The Complete Organ Works of César Franck

Adam Pajan & Joseph Arndt, organist

Friday, October 21, 2022, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, October 22, 2022, 7:30 p.m.

In-person and livestreamed from
Saint Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral, Seattle
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The Complete Organ Works of César Franck

Joseph Arndt, organist [JA]  
Adam Pajan, organist [AP]

FRIDAY

Six Pièces, Op. 16–21 (fwv 28–33)  
César Franck (1822–1890)

1. Fantaisie in C Major [JA]
2. Grand pièce symphonique in F♯ Minor [AP]
3. Prélude, fugue, et variation in B Minor [JA]
4. Pastorale in E Major [JA]
5. Prière in C♯ Minor [JA]
6. Final in B♭ Major [JA]

SATURDAY

Trois Pièces, fwv 35–37

1. Fantaisie in A Major [AP]
2. Cantabile in B Major [AP]
3. Pièce héroïque in B Minor [JA]

Trois Chorals, fwv 38–40

No. 1 in E Major [AP]
No. 2 in B Minor [AP]
No. 3 in A Minor [JA]

This Saint Mark’s Music Series concert is presented in conjunction with the Seattle Chapter of the American Guild of Organists.
The organ music of César Franck—gloriously tuneful, harmonically rich and beautifully crafted—is such a staple of the repertory that we forget how revolutionary it was in 19th-century France. Embracing a new vogue for non-ecclesiastical concert music for organ, Franck gave it new nobility and romantic expression. His 12 pieces for organ, published in three collections, also seeded a great flowering of dramatic French organ music carried forward by Alexandre Guilmant, Charles-Marie Widor, Louis Vierne, Charles Tournemire, Marcel Dupré, Maurice Duruflé, Olivier Messiaen, and Jean Guillou to today’s Thierry Escaich.

19th-Century French Organs and Organ Culture

Paradoxically, we owe the development of French concert music for organ to the 1789–1799 French Revolution. Before then, the organ in France was pretty purely a liturgical instrument, supplying entrance and exit music at Mass and Vespers and filling in short verses between verses of sung plainsong. These were usually improvised, but composed verses reached their late 17th-century apotheosis in collections by François Couperin and Nicolas de Grigny. Even there, in idioms sometimes not that different from aristocratic dances and operatic arias, the lines between sacred and secular idioms were blurred.

Ultimately as anti-Catholic as they were anti-aristocratic, Revolutionaries vandalized and destroyed churches and organs. Instruments, and organists, that survived did so by playing patriotic and popular songs in churches reimagined as “temples of reason.”

Liturgical uses of the organ were revived after the 1814 Restoration of the monarchy, but organists by then lacked the sophistication of their precursors. With a minimal symphonic tradition, French musical culture now was besotted with opera and ballet. Even the immensely cultured Saint-Saëns, who became organist of the new Church of the Madeleine in 1858, was told parishioners expected not fugues but ditties comparable to those at the Opéra-Comique.

After decades of vandalism and neglect, organs throughout France needed rebuilding, if not outright replacement. And 18th-century instruments would have seemed quite passé in the age of Meyerbeer, Berlioz, Chopin and Liszt. At this propitious moment, in 1833, an ambitious, innovative and apparently charming young organbuilder named Aristide Cavaillé-Coll appeared in Paris. In short order, he landed contracts for new organs for the vast basilica of St. Denis and the parish church of Notre Dame de Lorette. Over the next half-century, throughout France and beyond, he created bold new instruments to challenge newly enlarged orchestras for dynamic range and coloristic variety.

These new organs could build up great masses of tone, capped by blazing stops imitative of trumpets and trombones, but also suggest orchestral strings, flutes, clarinets, oboes and bassoons. With new pneumatic mechanisms (Barker machines), multiple keyboards could be coupled together without adding resistance to the keys. Other mechanisms facilitated adding and subtracting stops. The Récit division was enlarged and enclosed behind wooden louvers the organist could open and close for finer dynamic nuances. Cavaillé-Coll organs that have escaped major changes still supply visceral thrills.

As each major new instrument was completed, churches filled to hear the star organists of the day in public recitals. The concept of concert music for organ was born.

César Franck’s Contribution

Born in Liège, in present-day Belgium (but then in the kingdom of the Netherlands), Franck was trained in conservatories there and in Paris, his teachers including the composer Anton Reicha (teacher also of Berlioz, Liszt, and Gounod) and the pianist Pierre Zimmerman (whose other protégés included Gounod, Bizet, Alkan, and
Lefébure-Wély). Although Franck studied organ for a year with François Benoist, his father pushed him as a concert pianist. But the life of a touring virtuoso didn’t suit the mild-mannered son, and after a break with his father, Franck fils scrambled to make a living as a teacher and organist in Paris.

Starting in 1847, Franck was organist successively at the churches of Notre Dame de Lorette, St. Jean-St. François, and St. Clotilde—each with a new organ by Cavaillé-Coll. “My organ,” he exclaimed of the St. Jean-St. François instrument, “it’s an orchestra!” In 1872 he succeeded Benoist as organ professor at the Paris Conservatory. In what was mainly a course in composition and improvisation, Franck was the beloved teacher of students including Vierne, Tournemire, Ernest Chausson, and Vincent d’Indy.

Although Franck composed operas and oratorios; choral, chamber and piano music; and art songs; concertgoers today mainly know him by three late works: his richly Wagnerian Symphony in D minor, the impassioned Piano Quintet and the charming Violin Sonata. But his 12 major works for organ, published in three collections, seem utterly secure in the instrument’s repertory.

**Fantaisie in C major.** A placid opening section introduces Franck’s signature buildup of sonorities, manual by manual, until halted by cheeky fanfares. A cheerful trumpet melody follows, flute-accompanied, until interrupted by more solemn fanfares. Finally, the **voix humaine** stop, with tremulant (imitating a choir of aged, nasal French singers?), supplies a gentle epilogue.

**Grand pièce symphonique.** Franck and the slightly older Liszt knew and admired each other, so it’s no surprise that the structure of Franck’s longest organ piece seems inspired by Liszt’s B minor Piano Sonata. Contrasting section are telescoped into a continuous structure, with much recalling and combining of themes and motifs. This new notion of “symphonic” music for organ in turn would influence the multi-movement symphonies of Charles-Marie Widor and Louis Vierne and the sonatas of Alexander Guilmant.

Opening “dialogues” are a Franck signature, this one between a running, pulsing figuration and a quieter, questioning response that becomes a recurrent transitional gesture. Pedals announce a martial motto theme. A “slow movement,” introduced by the clarinet-like cromorne stop and reprised on shimmering string celestes, is interrupted by a fluttering scherzo. Franck then recalls fragments of earlier themes before triumphantly proclaiming the motto theme on full organ chords, driven by an athletic pedal part surely unprecedented in French organ music. A fugal development brings the 30-minute piece to a stirring close.

**Prélude, fugue et variation.** After the extended complexities of the Grand pièce, this work is charmingly straightforward. An oboe solo unfolds in two parts: triplets over gently rocking accompaniment, then a typically Franckian “expanding” motif sometimes echoed in the pedal. After a fugue worked out on warm foundation stops, the two-part oboe melody returns, now varied with a new fluttering accompaniment.

Franck’s **Six Pièces d’orgue**, published in 1868, demonstrated a seriousness and sophistication that couldn’t have been more different from the storm effects, marches, boleros, operatic arrangements and sentimental meditations that made Alfred Lefébure-Wély the most famous French organist of the day. They also transcended the competent but relatively academic works of Franck’s teacher Benoist. Quasi-symphonic effects were produced by layered crescendos and decrescendos precisely specified for the sounds and mechanics of Cavaillé-Coll organs.
Pastorale. Here is another opening dialogue, between another expanding motif—including the quintessentially pastoral oboe stop—and a chordal response. Pulsing staccato chords are interrupted by a fugal development based on the expanding opening theme. The first two themes are combined in the final section.

Prière. Mingling penitence and ecstasy, this “prayer” is a masterpiece of thematic concentration. Everything is derived from the long-breathed opening quasi-chorale—even the second theme introduced in the pedal, and the triplet figuration that drives the piece to an impassioned climax. Both halves of the piece close with a trumpet recitative.

Final. Although Lefébure-Wély’s flamboyant compositions and performances were pretty much the opposite of Franck’s, the two men were on friendly terms and sometimes shared dedicatory recitals. Dedicated to Lefébure-Wély, the Final is the most unashamedly populist of Franck’s pieces, starting with a flashy and extended pedal solo. (Complete pedal divisions and more developed pedal parts in organ music were recent developments in France.) This and a second theme combining chords and triplets leading to another expanding motif are joined by a third theme that moves back and forth between pedal and soprano. Detached full-organ chords modulate upward until brief flourishes close the piece.

Trois Pièces. The organ’s evolving identity as a concert, as opposed to liturgical, instrument, prompted the creation of France’s first major concert-hall organ—by Cavaillé-Coll, of course—for the Trocadéro Palace, an eclectic extravaganza built for the 1878 Universal Exposition. (Later torn down and replaced by the Art Deco Palais de Chaillot, it’s memorialized in what’s still called the Place du Trocadéro, on the ridge up from the Eiffel Tower.) The most famous French organists of the day inaugurated the large new instrument in a series of recitals. Franck performed on October 1, introducing these three pieces he composed for the occasion.

Fantaisie in A. Another dialogue: a stern theme introduced in octaves, and a modulatory chordal response. An extension of the first theme, accompanied by insistent triplets, leads to a third idea, a scale that falls and rises over an undulating accompaniment. A hymnlike fourth theme is introduced on the voix humaine with tremulant. After development of this material, a triumphant proclamation of the first theme announces the recapitulation, with a reprise of the down-and-up idea and finally the voix humaine’s tender hymn.

Cantabile. Here the opening dialogue contrasts solemn chords and a trumpet melody elaborated into a quasi-vocalise. Gathering urgency is dismissed as the trumpet melody appears in canon between soprano and bass, before a quiet ending.

Pièce héroïque. An ominous opening theme is accompanied by throbbing chords. “Timpani strokes” announce, and interrupt, a quasi-chorale that’s developed with growing intensity. The first theme returns, but ultimately the “chorale” emerges victorious, stated in big chords, with a final echo of the timpani strokes.
Trois Chorals. In May of 1890 Franck suffered a chest injury in a carriage accident in Paris. His condition improved enough for a vacation in the town of Nemours, south of Paris, where during August and September he composed these last works. Back in Paris in October, a respiratory infection developed into pleurisy and pericarditis, though, and the 67-year-old Franck died on November 8.

Choral No. 1 (E major). Unlike the Lutheran hymns that supplied much thematic material for German organist-composers, Franck’s “chorales” were newly composed and not intended for singing. “The chorale,” he remarked of the first Choral, “is not what you think it is: the true chorale evolves during the course of the work.” Indeed, the opening call-and-response dialogue of the E major Choral is only indirectly related to the actual “chorale,” subsequently played on the voix humaine stop. Two trumpet melodies, the first derived from the piece’s opening theme, are heard. The first is followed by a reprise of the voix humaine “chorale,” and a brief loud dialogue. The chorale melody repeatedly recurs in a development section, and then a new triplet motif engenders a great crescendo. A triumphant proclamation of the chorale is answered with exuberant flourishes derived from the first trumpet melody.

Choral No. 2 (B minor). Is the “chorale” here the main theme, introduced passacaglia-like in pedal? Or is it what’s been called a “seraphic song,” heard early on and at the end on the voix humaine? More important than the latter is a rising chromatic idea that recurs almost as much as the main theme. Even with fantasia-flurries here and there, the music proceeds with visceral urgency to that final triumph of the first theme and gentle seraphic afterthought.

Choral No. 3 (A minor). An overall three-part form makes use of four thematic entities: (1) a rippling toccata motif, heard at the start, (2) a slower arpeggio figure, sometimes ascending, sometimes descending, (3) the “chorale” theme proper, introduced on Récit foundations and reeds, and 4) the centerpiece: a lyrical melody played on the trumpet stop. Repeatedly emerging in different guises, the chorale finally sounds in full-organ chords over the toccata motif, with those descending arpeggios getting the last words.

—Notes by Scott Cantrell (July 2022)
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**Adam Pajan** is Lecturer in Music (organ) at the University of Oklahoma School of Music, where he teaches students in organ performance, organ technology, and church music. He received his DMA in 2014 at the University of Oklahoma following studies at Furman University and Yale University, earning the BM and MM degrees respectively under the tutelage of Charles Tompkins, Martin Jean, Thomas Murray, among others. His performing career has taken him across the United States, on five tours to Germany, England (including a performance at St. Paul's Cathedral, London), and Switzerland. Dr. Pajan has been recognized as the first prize recipient in four national competitions (Poister, Mader, Schweitzer, and Westchester) and has been heard at conventions of the American Institute of Organbuilders, Organ Historical Society, American Guild of Organists, American Liszt Society, and several times on American Public Media’s radio program Pipedreams.

An enthusiastic director of choral and sacred music, he serves as Director of Music at St. Mark the Evangelist in Norman, OK, was Artist-in-Residence at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Tulsa, OK from 2017–2022, and was Conductor of the Oklahoma Master Chorale from 2015–2019. He is currently leading a fully-funded $1.8 million campaign to renovate and install the 1928 Memphis municipal Kimball pipe organ, Op. 7035, for St. Mark in Norman. Due to be installed in late 2022 by the Schantz Organ Company of Orrville, Ohio, it will contain 4,734 pipes across four divisions and will be playable from the original 5-manual console.

An active composer and arranger, his *Preces and Responses* Sets I and II have been heard regularly at St. John’s Episcopal in Tulsa and on their weekly live stream. In the fall of 2022, Adam will pair with Joseph Arndt to present the twelve major organ works of César Franck in Houston, Ft. Worth, Tulsa, Seattle, Denver, and on the Grand Organ Series at St. Thomas Church in New York. Other upcoming performances include a sixth tour to Germany with an appearance at the Winter Orgelpunkt series at St. Sebastien Catholic Cathedral in Magdeburg and at the Dutch Walloon Church in Hanau in fall 2022 and at the Lincoln Organ Showcase in Nebraska in April 2023.

For more information, visit [www.adampajan.com](http://www.adampajan.com)

**Joseph Arndt** is Music Director at Saint John’s Episcopal Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He led the campaign for the parish’s 2018 chancel organ, Opus 173 by Schoenstein & Co. He founded the Oklahoma Bach Choir, an ensemble dedicated to performing the sacred vocal works of J. S. Bach with period instruments. His past two seasons with the Bach Choir have included BWV 1, 4, 10, 19, 29, 35, 51, 62, 140, and 230. He and guest conductor Timothy Brown (retired from Clare College, Cambridge) have also presented complete performances of Handel’s *Messiah*. Many of these Bach and Handel performances have been broadcast on Public Radio Tulsa.

A graduate of The Juilliard School (MM) and Westminster Choir College (BM), he studied organ with Paul Jacobs, Ken Cowan, and Diane Meredith Belcher. He is Chair of Planned Giving for the Association of Anglican Musicians and the most recent past Dean of the Tulsa Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. He has served as adjunct instructor of harpsichord and early music at Oklahoma City University and the University of Central Oklahoma.

In 2022 he has given solo recitals at Church of the Advent in Boston and Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. To mark the bicentennial of César Franck, he and Adam Pajan are giving joint marathon recitals of the composer’s complete organ works with a tour including performances in Houston, Fort Worth, New York City, Seattle, Denver, and Tulsa. They also recently gave a workshop on Franck’s life and work at the 2022 American Guild of Organists National Convention in Seattle.
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