

e



-Go dor-mi- vi, \* et so-mnum ce-pi: ☩.

**I** LAID me down and slept, and rose up again, for the Lord Eternal sustained me, alleluia, alleluia. —*Easter Matins Psalm Antiphon (Psalm ij)*



## VII. EPIPHANIA DOMINI

### PIÈCE TERMINALE: FANTAISIE

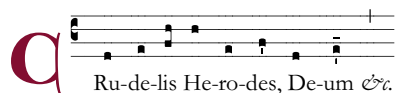
(DATE OF COMPLETION: 27 NOVEMBER 1928)

À son ami André Marchal (1894–1980), Organiste de Saint-Germain-des-Prés, à Paris



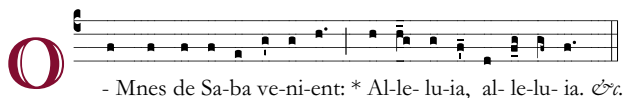
ALLELUIA, alleluia. *℣* We have seen his star in the East, and are come with offerings to worship the Lord. Alleluia. —*Alleluia (Saint Matthew ij)*

### HYMNUS • CRUELIS HERODES



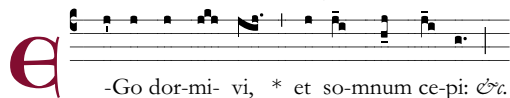
WHY, impious Herod, should'st thou fear Because the Christ is come so near? He who doth heavenly kingdoms grant Thine earthly realm can never want. Lo, sages from the East are gone To where the star hath newly shone: Led on by light to Light they press, And by their gifts their God confess. The Lamb of God is manifest Again in Jordan's water blest, And he who sin had never known By washing hath our sins undone. Yet he that ruleth everything Can change the nature of the spring, And gives at Cana this for sign— The water reddens into wine. Then glory, Lord, to thee we pay For thine Epiphany today; All glory through eternity To Father, Son, and Spirit be. Amen. —*First & Second Vespers Office Hymn (Caelius Sedulius, obiit circa 450; translated by Percy Dearmer, 1867–1936)*

### RESPONSORIUM BREVE • OMNES DE SABA



ALL they from Saba shall come, *†* Alleluia, alleluia. *℣* All they from Saba shall come. *℣* Bringing gold and incense. *℣* Alleluia, alleluia. *℣* Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. *℣* All they from Saba shall come, *†* Alleluia, alleluia. —*Sext Brief Responsory (Psalm lxxij/ lxxij)*

### ANTIPHONA • EGO DORMIVI, ET SOMNUM CEPI



LAIID me down and slept, and rose up again, for the Lord Eternal sustained me, alleluia, alleluia. —*Easter Matins Psalm Antiphon (Psalm iij)*



## Charles-Arnauld Tournemire

(22 January 1870, Bordeaux - 3 November 1939, Arcachon)

CHARLES TOURNEMIRE was a brilliant but now largely forgotten musical Titan who, through his genius, created a seminal work of supernal mystical transcendence that rightly ought to be lauded by each passing generation—L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE.

Born in Bordeaux on 22 January 1870, Tournemire began his musical career as a precocious child-organist at the church of Saint-Pierre. In 1886, he moved to Paris to study composition and to privately study piano. Tournemire's nascent talent led him to the Conservatoire de Paris where he studied organ under the tutelage of César Franck, the renowned *organiste titulaire* of the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde. Indeed, to understand the heart of Charles Tournemire, one must look *ad fontes* to the love he held for his great pious Maître:

One never departed from the Seraphic Musician feeling discouraged; his comments, said in a few words, generally gentle, incisive, and salient, brightened the soul and warmed the heart. This “experience” made his pupils smile. How many times, for our part, did we not hear him say: “Try to find yourself.... Years will be necessary....” The goodness of César Franck was immeasurable. If he lived for transcendent art, he knew, nevertheless how to interest himself with the life of those who came to him. He possessed, to an outstanding degree, the intelligence of the heart.

Through Franck, Tournemire experienced a metanoia—a new awareness of Transcendence and a vocational awakening. Exuding an ineffable sapience and a nurturing spirit, and referred to by his students as *Pater Seraphicus* (the moniker of Saint Francis of Assisi), Franck's heuristic pedagogical approach had a compositional and improvisational emphasis; but more importantly, he sought to create not simply *organists* but *artists*, imploring his students to seek the *Soul of Music*.

Then in the spring of 1890 tragedy struck: While riding in a carriage through the streets of Paris, Franck's cab collided with a horse-drawn omnibus. Although the injuries he sustained seemed innocuous at the time, they proved gravely deleterious resulting in Pleurisy complicated by Pericarditis eventuating in his death on 8 November 1890. In and of itself, Franck's passing was greatly traumatic to the young Tournemire; yet to add to his grief, Franck's successor, Charles-Marie Widor (the fêted organist of Saint-Sulpice Paris known by the epithet *Le Roi des organistes français*), compounded Tournemire's misery. Widor's relationship with Tournemire could at best be termed frigid, the grieving pupil feeling *Le Roi des organistes français* to be an abysmal replacement for the *Pater Seraphicus*. Widor's rigid, formulaic style rooted in Classical pedantry, his emphasis on technique over artistic exploration, along with Widor's cold demeanour and open denigration of his Maître Franck, horrified Tournemire. Louis Vierne, Tournemire's fellow student (later to become organist at Notre-Dame in Paris), vividly remembered Widor's opening remarks upon his succession to the post: “In France, we greatly favour improvisation over execution. This is more than a mistake. It is nonsense!” From the onset, Widor condemned Tournemire's improvisatory style as mere “aquatic music.” Having neglected to do proper obeisance to *Le Roi*, Tournemire would recollect that there was “a chill that degenerated on the part of Charles-Marie Widor into a profound and absurdly enduring hatred with regard to me”—a hatred that would come to haunt Tournemire later in life. Rising above the odium, however, Tournemire was able to use the principles Widor fostered (or as Tournemire termed it, Widor's *technique formidable*) to his advantage, winning the *Premier prix d'orgue* in 1891 and acquiring the coveted organ bench of Sainte-Clotilde from Gabriel Pierné in 1898, despite Widor's attempt to undermine his appointment. It was there, from that tribune, that Tournemire would then be blessed to remain in the edifying spiritual presence of his Maître for the rest of his days.



## Music & Mysticism

The music of Tournemire and the mysticism expressed through his art did not manifest itself *ex nihilo* but is part of a greater metanarrative that begins with the theodicy of the Gallican Church as secular society grappled with dramatic political upheaval and as the Church struggled for survival and integrity within a disquieted and reactionary culture. Born of the Enlightenment, the demagogues of the French Revolution, viewing the Church with implacable antipathy, sought to abrogate its existence. The fall of the *Ancien Régime* in 1789 and the resulting chaos of *la Terreur* saw the predation of the great churches of France and the imprisonment or martyrdom of recusant clergy (the abjuring priests being those who obsequiously renounced Christianity in favour of the Deist *Culte de l'Être Suprême*). Even the reordering of the calendar into *décades* sought to suppress the hebdomadal celebration of the Sabbath. Until a tenuous *rapprochement* was reached via the Napoleonic *Concordat* of 1801, the Church laid in a moribund state, and naturally, the vocation of organist well-nigh tumbled into oblivion. Eventually rising from the ashes, the Church's recrudescence during the Bourbon Restoration and Second Empire periods saw the emergence of the monumental instruments of the organ-builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll. Yet, still, sacred music at this time fell victim to the prevailing bourgeois theatrical indulgences of Romanticism. Men like Louis-James-Alfred Lefébure-Wély typified the cloyingly melodramatic organ-playing of the epoch with his specialisation in *storm scenes*, insipidly gooey sentimentalism, and in the use of overtly secular operatic melodies, or as the musicologist Norbert Dufourcq described this liturgical nadir: "the epitome of banality, triviality, and the *style de salon*."

Then in 1870, the French Second Empire collapsed in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War and the concomitant catastrophic Paris Commune of 1871. The nation, ensanguined from this tumult, paused and engaged in serious ruminations, and as a result, a new generation of artists emerged. Widor, who at that time would assume the role of *provisional organist* at Saint-Sulpice in Paris (a position he held for sixty-four years), came to embody the sense of gravitas of the new Third Republic with his classical ideals of maturity, nobility, and elegance, eschewing the theatrical frivolity of the Bourbon Restoration and Second Empire periods. Nonetheless, despite elevating the tone of the Catholic Mass, musical grandeur rather than religiosity reigned in the court of *Le Roi des organistes français*; but upon the reopening of the Conservatoire after the chaos of the Paris Commune, a countervailing prophetic voice resounded to challenge the opprobrious state of affairs. That still small voice who would espouse a more spiritually cultivated vision was the newly-appointed professor, the organist from Liège, César Franck. Franck's predecessor, François Benoist, had led his organ students in a thoroughly unremarkable direction, and it was felt by the Conservatoire that Franck's appointment would be equally inconsequential. They could not have been more mistaken. Inculcating his students to heed the great Virtues of their vocation, of Franck's pious artistry Gustave Dérépas wrote:

César Franck's mysticism is the direct expression of the soul and leaves him his full consciousness in his aspirations toward the Divine.... This music, which is truly as much the sister of prayer as of poetry, does not weaken or enervate us, but rather restores to the soul, now led back to its first Source, the grateful waters of emotion, of light, of impulse; it leads back to heaven and to the City of Rest.

Archbishop Darboy (who later was to be assassinated during the Commune), is said to have remarked of Franck to Sainte-Clotilde's priest, "You have there a marvellous intercessor, my son; he will win souls to God more than we can." Despite such esteemed sacerdotal accolades, ultimately the more socially acceptable Widor, who adeptly navigated within the upper echelons of the Parisian *haut monde*, held popular preëminence, while the dowdy, foreign-born Franck suffered baleful indignation in the hands of the secular and xenophobic establishment. To the horror of Franck's devoted students who held their Maître in hagiographic awe (a coterie later to be known as the *Bande à Franck*), the vast majority of the Conservatoire faculty quietly boycotted the funeral of the *Pater Seraphicus* as a subtle and vindictive expression of animus.

While the organ world was embroiled in its own imbrolios, what was to be a seminal musical influence in France was established in 1832 by Pope Gregory XVI in the form of the Benedictine monastery of Solesmes. Under the guidance of Dom Prosper Guéranger, this abbey—which was

partially destroyed during *la Terreur*—balked the anti-Catholic rancour that pervaded post-revolutionary France. With its Ultramontane proclivities, Solesmes became the focal point for the palaeographic and semiological study of Gregorian Chant, their work culminating in the publication of the *Liber Usualis* in 1896, a work that would ultimately receive official papal imprimatur under Pope Pius X. Their florid and expressive chant interpretation having a complex prosody composed of a composite duple-triple rhythmical ictus was conceptually revolutionary in its day. In the *Méthode raisonnée de plainchant* (1859), Guéranger explained, "Plainsong is an inflected recitation in which the notes have an unfixed value, the rhythm of which, essentially free, is that of ordinary speech." Prior to this, chant in the Gallican tradition was performed with a very strict note-for-note hymn-like homophonic accompaniment in metrical rhythm with a "modern" diatonic harmony to painfully over-simplified chant renditions. The richly elaborate melodic freedom and nuance revealed through Solesmes' renaissance insights much annoyed men like Widor who believed this style to have "too many ornaments, too many accents, and too many notes." Widor, who continued to advocate the simplified method that more adeptly reflected his notion of strict metronomical *volonté*, rather indignantly remarked:

The rhythmical freedom of Gregorian chant clashes with our stern metronomic time. What task requires more delicate handling than the transcription into modern notation of a vocal Gradual or of an Alleluia? The transcriber is reduced to the necessity of verbal explanations: quasi recitativo, rubato, espressivo, a piacere, &c.

In 1894, inspired by the work of Solesmes, Charles Bordes, Alexandre Guilmant, and Vincent d'Indy founded the Schola Cantorum, a society established to rival the Conservatoire devoted to the performance of plainchant according to the Gregorian tradition and that enjoined the creation of modern liturgical music. Born of the *Bande à Franck*, the Schola had four goals: The return to the Gregorian tradition of plainchant; the restoration of Renaissance polyphony (in particular that epitomised by Palestrina); the creation of modern choral music that pays homage to Gregorian Plainsong and Renaissance polyphony, and that, most importantly, respects the Liturgy; and finally, the improvement of organ repertoire that it may be more rightly apposite for the Church. Indeed, the Schola marked the dawn of modern musicology looking to the antecedents of the Enlightenment for musical wisdom to incorporate into the modern age.

Such opinions did not go without sparking heated vituperation emanating from the famously self-aggrandising and pugnacious French cultural élite whose laicistic ire was especially fomented in light of the tensions found in the wider political arena. Societally, antagonism toward the Church reached an apogee after 1900 when, as a result of the frenzied vitriolic Republican fervour ignited by the Dreyfus Affair *cause célèbre*, the government enacted an array of anti-clerical legislative decrees asserting laicistic cultural hegemony eviscerating the Church through the confiscation of Church property and closing of schools, plus the deracinating of monasteries such as Solesmes. The French Premier René Viviani would declare, "We have extinguished in the firmament lights that will never be rekindled." Not one to sit idly by, the Church tried to reassert its influence in French society. Musically speaking within that wider context, Pope Pius X issued a letter *motu proprio* in 1903 called *Tra le sollicitudini* endorsing the work of the Schola and Solesmes:

Sacred music should consequently possess, in the highest degree, the qualities proper to the Liturgy, and in particular sanctity and goodness of form, which will spontaneously produce the final quality of universality. It must be holy, and must, therefore, exclude all profanity not only in itself but in the manner in which it is presented by those who execute it. It must be true art, for otherwise, it will be impossible for it to exercise on the minds of those who listen to it that efficacy which the Church aims at obtaining in admitting into her Liturgy the art of musical sounds. But it must, at the same time, be universal in the sense that while every nation is permitted to admit into its ecclesiastical compositions those special forms which may be said to constitute its native music, still these forms must be subordinated in such a manner to the general characteristics of sacred music that nobody of any nation may receive an impression other than good on hearing them. These qualities are to be found, in the highest degree, in Gregorian Chant, which is, consequently the chant proper to the Roman Church, the only chant she has inherited from the ancient fathers, which she has jealously guarded for centuries in her liturgical codices, which she directly proposes to the

faithful as her own, which she prescribes exclusively for some parts of the Liturgy, and which the most recent studies have so happily restored to their integrity and purity.

After the Great War, France mollified its harsher laicist decrees as the Church was called upon to entomb the nation's one-and-a-third million war-dead. A philosophical palingenesis initiated by the war occurred— a *renouveau catholique*. Musically within the context of that ameliorative climate, Cardinal Dubois of Paris gave his official approbation for the use of the 1904 *Liberal Usualis*, and the *Institut grégorien* was founded. Then in 1922, the monks of Solesmes were welcomed back to France affording them the opportunity to further promulgate their notions.

The vicissitudes endured by the Church and the appeals within the institution for musical integrity proved highly formative upon Tournemire, but then in 1903, he married Alice Taylor through whom he would have his initial foray into mysticism. Her sister was the wife of Josephin “Sâr” Péladan, a French mystic and founder of the *Ordre de Rose & Croix* in Paris. In the 1890s, Péladan famously hosted salons promoting the literary, visual, and musical art of the *Symbolists*, a movement that emerged during the *Fin-de-siècle* that sought to capture the noumenal through allegorical abstraction. In his article *L'esthétique au salon de 1883*, Péladan defined his vision of art:

Art is man's effort to realise the Ideal, to form and represent the supreme Idea, the Idea *par excellence*, the abstract Idea. Great artists are religious because to materialise the Idea of God, the Idea of an angel, the Idea of the Virgin Mother, requires an incomparable psychic effort and procedure. Making the invisible visible: that is the true purpose of art and its only reason for existence.

As the poet Stéphane Mallarmé argued, the nodus of Truth cannot be *copied* but can be only *pointed to* saying that “the ideal is to *suggest* the object. It is the perfect use of this mystery that constitutes the *symbol*. An object must be gradually evoked in order to show a state of soul.” As his philosophies ossified, Tournemire found himself in concord with this artistic *raison d'être*, espousing the Symbolist epistemology where one sees through the glass dimly via allegorical adumbrations of artistic simulacrum. Tournemire became a passionate follower of the works of Joris-Karl Huysmans, Ernest Hello, and Leon Bloy; and in 1922, upon the death of Saint-Saëns, Tournemire was awarded the music chair of the *Société Baudelaire*, thus further exposing him to the eminent artists and philosophers of the day. Tournemire's Faith was not a simple *a priori* assertion; but through scholarly erudition rooted in *philosophia perennis*, he excogitated a religiously pansophical teleological dialectic... a *theosophical eschatology* wherein, having “glimpsed the harmony and flow of things spiritual,” he perceived that God through Xrist, “crucified out of love of the Good,” constituted an ultimate apotheosis. Through this esotericism, he sought to sonorously elicit the noumenal ontological and broader metaphysical Truths of the Church through the mystically illuminating wisdom of music. Armed with these rarefied insights, he would withdraw to his summer cottage on the Île d'Ouessant off the coast of Brittany on whose property was situated a moulin that he had furnished with a music atelier. There he found his compositional muse where, in the serenity of that halcyon hermitage, he would “look to the sea for answers.” Music to Tournemire was not a mere *métier*. Being a man of humble disposition and intellectual acuity, and with a profound entelechial vocational awareness, the nihilism endemic in the secular sphere and the irksome hubris of its musicians were anathema to Tournemire who, through religious and philosophical cognisance, descried the realm of transcendent, immutable Verities. He averred a latreutic musical axiology opining philosophically facile temporal music as *worthless* famously proclaiming *organ music where God is absent is a body without a soul*. In his unpublished treatise, *De la haute mission de l'organiste à l'église*, Tournemire invoked the words of Hello: “Higher than reason, orthodox mysticism sees, hears, touches, and feels that which reason is incapable of seeing, hearing, touching, and feeling”; and in his biography of Franck (an honorific didactic paean dedicated to his Maître written while composing L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE), he pronounced:

Did not Ernest Hello—the Franck of literature, as Henri Duparc called him—also have a very clear understanding of his own worth when he exclaimed: “I would like to know glory.” He was thinking about the glory to which a gifted, prayerful, and humble writer has the right... Glory, which is to say, “a call which *has been heard* by souls and is bearing fruit; a call which invariably leads to the praise of the One who saved the world.”

## A Period of Losses

Tournemire's antebellum period (1898-1914) was a happy one fecund with success. In addition to acquiring the post at Sainte-Clotilde and his marriage to Alice Taylor, his musical output included his first five orchestral symphonies, and his cantata *Le Sang de la Sirène*, which won the *Concours musicale de las ville de Paris* in 1904— but then the lamps went out all over Europe.

With the Great War (1914-1918), the Romantic ideals that propelled society through the nineteenth century reached an inexorable calamitous end bringing a cultural shift in music and marking the beginning of a period of deep personal despondency for Tournemire. As he grew in years, Tournemire's Post-Romantic harmonic language initially entered into Impressionism but later moved toward a chromatic polymodality. Notwithstanding his modern proclivities, he became out of step with the disillusioned nihilism of the *génération perdue* whose avant-garde music then in vogue (epitomised by Igor Stravinsky and *Les Six*) was a wanton iconoclastic reaction against Romanticism and Impressionism. This cultural and aesthetic shift resulted in Tournemire's music being buffeted with harsh criticism or, at best, damning praise. In 1925, the critic Émile Vuillermoz lamented that “Tournemire's vast compositions [would not destine him for] great success among the crowds.” Later noting the same qualities in his organ music, the organist, Flor Peeters, who nonetheless was a great supporter of Tournemire, remarked:

Tournemire's organ music speaks to an intelligent, spiritually-oriented listener, in short, to an élite. By contrast, Vierne's organ music, with its simple lines and wonderful effects, addresses itself to a larger audience.

In 1919, Tournemire was granted the Ensemble Class professorship at the Conservatoire, but this was simply believed to be a stepping-stone, for he was generally accepted as the Professor of Organ presumptive heir-apparent in continuance of the lineage of his Maître Franck. The organist Eugène Gigout (who had succeeded Widor) had taken on the position emphasising improvisation and chant accompaniment, so Tournemire was seen as destined to carry the baton into the future; however, through the machinations of Tournemire's nemesis Widor, he was glossed over for Widor's protégé Marcel Dupré who, through his well-cultivated performance-oriented career and prodigious cult-following, stole Tournemire's apparent birth-right. However, Tournemire's sense of personal anguish caused by this criticism and rejection in the shadow of those who basked in societal éclat paled in comparison to the tragic loss of his loving wife Alice in July of 1919 that launched in him a disconsolate period of deep and haunting darkness.

## The Ageing Tournemire

After this period of personal tragedy, Tournemire voraciously busied himself with some of his most profound musical output climaxing in 1927 when he began perhaps his greatest work, the landmark L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE. Written in the context of the interbellum *renouveau catholique*, this colossal cycle, consisting of fifty-one Offices each with five liturgical movements to be performed during the Mass, is often credited with being the Catholic equivalent to the Lutheran Cantatas of Bach. Indeed, this mammoth fifteen hour-long opus alone exceeds in duration Bach's entire collected organ works. Yet, despite the noble grandeur and profundity of his achievements, his endeavours, which invariably were intellectually and spiritually recherché, continued to be disregarded by a culture with more plebeian sensibilities, causing the discomfited Tournemire to repine, “I did not intend to create a museum.”

In his dotage, Tournemire's mercurially emotive nature (a personality trait common to those from Bordeaux) could transform into explosive irascibility, especially when piqued by the braggadocio of his more acclaimed, immodest, meretricious, and philosophically nescient colleagues. His feelings of estrangement only increased after he remarried in 1934 to the young besotted Alice Espir, whose protective (if not possessive) adoration exasperated the situation. Of Tournemire's perceived enigmatic froideur, the organist Daniel-Lesur insightfully noted:

In him, the man and the artist were one and the same: Of noble character, he remained aloof from all kinds of intrigue and, if he suffered deeply from being ignored by his peers, he was entirely aware of his worth. He could be difficult. Relaxed, Tournemire let a more familiar aspect of his personality appear, most often good-natured, occasionally not so good-natured,



always spontaneous. Endowed with a highly emotional nature, it was not rare to see him go in several instants from calm to the most vehement indignation. One sensed that he held to an absolute value: grandeur. The eclectic along with the dilettante were, without doubt, intellectual attitudes in direct contradiction to his temperament. His love of nature was intense. Each year saw him carry back from his retreat on the Île d'Ouessant one or another new *chef-d'œuvre*, pondered while facing the ocean. The ocean's presence marked his character with a sense of universal grandeur. The ocean and the cathedrals.

On 3 September 1939, war with Germany was again declared. The “just and lasting peace” proclaimed after the Great War had merely created the justification for a new and even greater war. During the psychologically tense preamble to hostilities known as the *drôle de guerre*, Sainte-Clotilde was closed due to the threat of bombardment citing its proximity to the French War Ministry, moving to a small chapel on rue La Cases. Bereft of an organ and his cherished Sainte-Clotilde, Tournemire and his wife retreated to his sister's cottage in the coastal village of Arcachon, and it was there that the unthinkable happened. Tournemire left the house on 31 October only to be found by an oyster farmer drowned in the Bassin d'Arcachon four days later. Due to the chaos caused by the onset of the war, his body was hastily buried without autopsy or funeral. The mystery surrounding his shocking and shadowy demise and abrupt interment sans the obsequies only fitting for a man of such dedicated Faith has ignited rampant rumour and intrigue with pervasive mutterings suggesting suicide. Though vehemently condemned by Tournemire's disciples as incongruous with his famed piety, there is an unuttered, dolorous acknowledgement of another possibility: The imminent probable fall of France to Nazism, the personal loss of his precious Saint-Clotilde, his career rife with discomfiture and the sense of perfidy he felt from those whom he had trusted, increasing financial woes that threatened the loss of his home in Paris, his life-long pensive and melancholic emotional sensitivity, and a diagnosis of prostate cancer that resulted in a surgery that rendered him gravely enfeebled— Collectively these all may well have led to the collapse of his spirit. It was as though the vicious world had said to Tournemire that it was time, and in the shadow of All Soul's Day, looking to his beloved oceanic source of wisdom and peace, he yielded himself to its pelagic embrace.

### *An Improvisor of Genius*

His musical works were legion; yet despite Tournemire's enormous and incredibly profound compositional output, he is still most famously known as an improviser extraordinaire. In fact, most organists fail to know him beyond his *Cinq improvisations*. Recorded on cylinder at Sainte-Clotilde in 1930, they were posthumously transcribed by Maurice Duruflé, one of Tournemire's most renowned students, thereby bequeathing to the ages a veiled glimpse of Tournemire's ephemeral art from its otherwise sepulchral silence. Remembering a post-Mass Sortie, Duruflé described one of Tournemire's fervid improvisations:

Carried away by the music that sprang forth spontaneously from his fingers, he could no longer control his reflexes. He had departed elsewhere. When he played upon the Récit, he would close his eyes at the same time as the expression box. During a crescendo he could be seen becoming animated little by little, emphasising with an involuntary grimace a particularly dissonant harmony. Then as he reached the tutti, at the reëntrance of the themes in pedal octaves, he suddenly stood on the pedal keyboard for several measures, to the great astonishment of his guests, all the while continuing to improvise. He rarely finished the *sortie* on full organ. He generally preferred to conclude in softness and ecstasy. All organists knew the following anecdote: One Sunday, after Tournemire had finished his *sortie* very quietly on a Récit Bourdon, one of his guests discreetly moved to his ear, intending to do him a favour, and said to him in a low voice, “Maître, this is the *sortie*.” The Maître suddenly glanced at him and calmly replied, “Well, my dear friend, *sortez*.”

Béranger de Miramon Fritz-James, founder of *Amis de l'orgue*, commented that “the feverish inspirations” of Tournemire's passionately pious Symbolist organ improvisations had revealed him to be a “liturgical metaphysician, and illustrator, and musical preacher.”

### *L'Orgue Mystique*

On 4 January 1927, Tournemire played for the marriage of his student, Joseph Bonnet, and at the wedding, he announced in the presence of Dom Joseph Gajard (choirmaster at the Solesmes Abbey) and Louis Vierne that he would begin work on what was then termed *L'Orgue Glorieux*, something Bonnet had long been advocating.

Spurred on by the technological and tonal advances of the nineteenth-century organ-builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, Paris saw the rise of the *Messe basse pour orgue*, a peculiarly French invention where the Grand Orgue made liturgical cantillations within the Mass in lieu of a choir. While popular, the disconnect between the altar and the organ (or indeed the adversarial relationship between the two) became notorious, the event essentially becoming an organ concert where a Mass just happened to be taking place. L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE, through its liturgical sensitivity, would challenge this concert ethos rendering a musical *beau idéal* purely *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.

Hoping to elevate the Mass to its full theological musical grandeur, Bonnet, seeking to enkindle the flame of inspiration, had gifted Tournemire with Dom Guéranger's magnum tome, *L'Année liturgique* that ultimately would serve as a liturgical and theological guide for what Tournemire initially called *L'Orgue glorieux*. After Bonnet's wedding, having found his muse, Tournemire organised the chants to be cited in a grand plan using the 1922 *Paroissien romain* edition of the *Liber Usualis* and the 1897 edition of the *Liber Antiphonarius* as musical sources. His *modus operandi* was to begin with the feast days, establishing the work's soteriological emphasis by starting with Easter Day—which Tournemire termed “a sun that shines around him a *multitude of worlds*”—completing this Office on 11 November 1927. Upon the composition of the final feast day (All Saints) on 16 March 1928, Tournemire renamed the work L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE. Then composing the rest of the year in liturgical sequence, he finished the last Office on 5 February 1932. Consisting of over a thousand pages of printed music (frontispieces, forewords, &c. makes final page-tally around thirteen hundred), the score took a gruelling eight years for the publisher Heugel to complete. In the *Foreword* to L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE Bonnet wrote:

A great musician was needed for its accomplishment, a master of organ technique and composition, having a great Spirit of Faith, loving the supernatural beauty of the Liturgy and of Gregorian melodies, a disciple of J. S. Bach and his Latin forerunners who created for Gregorian themes different forms that the *Great Cantor* resumed in the chorale preludes. This great musician had to work in peace and meditation as an artist must do. It is a splendid evocation of the architecture of our cathedrals, of the rich colour of their stained glass, of liturgical splendour revealed to us in the Monastery of Solesmes as we would like to find in every church of the Catholic world. Our modern musical writing is extraordinarily fit to adorn the Gregorian melodies. [*Alternate translation*: Our contemporary musical language possesses astonishing aptitudes to paraphrase Gregorian melodies eternally young.] So without sacrificing anything of his rich imagination, of his brilliant originality, Charles Tournemire has succeeded in creating such a mystical frame for the liturgical melodies.

In losing the Organ Professorship to Dupré, Tournemire would surpass Dupré in musical achievement through L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE both in substance and scope. Each of the fifty-one volumes of L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE consists of five movements to be offered during the *Grand messe*:

- PRÉLUDE À L'INTROÏT** Based on that chant, to be played after the *Asperges me* or *Vidi aquam* as the priest returns to the Altar prior to the Introit. (*Omitted Sabbato Sancto*)
- OFFERTOIRE** Based on that chant, played after the Offertory as the Host is prepared.
- ÉLEVATION** Derived from an Antiphon from one of the Offices of the day, to be played during or following the Elevation. In truth, Tournemire preferred silence during the actual *Verba Testamenti* with this Elevation music to be played concurrently with the second half of the Canon. (*Omitted Sabbato Sancto*)
- COMMUNION** Based on that chant, to be played prior to the Antiphon ending Communion.
- PIÈCE TERMINALE** Derived from Hymns, Graduals, Alleluias, Antiphons, &c. related to that Feast, to be played as the Sortie or Postlude.

Stylistically, Tournemire's musical impetus had a nineteenth-century French symphonic organ foundation while being infused with Post-Romantic and Impressionistic elements—his ardent faith finding its voice through the language of Gregorian Chant. Over three hundred chants are incorporated into the two hundred fifty-three movements of L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE. What is more, his Symbolist semiotic approach made each composition a musical exegesis based upon the chant libretto. He frequently used the term *paraphrase*, which refers not merely to the musical rendering of a *cantus firmus* but the piece's *theological hermeneutic*. In fact, he called the *Pièce terminale* a *résumé* or a compilation of thoughts for each feast; hence, it is not simply Tournemire's musical exploitation of chant that makes L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE significant, but rather it was the theological elucidations that Tournemire evinced *through* chant combined with his ability to educe within the heart of the listener the latent human intuitive ken of the Divine through his art that makes it a monumental pinnacle of sacred music.

Prima facie, L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE sounds like an improvisational dithyramb conjured in the nonce; yet in truth, this *chef-d'œuvre* exhibits Tournemire's Franckian Post-Romantic structurally nuanced approach where thematic reiterations are adroitly transmogrified through Beethovenian deductive cyclic techniques. Whilst utilising such traditional styles as fantasias, toccatas, chorales, and fugues, and being rooted in the Gregorian tradition, L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE is hardly an atavistic expression of antediluvian musical archaicism, for he bedighted these ancient formulæ in modern *vêtement* or, as Stephen Schloesser termed it, a *futural past*. Foregoing key-signatures, in addition to the Occidental modes, Tournemire employed extreme chromaticism and musically heterodox Octatonic and Carnatic scales; thus serving as a bellwether for Messiaen (with whom he enjoyed a philosophical propinquity). In superimposing Gregorian monody and organum over diaphanous Impressionistic sonorities and impassioned Romantic dissonance, his music exhibits a *sui generis* chiaroscuro of harmonies. Of particular note is the *Tournemire Chord* (akin to the Wagnerian *Tristan Chord* or Scriabin's *Prometheus Chord*) whose rich complexity forms a harmonic climax or theological dénouement. In performance, Wagnerian *melos* and Gregorian prosodical nuance rather than metronomical *volonté* shapes note duration, thus mensural time is abandoned in favour of a sonorous sense of Eternity. Including up to seven staves indicating different manuals, the score often has visually confusing hand-inversions in addition to having a great deal of one-handed double-keyboard play as well as double-peddalling. Many times the chant is fully cited, but more often than not, the figuration of the chant is manipulated to the point of deformed obscurity where simply the meaning behind the devotional odes and biblical pericopes of the epigraph are allegorically realised through the aesthetic. Tournemire also shattered the restrictive paradigms that shackled classical stop registration, opening the organ to heretofore unheard timbres, all in aid of effectuating a new mellifluous dimension to his theological meditations.

Perhaps the most remarkable movement within each Office is the *Pièce terminale*. Most commonly frequenting concert settings, the *Pièce terminale* exhibits the wide-ranging palate Tournemire had at his fingertips. It oftentimes disappoints those seeking superficial organ-bombast, flamboyant whimsy, or mere piquant witticism, for Tournemire's sense of Divine grandeur and spiritual intimacy seeks not to incite congregations to surge for the door after Mass with a mighty din but calls humanity to a more profound, reflective response (much to the stultification of the aforementioned jejune archetypes). Often having a duration of eight to twelve minutes, these climatic closing movements hardly conform to the notion of a brief, boisterous, postludal flourish as is common praxis. Even Tournemire's observance of Easter defies expectations, reaching its rapturous terminus not with a sforzando but with a spiritually corybantic pianissimo expressing the intense elation of a newly-redeemed humanity.

Tournemire saw L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE as the quintessence of vocation reified—an ambrosial paragon to be seen as both a liturgical exemplar and a monolithic work of sacred art. With an amorphous sense of metre and tonal centre, freely moving from religious modal purity to vexed Romantic chromaticism, L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE floats unfettered between the realms of Eternity and tellurian passion contextualising man's subastral human frailty under a God of transcendent aseity yet all-embracing immanence. Indeed, the aura of beatific stupefaction and pious pathos imparted through L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE echos words found in Hello's *Paroles de Dieu* (1877): "This magnificent replacement of fear by awe [*de la peur par la crainte*] that opens the window for adoration."

## A Musical Monument Lost to History

The public and critical commentary concerning L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE spanned the spectrum, but all were stunned. A critique in *Le Monde Musical* of a concert given by Duruflé of two pieces from L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE still in manuscript form seemed to capture the dichotomy:

[The first piece was] played in encore with enthusiasm. It was ravishing. [But the second,] filled with *fantaisie*, seemed to describe—in the manner of the gargoyles of our very oldest basilicas—the very worst moral ugliness, nightmares of sins, accursed *hallucinations*. The mind is not moved when the ear is shocked.

Yet, in that same critique, the author conceded that Tournemire had created "something of beauty." Messiaen, one of the great supporters of L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE, deferentially remarked that its "rhapsodic liberty" defied "all analysis" as though to suggest that all one could do is behold the work in awe and gasp. The work's acclaim climaxed on 24 April 1932 when the great organists of the next generation: Maurice Duruflé, André Fleury, Jean Langlais, Noëlle Pierront, Gaston Litaize, Jean-Yves Daniel-Lesur, and Olivier Messiaen, performed L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE in a nationally broadcasted concert from Sainte-Clotilde thereby establishing it as one of the great works of the century. The critic Pierre Giritat, drawing a parallel to Saint Thomas Aquinas, called L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE a "sonorous *Summa Theologica*"... "daring" and "overwhelming." He continued:

The art of Charles Tournemire is one of the most subtle of our time. It is appealing to traditionalist on account of its return to the spirit and to the modal forms of a past extending even anterior to Bach, yet it is evolutionary in its adoption of modern *polytonality* denounced as diabolical by conservatives. Tournemire mixes together harmonies like the poetry of cathedrals alloys mystical perfumes. [Posterity] will remember the work of Tournemire as one of the most exceptional and the freest in a petty and troubled epoch.

If only this were true. History has been grievously neglectful of Tournemire's music and obdurate to his Ideals, and understandably so: His music's intimidating intellectual content, the chaos enveloping the world at that time, the ever-burgeoning myopic apostasy of the secular postwar period where Faith is held as a pejorative state of being, as well as the abnegation of the metaphysically transcendent Tridentine Liturgy that came to be decried as a ritualistic shibboleth by a generation favouring puerile cosy informality—These all played a role in his modern obscurity. Indeed, the year after the completion of L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE, the world, enveloped in the Great Depression, negligently acquiesced to the accession of Hitler to power as it slowly marched down the road to madness. L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE and its creator came to be included among the many victims of this overwhelmingly tragic era. Yet, still, the man would become an iconic progenitor whose prophetic vision opened the burgeoning minds of a budding generation of future artists, his music embodying the Augustinian notion of *ab exterioribus ad interiora*, *ab interioribus ad superiora*. On the tenth anniversary of Tournemire's death, Langlais, Tournemire's eventual successor at Sainte-Clotilde, offered this panegyric:

On 4 November 1939, the news of Charles Tournemire's death struck the musical world. It was then, the day of his feast, that this great master, whose message was so in advance of our conception of art, left us. But thanks to his work, he lives.... He erected a monument, a religious summation, in his L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE, which makes him one of the greatest servants of Christian art and even of art in general. Such an anniversary must deeply grieve all who are attached to Sainte-Clotilde, which he served with passion, and, with a feeling so common to many great men, that of not being understood except by a small number of devotees.

Indeed, the man and his musical legacy are known but to a privileged few, yet L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE is a supernal masterpiece —*ne plus ultra*— that needs to be shared among this increasingly spiritually void and vacuous world with its heartbreaking evanescent cognisance of Divinity. A miraculous work of true art, L'ORGUE MYSTIQUE in a sense exhibits *potentia obadientia* in the Verities its euphonic allegory reveals, invokes, if not embodies. Truly, it is difficult to think upon Charles Tournemire and not utter the word *genius*—for Tournemire would discover that the search for the *Soul of Music* extolled by his Maître Franck was, in fact, a quest to know the ultimate SOUL.

PER • ASPERA • SPERA  
THROUGH ADVERSITY, HOPE  
—*The epitaph on the tomb of Charles-Arnauld Tournemire*

