

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

✦c PROGRAM II ✦

JEREMY FILSELL, *organ*

MARCH 6, 2021 | SATURDAY AT 3 PM



PSAUME XVIII, OP. 47

During the 1920s Dupré composed three major works to which he gave the title of symphony: two for solo organ and one for organ and orchestra. He returned to large-scale composition in the Forties, and in the course of this decade he composed three more major works — not symphonies this time, but ‘symphonic poems’, two of which were inspired by biblical texts. *Psalm XVIII* (1949) was written in memory of his mother, the cellist Alice Dupré, who had died many years before, in 1933. The opening words of the Psalm are inscribed on the title page (*Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei*, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God’), and their spirit illuminates the whole work, but this is not program music in the style of Reubke’s *Sonata on the 94th Psalm*. Dupré suggested that ‘the main theme is reminiscent of the sun’, but he would not be drawn any further: ‘as for the other movements, I could not give a precise explanation...’

Like *Évocation*, *Psalm XVIII* employs a cyclic structure (although of a less complicated kind), the main theme of the first movement returning in the finale. The first movement begins with a pregnant bottom C on the pedals (the deepest note of the organ), above which a great mass of tone slowly builds up through six *lento* bars, in a graphic depiction of the rising sun. It bursts into a dazzling display

of toccata figuration, which accompanies the succeeding exposition of the main theme, and as this subsides, a hushed reprise of the sunrise leads into the contemplative second subject, which pursues its gentle course in an expressive *cantabile* on Voix Celeste. An increase in animation quickly builds up to a radiant *largamente* reprise of the main theme, calling on the full power of the organ and the full range of the keyboard, and a brief return of the contemplative mood is unable to suppress the jubilant mood for very long; the second theme is soon caught up in an equally powerful affirmation, before the music begins to fade away until nothing remains but the deep pedal note with which the movement began.

The *Adagio* slow movement falls into five clearly differentiated sections in which three contrapuntal developments of a chromatic theme are separated by atmospheric chordal interludes, evoking some ghostly nocturnal procession. The avoidance of 16' pedal tone during these three developments gives the music an elusive, ethereal quality which is soon dispelled by the finale. The main theme of the first movement becomes the subject of a brilliant *Allegro* in the form of a free double fugue; driving rhythmic counter-subjects and virtuoso pedal writing propel the music through a variety of contrapuntal adventures, culminating in a grand final harmonization of the theme in a resounding C major.

MISERERE MEI, OP. 46

The short but haunting meditation for a time of Penitence dates from 1948, and is dedicated, like so many of Dupré's works, to the memory of one of his friends. Much of the melodic material seems to have a vocal inspiration, and it is not just the prominent Trumpet motif that seems to be crying *Miserere Mei*, but many other phrases as well. The piece falls roughly into four sections: a *Moderato* introduction, a pleading *Andante* for Voix Celeste, a *Piu animato* that builds up to an anguished climax, and a *Cantabile* for solo flute that finally attains peace, of a kind, in its concluding major chord.

24 INVENTIONS, OP. 50, NOS. 7-12

(For introduction, see page 24)

NO. 7 EN RÉ MAJEUR (QUASI ADAGIO) — a sparse, other-worldly meditation, scored for two 8' flutes; the elusive effect of this piece is typical of Dupré's later work, deeply affecting, but impossible to describe. . . .

NO. 8 EN SI MINEUR (POCO ALLEGRO) — A single six-note phrase runs through this trio like an ostinato, modified, inverted, but ever present, and producing a memorable and strangely haunting effect.

NO. 9 EN SI BÉMOL MAJEUR (ANDANTE GRACIOSO) — A delicate four-part texture in a flowing 6/8 tempo, teeming with inversions and stretti.

NO. 10 EN SOL MINEUR (QUASI SCHERZANDO) — Another trio, with a lively semiquaver dialogue on the manuals, twice punctuated by an enigmatic, growling thematic fragment on a Cromorne deep in the bass.

NO. 11 EN LA MAJEUR (LENTO) — A strange and wonderful invention for three different flutes all sounding in the same area of the treble register. Their drifting melodic lines circle and entwine, as if in a dream, and the texture fills out to four, five and then six parts; mysterious harmonies are created at every moment, but they shift and distort before one can grasp them, like a kaleidoscope in slow motion.

NO. 12 EN FA DIÈSE MINEUR (VIVACE) - one of the few non-linear pieces in the set of Inventions, this study in staccato is an impish concert scherzo requiring nimble fingers and nimble feet.

VISION, OP. 44

This long and in many ways rather obscure Symphonic Poem from 1947 is the only one of Dupré's published works to bear no dedication, a significant omission which reinforces the impression produced by the music itself, that this is an intensely personal, pri-

vate work. The quotation at the head of the score is from St. John's Gospel: 'And the light shineth in darkness', but the music suggests even more strongly the First Chapter of Genesis: 'And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light' This is not the kind of music that responds to or benefits from analysis (Dupré's first biographer Abbé Delestre describes it as a 'Spiritual Allegory'), but one could just point out the two themes (solo Bassoon on the 2nd page, and solo Trumpet on the 5th) that guide the Vision to its apotheosis before it fades into the darkness whence it came, and also the ethereal invention for flutes that follows the first appearance of the trumpet theme; this returns as the vision fades, in a passage of extraordinary, dream-like polyphony involving a duet for the pedals on a 2ft flute. A passage for pedal with *coupure* (see Program 8) on the final page suggests that, like *Les Nymphéas*, this poem was conceived on Dupré's own house-organ, the poet in his laboratory taking us on a journey of exploration into the furthest realms of his imagination. But at last, in the words of the Abbé, 'the mysterious voice which has been raised for an instant is silent, leaving behind it just a trail of light ...'

ÉVOCATION, OP. 37

Dupré grew up in Rouen where his father was also a distinguished musician; in his later years he was organist of the famous Abbey Church of St-Ouen. When the elder Dupré died in 1940, St-Ouen's equally famous Cavallé-Coll organ was in pieces undergoing a major restoration. The restoration was completed in 1941; Marcel gave the inaugural recital in memory of his father, and he composed a new work for the occasion - a Symphonic Poem which he entitled *Évocation*.

Composed in wartime in the shadow of the Nazi occupation, for an organ and a church full of family memories, *Évocation* is one of Dupré's most personal works. While he never specified in public exactly what he was trying to evoke, he confided to his pu-

pil Jeanne Demessieux that his intention was 'to capture three aspects of my father's character: he was a worrier (*un anxieux*), like me; he was gentle, and he was proud, in a dignified way'. But this is only part of the story, and the music clearly reflects the troubled times in which it was written, particularly in the finale, which mixes anger, nostalgia and defiance into a potent brew. The first movement opens in C minor with an uneasy, angular melody in the tenor register, which gives way to the more conjunct second theme on a soft solo Trumpet. But the mood of gentle nostalgia is soon swept aside by the approach of a stormy *Allegro*; this rises to a savage climax and then collapses into a sombre funeral march, which echoes the opening bars as the movement draws to a close.

The slow movement is in F sharp major, the furthest possible tonality from the dark C minor of the first. The two developments of the poignant main theme (firstly for flute in the treble register and then for clarinet in the tenor) are separated by a passage of mysterious chords for strings, and later these two ideas are combined in music of considerable intensity. Then, a surprise: a tiny scherzo of busy figuration over dense pedal chords, 'a sort of little ecstasy, a fairytale ...' The scherzo is short-lived, and the movement ends with the hushed return of the solo flute, and a coda of dream-like tenderness, registered for the ethereal *Voix Éolienne* which is a unique feature of the St-Ouen organ.

Reality returns in the spectacular rondo finale, which is often played on its own, but really makes no sense out of context. It establishes the unity of the whole work in its two softer episodes, which bring back firstly the Trumpet theme from the first movement (but not on a Trumpet this time), and secondly the fairytale scherzo and the poignant melody of the *Adagio*. The hammered chords of the rondo theme were designed for the snarling Chama-de Trumpets of Saint-Ouen; on their third appearance, after the second episode, they merge into the return of the main theme of the first movement, and the symphony ends with the apotheosis of the Trumpet theme in a victorious blaze of C major.