

Organ case of Saint-Jean-Saint-François

In 1790 the monastery was nationalized and the following year, with the constitutional schism, the order's chapel was made a parish church dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi. The organ was destroyed during the Revolution. The church's communion vessels, borrowed to use at the last mass celebrated in the Temple for Louis XVI the morning of his execution, are on display in the sacristy. When the church was reopened after the Concordat its pastor had previously been at Saint-Jean-en-Grève. That church having been demolished, he brought numerous furnishings from it and added the appellation of Saint-Jean to that of Saint-François.

Somer installed a two-manual, 13-stop organ in 1818 and Gervais-François Couperin was appointed organist, holding this post simultaneously with that of Saint-Gervais. On his death in 1826 he was succeeded by his unmarried daughter, Céleste, the last descendant of the illustrious family. She resigned the last day of 1829 and nothing is known of her successors until the appointment of César Franck in 1851.

A contract for a new organ was given to Dominique and Aristide Cavallé-Coll in 1844. An 18-stop organ then being exhibited at the Paris Exposition was later installed in the church and received on December 29, 1846. Franck was so enchanted with the fine tone of this modest two-manual instrument that, when asked about it, he exclaimed, "My new organ? It is an orchestra!"

Franck was in the audience with Gounod, Boëly, Alkan, and his old teacher Benoist at Saint-Vincent-de-Paul in January 1852 when Jacques Lemmens, the Belgian virtuoso, inaugurated Cavallé-Coll's new organ. He must have been well acquainted with the already established organbuilder, for he and Mme Franck were among the dinner guests following Cavallé-Coll's wedding in 1854. It is all the more remarkable, then, that his first concert appearance as an organist should be on an instrument by a rival organbuilder, Ducroquet, at the church of Saint-Eustache. Franck was one of four organists who inaugurated this organ on May 24, 1854. He played a "fantaisie carefully composed and energetically performed."⁴

His next two performances were not in church but in Cavallé-Coll's organ factory. An organ built for Saint-Michel's Cathedral at Carcassonne had been set up in the erecting room and for a year was demonstrated at innumerable soirées by various noted organists.

Franck was heard twice. On August 30, 1856, he played what was undoubtedly the first version of his *Fantaisie in C* and what were described in the musical press as "brilliant improvisations." On Saturday, April 25, 1857, he shared a program with students from the École Niedermeyer, Franck "demonstrating the resources of the fine instrument." Balthasar Waitzennecker played a fugue on the *Laudate Dominum* by Lemmens and other students were heard in various pieces of sacred music. One of the pieces which Franck may have played on this occasion was his *Andantino [in G Minor]*, published this same year by Richault. The manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale (No. 8564) bears Franck's registration for this four-manual instrument.

Sometime in the fall of 1857 Franck was appointed organist of a new church still under construction in the fashionable Faubourg Saint-Germain. The Church of Sainte-Clotilde, the first neo-Gothic church in France, was built over the course of eleven years, from 1846 to 1857, under the direction of two successive architects. The contract for a new organ had been awarded to Cavallé-Coll in 1854, but work did not begin for more than a year, being delayed by the architect's final plans for the case. Franck began his duties inauspiciously by directing the choir and playing a harmonium in a temporary chapel, Sainte-Valère.

By the end of September 1857 the case pipes were in place and the wind system installed but, while the action and console had been built, they still had not been delivered in time for the dedication of the church on November 30, 1857. Franck conducted the choir and orchestra for the elaborate ceremony; the music included a *Marche* by Adolphe Adam, a *Prelude* by Bach, *O salutaris* by François Auber, *Ave Verum* by Palestrina, a *Dominum salvum* with quartet, choir, and orchestra, and, finally, the "Laudate" from a Mass by Ambroise Thomas.

Sainte-Clotilde is unusual in that it has two rear galleries, one above the other. The lower is for the choir; the upper, much smaller, holds the organ console. For two years Franck, an organist without an organ, directed his choir from the lower gallery. By 1858 he had induced 20-year-old Conservatoire student Théodore Dubois to give up his post as organist of the Chapelle des Invalides, just a few blocks away, and come to Sainte-Clotilde as his organiste accompagnateur. The only instrument for accompanying the choir was a harmonium which was used until Joseph Merklin installed an electropneumatic *orgue-de-choeur* in the front of the church in 1888.

Franck took his church duties seriously. Knowing he would soon have a new organ, he equipped himself with the organist's most up-to-date practice instrument, a *pédalier*. Auguste Wolff, a partner in the Pleyel piano firm, had designed and built, in 1857, a two-and-one-half octave *pédalier* (or piano pedalboard) which, instead of merely coupling the piano keys to a pedalboard, was completely independent, having its own strings, hammers, and mechanism. A set of thinner 8' strings playing simultaneously with the 16' strings produced a remarkably full sound.

It did not take Franck long to order one. Louis Niedermeyer wrote enthusiastically about the new instrument in *La Maîtrise* in December and Franck's was delivered on February 28, 1858. Franck's initiative in improving himself is all the more remarkable because Félix Danjou, writing in May 1859, "could not name ten organists who had a pedal piano on which they could practice daily and familiarize themselves with the beautiful fugues and pedal parts of Bach, Mendelssohn, and Lemmens."

Franck's *Andantino in G Minor* for organ dates from this year, as do the *Cinq Pièces pour Harmonium*, but the rest of his output was for voice and included a *Messe solennelle* for bass solo and organ, Op. 1; *Trois Motets*, Op. 4 (*O salutaris*, *Ave Maria*, and *Tantum ergo*); and a third setting of *O salutaris*, Op. 5, for soprano and tenor duet.

Among Franck's acquaintances at the Jesuit College of the Immaculate Conception where he taught piano was a Jesuit priest, Louis Lambillotte. The good father, aptly described by Saint-Saëns as a "ridiculous composer" of "dreadful music," who left an indelible impression on Catholic church music with such hymns as "Come, Holy Ghost" and "On This Day, O Beautiful Mother," also pursued a reputable scholarly interest in Gregorian chant, publishing chant collections, articles on the restoration of plainchant, and even a facsimile of the Saint-Gall manuscript. He died in 1855 but over the next few years Franck completed for publication their collaboration, a five-part *Chant Grégorien*: restauré par le R.P. Lambillotte; accompagnement d'orgue par César Franck. The work is Franck's note-for-note accompaniment of Lambillotte's modern notation transcriptions of plainsong then being reintroduced into the churches of France. Issued in three parts, it consisted of five sections:

- I. Ordinary of the Masses for the church year;
- II. and III. Roman Hymnal with each hymn harmonized for organ in a comfortable key for the (unison men's) choir and in a higher key for three or four voices;
- IV. and V. 1. Proses and Sequences; 2. Antiphons for the major feasts of the Blessed Virgin; 3. Various hymns for Benediction; and 4. Fauxbourdons.

The theory behind this note-for-note harmonization of Gregorian chant has long been outdated and the practice of plainchant accompaniment has gone through several stages of theoretical development. The Preface to this Chant Grégorien is the only prose that César Franck ever published, sufficient reason to include it here in its entirety.

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PREFACE

It is generally agreed that the correct accompaniment of plainchant is difficult. Most of the melodies used in church have such a special character, so far removed from present-day musical thought, that in order to harmonize them it is necessary to isolate them as much as possible from our leanings toward modern tonality. This is to impart to Gregorian chant its own tonality and, consequently, preserve its character. This difficulty has been serious enough to cause many otherwise capable musicians to doubt their ability to accompany plainchant and despair of attaining agreement between two seemingly noncomplementary elements. We admit that restoring the use of such pristine melodies was not intended to make the role of the organist easier and that, even momentarily giving up the sonority of unaccompanied chant, we must relinquish recently developed musical skills, including counterpoint. However, the organ is so universally used as an accompanying instrument today that there is a pressing need to provide some written accompaniment for those who must accompany choirs in Gregorian chant, lest the organ become an obstacle rather than a help at the hands of the less skilled.

However, it is necessary to guard against systematization and archaism. It is also necessary to have a clear idea of the musical resources of a parish, so as to provide solutions at the level of the least trained organists. We have tried to adhere to these two points, since there is not space in this short foreword to give a treatise on accompaniment, which will be the subject of another paper. Leaving the appreciation of this offering to the more knowledgeable, we are content to give some practical observations.

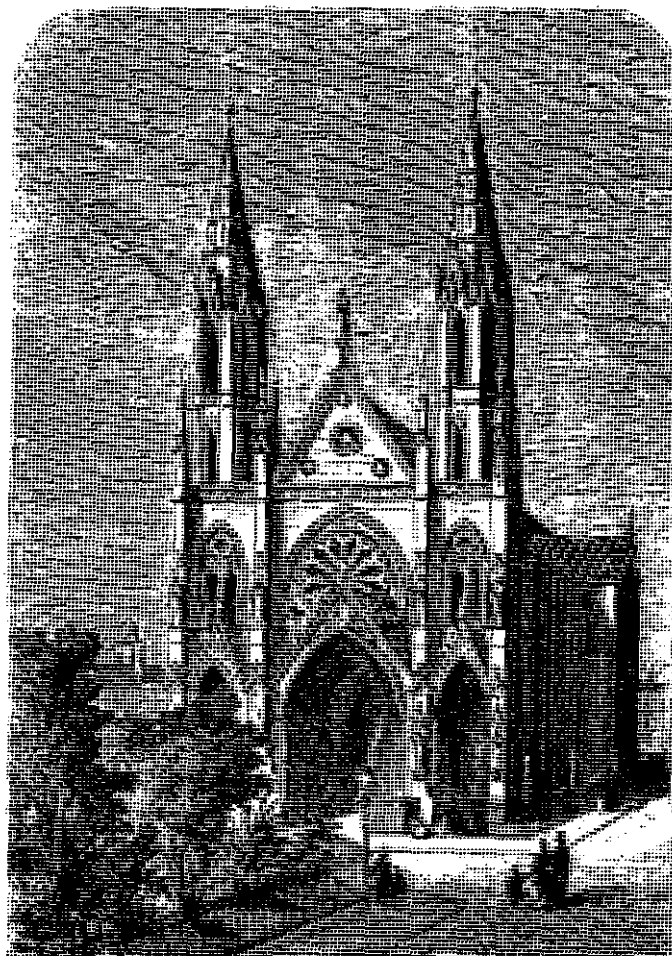
1. In three-part writing, it is easiest if only one voice is given to the left hand, so that the organist can play it at the octave in the same hand or double it in the pedal. This way of writing leaves the bottom line of the accompaniment—the contrabass or ophicleide part—perfectly clear, restoring instruments which are not playing the chant melody in unison to the correct place, in accordance with the deplorable practice found almost everywhere.
2. Everyone agrees that having the text written above the accompaniment is a great help to the organist.
3. The pitch range chosen enables male voices to reach the notes of each piece. We strongly urge choir directors to adhere to the written key unless there is a particular difficulty. Everyone knows the practice of certain singers who do not want to go beyond A of the middle octave and thus produce a cavernous tone unsuitable for the ordinary bass part of even the most correctly written music.
4. As a general rule, the organ should not sound passing notes or the small notes; however, a tasteful organist may sometimes accompany melismas.
5. We have written all chords individually, but when a note is common to several consecutive chords, it must be tied as long as it is present in the harmony. This is too basic for any organist to ignore.

Our project is to publish successively, in separate volumes, a complete organ book which will include all liturgical chants. We offer first to organists this volume which contains the chants for the ordinary of the masses, as well as the *Benedicamus* and the *Te Deum*.

The second volume, now in preparation, will contain the Hymnal. In it will be found not only the accompaniment to the hymns in the choir's range, but the same hymns written in three voices in a higher key, so that, where resources and abilities allow, these same hymns can be sung in parts at Vespers and at Benediction.

Subsequent volumes will contain the series of offices, beginning with the Common of Saints.

The reference sections and tables of contents will facilitate exhaustive research.



Sainte-Clotilde

The numbering system at the top of the pieces refers to the Graduale. The first number is for the edition in modern (round) notation, the second, for the edition in Gregorian (square) notation.

It was during his vacation in August and September 1859 that Franck began composing small organ pieces which were published after his death as the second volume of *L'Organiste*. The Franck family, now consisting of two sons and a daughter, spent their vacation with the family of Auguste Sanches, a wine merchant in Azille. He was the amateur organist of the local church and asked Franck for some easy organ pieces he could play. From time to time Franck obliged.

This same year Louis Niedermeyer published *Trois Antiennes* in the music supplement of his journal, *La Maîtrise*. Brief pieces which could be played as versets by organists who could not improvise, the *Quasi lento*, *Allegretto*, and *Lent et très soutenu* appeared as numbers 10, 11, and 17 of *L'Organiste*, Vol. 2.

On August 14 Franck completed his *Seven Words of Christ*, undoubtedly for performance at Sainte-Clotilde during Holy Week the next year.

The new organ at Sainte-Clotilde was finished and playing in August; Cavallé-Coll sent his final statement to the architect on August 29, 1859, and the inauguration was set for December 5. It was decided that Lefébure-Wély would share the dedicatory recital with Franck who now set himself to arranging his part of the program. On September 13 he completed a *Pièce symphonique* (*L'Organiste*, Vol. 2, No. 26) and may have considered playing it. He almost certainly composed his *Final in B-flat* at this time, or earlier, as it was mentioned in reviews of the recital and dedicated to Lefébure-Wély.

The first two performances on the organ of Sainte-Clotilde were not by the titulaire but by Lefébure-Wély. The first was a private demonstration for the Empress Eugénie's sister, the Duchess of Alba, and other ladies of the imperial court, and the second, on September 29, was a society wedding performed by the Bishop of Carcassonne.