

THE COMPLETE
WORKS FOR ORGAN

Marcel Dupré

JEREMY FILSELL

Jeanne Demessieux

STEPHEN THARP



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH
FIFTH AVENUE

We are extremely grateful to all our donors who support and enhance the activities of Concerts at Saint Thomas. This concert series is underwritten in part by the following generous individuals:



Marsha & Michael Ambler
Louise H. & John G. Beard
Ursula Corning†
Donald H. Goodyear, Jr.
Mr. & Mrs. John C. Harvey
Dan & Ellen Kiser
Michael D. Kunkel & Henry Cox
Kenneth A. Lohft†
Mary Beth & Jay Marshall
Mr. & Mrs. William R. Miller†
Russell Keys Oberlin Foundation
Simon Yates & Kevin Roon
Miles Archer Woodlief

FRONTISPIECE: Marcel Dupré at the organ, Ambrose McEvoy

CONCERTS *at*
SAINT THOMAS

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE

The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner

Rector

Dr. Jeremy Filsell

*The Nancy B. & John B. Hoffmann Organist
and Director of Music*

Marcel Dupré

THE COMPLETE WORKS FOR ORGAN

✻c PROGRAM IV ✻

JEREMY FILSELL, ORGAN

THE REV. CARL F. TURNER, SPEAKER

MARCH 30, 2021 | TUESDAY AT 6:45 PM



LE CHEMIN DE LA CROIX, OP. 29

The devotional sequence of 14 Stations of the Cross was established in a definitive form in the 18th century, but its origins go back to the earliest days of Christendom, when pilgrims to the Holy Land would follow in the footsteps of Christ on the road to Calvary, the *Via Crucis* or *Via Dolorosa*. The 14 traditional stages or ‘Stations’ trace the Passion of Christ from trial to crucifixion and burial; some of them have biblical authority, but others come from other later sources (the three painful Falls that punctuate the journey, and Veronica, the ‘pious woman’ who wiped Jesus’ face). In time this devotion was transferred to Europe, and images of each Station were placed on the walls of every Catholic church; priest and congregation move from one to another to meditate and pray — especially, of course, during Lent and Holy Week.

Dupré’s *Chemin de la Croix* had its origins in an imaginative collaboration between Professors of Literature and Music at the Royal Conservatoire in Brussels in February 1931. The literary element was a recitation of *Le Chemin de la Croix* by the Catholic dramatist, poet and diplomat Paul Claudel — an imaginative and idiosyncratic sequence of 14 poems meditating on the significance

of each Station for Christians in the modern world. In between the poems, Dupré improvised a musical commentary or illustration for each Station, and this unique event made such a deep impression on the audience that he decided to compose a written work along similar lines, which he completed the following year.

‘Advised in advance of what I would have to do’, he said, ‘I had determined, in broad terms, the musical atmosphere of each of the 14 stations, their registration, their tonality; finally, in my imagination I had found my themes, or rather the ‘symbolic motifs’ on which the finished work is constructed. Moreover, on the afternoon of the concert I devoted myself to a preliminary ‘study’ of my 14 stations, in accordance with the decisions I had made; it was a kind of rehearsal. So what I did what was part composition, part improvisation.’

Dupré’s own detailed program notes make it clear that his inspiration for this extraordinary work came from the Bible, from the rich heritage of Passiontide music, and from traditional Catholic iconography. He described it as ‘a vast symphonic poem in which several leading themes recur, but each station has its own musical conception... All the themes are not only symbolic, but also traditional, one might say. Certain intervals, certain melodic shapes are part of the patrimony of music. I researched how the Masters have agreed on certain formulas, such as the double leap of a fourth for the Cross; we find it in Bach, Handel, Schütz. The theme of Redemption, formed of four conjunct notes, is found in Handel, Bach, Franck and Wagner. The theme of the Virgin, forming the major triad, is the idea of ‘Genetrix’. The theme of Suffering, composed of a descending chromatic phrase, is found in Bach. These are all themes of traditional symbolism ...’

JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

A vivid piece of musical scene-painting, with vocal-style motifs depicting the violent cries of the crowd (in French, of course): ‘As soon as Pilate has pronounced the fateful phrase: *Gardes, saisissez-vous de cet homme!*, the agitation of the crowd, which had calmed for a

moment, breaks out again and degenerates into a tumult, in the midst of which one can hear the cries of *Barrabas, Jésus, and Qu'il soit crucifié*, finally dominated by the clamor: *Y mort*. Then, as the praetorium gradually empties, the cries recede and die away in the distance.'

JESUS IS MADE TO BEAR HIS CROSS

Against a sombre background of oppressive snapped rhythms, the Theme of the Cross rises up in sinister, discordant counterpoint; proliferating into two and then three voices, it 'overwhelms with its weight the painful rhythm of the march to Calvary.'

JESUS FALLS FOR THE FIRST TIME

The stumbling progress of Christ's ascent to Calvary is marked by three powerful marches, illustrating the three Falls. An insistent motif of descending paired notes depicts his weary steps, while his poignant 'Theme of Suffering' soars above. The march intensifies to a heart-rending climax, and then slowly recedes. 'However, the hearts of the disciples who follow him are penetrated by the gentle light of Redemption, whose consoling theme illuminates the final bars of the painful scene.'

JESUS MEETS HIS AFFLICTED MOTHER

'Mary stands by the road, frozen with horror ... Down her face flow silent tears ...' The theme of the Virgin sings out on a solo flute above a circling, almost motionless accompaniment; the first and last notes of the theme are prolonged, as if frozen in time ... Towards the end, in the pedals, there is a brief reminiscence of the 'weary steps' motif.

SIMON THE CYRENIAN HELPS JESUS TO CARRY HIS CROSS

Against an impressionistic background of gentle walking music, a duet on the Theme of the Cross unfolds in two voices, representing Jesus and Simon. At first Jesus is alone. Simon tries to join in,

but the duet is disjointed, ungainly: he is unable to keep in step. Soon he finds the rhythm: the two voices become one, and the burden of the Cross is eased.

VERONICA WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS

Veronica's song of compassion 'sings out in a harmonious, archaic and slightly exotic atmosphere'. In the bass, very quietly, the Theme of the Cross. At the end, a hushed harmonization of the Theme of Redemption.

JESUS FALLS FOR THE SECOND TIME

'The bitter ascent resumes, while the turbulent crowd presses on all sides around the tragic procession, and the second fall passes almost unnoticed.' The music of the second fall is developed from the first, intensifying the 'weary steps' motif through the addition of chromatic semiquaver decoration. Again the scene rises to a central climax and then recedes until only the rhythmic pedal figure remains.

JESUS COMFORTS THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

'The holy women follow, sad unto death, haunted by the vision of the final sacrifice. The theme of their grief rises up like a lament, to which the consoling voice of Jesus replies.'

JESUS FALLS FOR THE THIRD TIME

'The crowd is infuriated by the slow progress of the ascent; cries, clamors and insults break out on all sides.' The violence implicit in the two previous marches now erupts in full fury. The fall itself is sudden and graphic. It is followed by a long silence, before 'a few muffled spasms illustrate the crushing of the Victim.'

JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS

An agitated scherzo illustrates the pain and hostility of the stripping and flagellation. The violence suddenly ceases, and after an-

other long pause, the moving spectacle of the Savior's helpless body inspires a hushed meditation on the mystery of the Incarnation.

JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

'The obsessive rhythm of the hammer blows (theme of Crucifixion), forcing the nails through the hands and feet of Jesus, dominates this station and expresses the implacable cruelty of the executioners, while at times there rises up the heart-rending lament of the theme of Suffering.'

JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

Eerie, disembodied music floats out of the darkness. Fragmented melodic phrases evoke Christ's seven last words from the Cross, with his Theme of Consolation from the 8th Station: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'. A brief explosion of terror: the earth trembles . . . Darkness . . . Silence . . .

*JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS AND
LAID IN MARY'S BOSOM*

A sinuous arabesque for flute stops evokes the tenderness with which the body of Christ is removed from the Cross. At the end, a poignant reprise of Mary's muted song from the 4th Station, as she is reunited with the lifeless body of her son.

JESUS IS PLACED IN THE SEPULCHRE

In this final movement the women's lament (8th Station) and Christ's Theme of Suffering are woven together into a lyrical and deeply moving funeral march. But the ethereal final page rises above the darkness towards the light of a new dawn. The muffled tread of the funeral march is stilled, and the Theme of Suffering is miraculously transformed into a song of eternal life, very soft, very far away, finally fading imperceptibly into silence.