

THE COMPLETE  
WORKS FOR ORGAN

*Marcel Dupré*

JEREMY FILSELL

*Jeanne Demessieux*

STEPHEN THARP



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH  
FIFTH AVENUE

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# Marcel Dupré: The Complete Works for Organ

JEREMY FILSELL



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# Marcel Dupré

THE COMPLETE WORKS FOR ORGAN

❖ PROGRAM I ❖

JEREMY FILSELL, *organ*

JANUARY 23, 2021 | SATURDAY AT 3 PM



ENTRÉE, CANZONA ET SORTIE, OP. 62

These three little-known pieces date from the twilight of Dupré's composing career; modest in their technical demands, and traditional in their harmonic language, they were written in 1967 as a favor for his friend Heinrich Funck, the president of the Zurich Organists Association, and published in Switzerland in an anthology of contemporary liturgical music compiled by the Association to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. The first and last pieces reflect the style of the improvisations of Dupré's later years; the *Entrée* in D major is a grand processional, with full, hammered chords and a dotted pedal theme below, while the D minor *Sortie* is in the style of a toccata, with a more melodic second theme which is transformed into a hymn of thanksgiving at the end. The little *Canzona* in A minor features one of Dupré's favorite textures, which can be traced back to the *Symphonie-Passion* of 1924: an undulating, constantly shifting harmonic background created from the interplay of two accompanimental voices, both in regular crotchets, one moving on the beat and the other a quaver behind. Here they accompany a simple modal tune on the Oboe.

24 INVENTIONS, OP. 50, NOS. 1-6

In 1954 the Director of the Paris Conservatoire was tragically killed in a car crash, and Dupré was persuaded to give up his Organ Class and take on this demanding position for a term of two years, until he reached the official retirement age in 1956. The thankless and time-consuming administrative work left little time for his own playing and composition, and the only work he was able to complete during this period was an extraordinary collection of 24 short 'Inventions' in all the major and minor keys. Mostly restricted to two pages, and to three or four voices, these pieces are all fingered and pedaled, emphasizing their practical value for the student, but many of them are by no means unduly difficult, and the emphasis is far more on the compositional side, as Dupré displays unerring resource and imagination in the art of motivic contrapuntal development — 'invention' in the way that Bach understood it. Indeed, the title page of Bach's own Inventions is also perfectly applicable to Dupré: *'Upright instruction, wherein the lovers of the clavier, and especially those desirous of learning, are shown a clear way to learn to play clearly in two and three obligato parts; furthermore, at the same time not alone to have good inventiones (ideas), but to develop the same well, and above all to arrive at a cantabile style in playing and at the same time to acquire a strong foretaste of composition.'*

NO. 1 EN UT MAJEUR (POCO ANIMATO) — The arpeggio figure that has always been traditional in C major preludes animates this flowing trio, augmented in the pedal, and then inverted, but the whole piece has a curiously wistful flavor.

NO. 2 EN LA MINEUR (CALME) — an elegiac four-part chorale of gliding legato chords; the phrases of the tune are repeated in the bass on the pedals, whose entry fills out the texture to a richly expressive five parts.

NO. 3 EN SOL MAJEUR (ALLEGRETTO) — A perky trio for Oboe, Flute and pedal, bristling with crushed notes, and further enlivened at the end by dancing staccato octaves in the bass.

NO. 4 EN MI MINEUR (ANDANTE SERIOSO) — A trio of a very different kind, as two sinuous chromatic lines on different manuals engage in an expressive dialogue above long pedal points.

NO. 5 EN FA MAJEUR (ANDANTINO) — A bass line in flowing quavers, a soft two-part accompaniment in the left hand, and a solo tune in the right. On the second page the hands take over the quavers and the tune moves to the pedal.

NO. 6 EN RÉ MINEUR (ALLEGRO CON MOTO) — A vigorous, boldly registered, and very Bach-like trio in fugal style.

#### SUITE BRETONNE, OP. 21

##### *Berceuse — Fileuse — Les Cloches de Perros-Guirec*

Composed in the summer of 1923, and premiered during his second transcontinental tour later that year, the *Suite Bretonne* was the second work inspired by Dupré's encounter with the organs of America. The previous year he had described his *Variations sur un Noël* as 'a synthesis of the orchestral possibilities of the modern organ', and he continued on this path in the *Suite*. In the *Fileuse* he again exploited the technical possibilities opened up by a light electric action, and in the *Carillon* he included an important part for that most American of organ stops, the Chimes. Dupré was proud to be a Frenchman, and never more so than during his early years as a touring virtuoso: the *Variations* were based on a traditional French carol, and the *Suite* that followed was inspired by the picturesque countryside of Brittany. He always enjoyed painting with watercolors, and the artist's eye is very much in evidence here . . .

The gently rocking rhythms, the delicate pastel shades of color, and the pretty canon at the end combine in the opening *Berceuse* to create the perfect lullaby. The fleeting *Fileuse* (Spinning Song) was inspired by the sight of an old peasant woman sitting at the spinning-wheel by her cottage door. Two themes — a little dancing motif, and a tiny fanfare for flute — accompany the spinning



throughout this vividly descriptive, featherlight scherzo, and the jazzy harmonies that appear near the end are as unexpected as they are delightful. The title of the final movement might lead the listener to expect a typical French toccata or carillon, but the extended finale of Dupré's *Suite Bretonne* is a pastoral rhapsody full of soft, evocative colors: a rustic drone, with characteristic crushed notes (reminiscent of *The Shepherds' Farewell* from Berlioz' *L'Enfance du Christ*), a haunting folksong-like melody on the oboe, the sound of distant bells, all finally fading into silence in the tranquility of a summer evening.

REGINA COELI, OP. 64

Dating from 1969, when Dupré was 83, this short antiphon was written in memory of a former student in Dupré's organ class who had later become a nun. The theme is one of the four popular antiphons of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and is traditionally sung during the season of Easter; its flowing contours suffuse all the voices of Dupré's serene meditation, in an atmosphere of simple trust and resignation.

ANT.  
VI.

souvenir of the occasion, and this was the origin of the *Choral & Fugue*. The sombre contrapuntal *Choral* is typical of Dupré's conception of the liturgical chorale paraphrase, treating the *Salve Regina* as a cantus firmus on pungent reed stops. The *Alleluia* forms the first subject of the five-part double fugue, but the *Salve Regina* is soon caught up in the prevailing jig rhythm to serve as second subject; the closing section bristles with Dupré's beloved inversions and stretti before the two themes are briefly superimposed in a brilliant peroration.

ANT.  
S  
Al- ve, \* Re-gi- na, ma-ter mi-se-ricórdi- æ:  
VIII  
I  
-te, missa est, allelúia, alle- lú-ia.

SEPT PIÈCES, OP. 27

*Souvenir* — *Marche* — *Pastorale* — *Carillon* — *Canon* —  
*Légende* — *Final*

Like Vierné's four books of *Pièces de Fantaisie* (1926/7), which clearly provided a model, Dupré's set of *Seven Pieces* (1930) comprises a varied selection of short concert works, dedicated to musicians whom he had met on his American and British tours, and combining poetry, wit and virtuosity in an engaging blend. Dupré's repertoire for his US tours always included the new works which he had composed since his previous visit. His fifth major tour, in 1933, opened here at St. Thomas on 28th September, and he ended the program with the US premiere of two of these pieces, the *Légende* and *Final*.

*Souvenir* is dedicated to the memory of the Canadian virtuoso Lynnwood Farnham (1885–1930), whose early death shocked the musical world throughout Europe and the USA. Farnham was a dedicated champion of contemporary French music, learning new

works by Tournemire and Dupré, among others, as soon as they were published; on Dupré's first visit to America in 1921, Farnham had greeted him, to his complete amazement, with a memorized performance of his *Prelude & Fugue in G minor*, and the two men soon became firm friends. The nostalgic *Souvenir* unfolds in a gentle *Cantabile* on single 8ft stops.

The next two pieces are dedicated to organ-builders. Firstly, a majestic piece of 'Pomp and Circumstance' for the Englishman Henry Willis, builder of the Grand Organ in Westminster Cathedral. Dupré gave many recitals on this notable new instrument, and his *Marche* perhaps recalls its inauguration on 2nd July 1922, when he played Widor's equally grandiose *Marche Pontificale*. The colorful *Pastorale* is dedicated to the iconic American builder Ernest Skinner, whose work Dupré greatly admired. Its opening section alternates a rustic solo for the Clarinet in the tenor register with a more flowing theme first heard on the Voix Celeste and then on a solo Harmonic Flute. The reprise of the Clarinet theme is varied by a curiously hollow texture with the hands playing in unison three octaves apart, against a moving pedal line, and after further development of both ideas the music comes to rest with a final flourish on the flute.

No French collection of this kind would be complete without a *Carillon*, but Dupré comes up with a characteristically personal reinterpretation of this conventional genre. Dedicated to Frederick C. Mayer, of West Point Military Academy, his *Carillon* is based on the chime of the bells at the Immaculate Conception in Elbeuf, where Dupré had spent many childhood Sundays in the company of his father, who was organist of the church at the time. The theme is sketched in the jangling fourths of the toccata figuration that runs right through the piece, punctuated by leaping octave figures, which eventually set up an ostinato rhythm on the pedals to herald the arrival of the thunderous final peal.

A typical Dupré *tour-de-force*, the captivating *Canon* is dedicated to his agent Alexander Russell, the man who had been responsible

for launching his career in the United States. The lightly tripping, staccato theme is played in canon between the flutes of the right hand and the Clarinet of the tenor, at the bizarre interval of a major seventh, and the deceptive complexity of the contrapuntal texture is further increased at the reprise by the addition of a new counter-melody in the bass, in dancing staccato quavers.

Dedicated to Dupré's English friend and translator John Stuart Archer, the evocative *Légende* has a hypnotic, archaic atmosphere, the regular phrases of its Oboe melody (echoed here and there by the *carillon*) and the repeated chromatic pattern of the accompaniment, all in an elusive 5/4 metre, combining to create an ostinato-like effect. The equally original second theme consists of a rising arpeggio figure on the strings, building up in a kind of triple canon. At the end, the coda inverts the first theme, first on a flute and then on an Oboe, finally coming to rest on a bare open fifth.

The *Final* is dedicated to Dupré's closest American friend, the noted Bach scholar Albert Riemenschneider, and as a tribute to Riemenschneider he conceals the *BACH* motif within the insistent chromatic semiquaver figuration that goads the piece along with such unflagging intensity. There are three themes — the scale figure that is hammered out in full chords in the first line, the *BACH* semiquavers, and the march that breaks out on the second page, but they seem to be fused together by the blazing energy of the music; a softer central interlude barely reduces the tension, and the *Final* soon resumes its headlong rampage towards a tempestuous conclusion.