

Preludes & Postludes

Online Concert

December 31, 2020, at 5 p.m.

Paul Meier, organist



A Very French New Year

Organ Symphony No. 3 in f-sharp minor Louis Vierne
(1870-1937)

1. Allegro maestoso
2. Cantilène
3. Intermezzo
4. Adagio
5. Final

PROGRAM NOTES

The organ symphonies of French composers are more often represented in abridged forms in modern recitals, which makes a complete performance of an organ symphony of Louis Vierne (1870-1937) worth relishing. From the year 1911, the Third Symphony in F-sharp minor is dedicated to and was premiered by his longtime friend and protege, Marcel Dupré (1886-1971), before a famous falling out between the two master French organists occurred.

Commencing with a loud, highly chromatic *Allegro maestoso*, the main 2-bar theme (with a three-note pick-up) is stated *fortississimo* and then repeats itself in a roughly inverted form – emphasizing with the ultimate three quarter notes. From there, this first movement proceeds academically in a sonata allegro form. After a transition of highly chromatic, stridently dissonant large chords developing the opening theme, a second theme is introduced with the indication “*sostenuto e legato*” in the dominant key. The running eighth-notes of the second theme transform into running 16th-notes, eventually leading to the closing of the exposition with variation of the opening theme. A development section follows, as does the recapitulation in an even louder, more strident chromatic presentation emphasizing large chords.

If this first movement pushed the limits of how loud the instrument could play, the second movement, *Cantilène*, explores how softly it can play. Following this, a playful *Intermezzo* movement in triple meter then borrows much from the character of a *scherzo*, if not also a variation of its form (ABA-ABA). These two movements complement the first in keeping an almost rote agenda of the academic sonata allegro form.

The fourth movement, entitled “*Adagio*” (even though the tempo indication is “*quasi largo*”), returns to the soft, homophonic idiom of the *Cantilène*, but with a much more Wagnerian use of chromaticism. Nonetheless, it begins with the slowly unfolding canonic layering of a distinct opening theme in a diffuse B minor (based on the key signature and the note B held in the pedal). A middle section develops with an endless declamatory melody before a solo heralds again the opening theme, which is then developed further in the closing section.

The *Final* offers everything of the typical French toccata (i.e., rapid ostinato passages on the manuals with a slow melody in the pedals) which often closes such organ symphonies, but develops in a much more contrapuntal and multifarious way. A recognizable second theme repeats and then recurs between the sections that repeat the opening theme. The ostinato built on fifths often resonates into a continuous harmony, while carefully notated dynamics test the organist’s skill on the swell pedal.

Above all, Vierne uses academic forms to his advantage, allowing him to edit and perfect his musical ideas based on a purely abstract ideal. With this in mind, this Symphony deserves careful study and attention to the twists and turns of how the themes are presented and developed.

Dr. Paul Meier

Paul Meier is Director of Music at Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral in Kansas City. His performance highlights include multiple appearances as a guest organist with the Los Angeles Master Chorale at Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Kansas City Symphony at Helzberg Hall, and the Pacific Symphony at Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall. As a collaborative organist, he has performed under conductors James Conlon, Carl St. Clair, Grant Gershon, and Robert Spano. He received a Doctor of Musical Arts degree and a Master of Music degree, both with honors, from the University of Southern California, where he studied with Cherry Rhodes, and a Bachelor of Music degree from Rice University, where he studied with Clyde Holloway, with additional studies at the Norddeutschen Orgelakademie with Harald Vogel. Prior to his appointment at GHTC, Dr. Meier was Assistant Director of Music at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco. He also previously served as Associate Organist at St. James’ Episcopal Church, Los Angeles, Organist at Bel Air Presbyterian Church, Los Angeles, and Organist at Christ the King Lutheran Church, Houston.

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4 Manuals, 53 Stops, 65 Ranks (3684 pipes)

Multiple enhancements, changes & additions by both the Schantz Organ Co.
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Great Organ II

16' Spitzflöte
8' Principal
8' Bourdon
8' (PD) Nachthorn
4' Octave
4' Spillflöte
2' Doublette
IV Fourniture
III Scharf
8' Trumpet
Tremulant
Cymbelstern
Chimes

Choir Organ I (expressive)

8' Spitz Principal
8' (SW) Pommer
8' Flute Dolce
8' Flute Celeste (TC)
4' Koppelflöte
2' Blockflöte
8' Clarinet
8' English Horn
8' Royal Trumpet
8' (ANT) Imperial Trumpet
Tremulant
Harp (61 bars)
Celesta (49 bars)
Chimes

Accessories

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Manual to Pedal Piston Couplers
Full Complement of Couplers & Pistons

Swell Organ III (expressive)

16' Pommer
8' Flûte à Cheminée
8' Viole da Gamba
8' Viole Celeste
4' Prestant
4' Loch Gedackt
2 2/3' Nazard (TC)
2' Octave
2' Flûte à Bec
1 3/5' Tierce (TC)
1 1/3' Larigot
IV Plein Jeu
16' Basson
8' Trompette
8' Hautbois
8' Vox Humana
4' Clarion
Tremulant
MIDI

Positiv Organ I

8' Nazon Flöte
8' (GT) Spitzflöte
4' Spitz Octave
2 2/3' Nazat
2' Principal
1 3/5' Terz
1' Siffflöte
III Zimbel
8' Krummhorn
Tremulant

Pedal Organ

32' Bourdon
16' Open Wood
16' Contrebasse
16' Bourdon
16' Gedeckt
16' (GT) Spitzflöte
16' (SW) Pommer
10 2/3' (GT) Quint
8' Open Wood
8' Principal
8' Bourdon
8' Spitzflöte*
8' Gedeckt
4' Octave
4' Nachthorn*
2' Nachthorn*
III Mixture
32' Bombarde
16' Bombarde
16' (SW) Basson
8' Bombarde
8' (CH) Royal Trumpet
4' Bombarde
4' (CH) Clarinet
8' (ANT) Imperial Trumpet
** Stops affected by Great Tremulant*

Antiphonal IV (Coupling Manual)

8' (SW) Flûte à Cheminée
16' (SW) Basson
8' (GT) Trumpet
8' (SW) Hautbois
8' (CH) Clarinet
8' (CH) Royal Trumpet
16' Imperial Trumpet (TC)
8' Imperial Trumpet
Harp
Tower Chimes (10 Deagan Chimes)