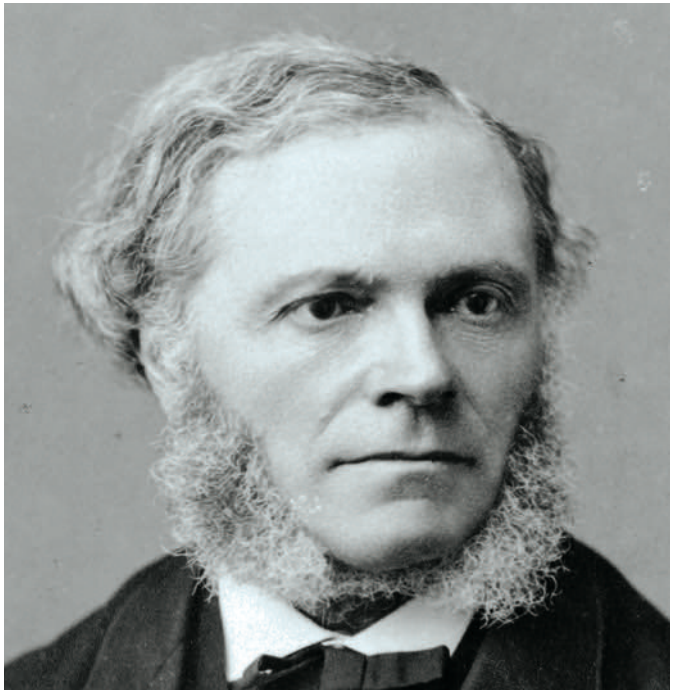
# L'Orgue Spirituel

*Organ music by* CÉSAR FRANCK *and* CHARLES TOURNEMIRE


Peter Stevens



**César Franck (1822–1890)**



**Charles Tournemire (1870–1939)**

CHARLES TOURNEMIRE (1870–1939)

1 Triptyque (L'Orgue Mystique, No. 26: In Festo Ss Trinitatis) ..... 8' 41
2 Postlude (L'Orgue Mystique, No. 2: Immaculata Conceptio Beatæ Virginis Mariæ) ..... 10' 47
3 Diptyque (L'Orgue Mystique, No. 11: Purificatio Beatæ Virginis Mariæ) ..... 12' 07

CÉSAR FRANCK (1822–1890)

TROIS CHORALS

4 Choral I ..... 14' 01
5 Choral II ..... 14' 03
6 Choral III ..... 14' 22

PETER STEVENS

*plays the grand organ of Westminster Cathedral*



## ABOUT THE MUSIC

'*Franck held the organist's profession in too high honour to allow him to descend into the easy-going habits of so many of his colleagues…he believed the organist's function to be to assist the priest in worship. His ambition was to devote his artistic abilities to the service of the Church, and to raise the souls of the congregation to a higher plane of religious meditation. To this end he had no need to pursue virtuosity for its own sake…*'

These words of Léon Vallas were written to illustrate César Franck's underlying philosophy as a church musician; however, they appear just as relevant to his youngest pupil, Charles Tournemire, whose own mystical improvisations and organ works are rooted in Gregorian chant, and which foster a profound and prayerful atmosphere within the liturgy. Both men served for several decades as organist at the church of Sainte-Clotilde in Paris; both were major figures in the wider musical landscape of their time; and both pointed the

way forward, through their teaching as well as through their example, to the next generation.

Born in Liège, then part of the Netherlands, in 1822, Franck showed early promise as a pianist, and spent much of his childhood touring and performing, without much success. In 1847 he became organist at the church of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette in Paris, and moved to Sainte-Clotilde eleven years later; here he presided over the magnificent Cavaillé-Coll organ from the time of its inauguration in 1859, and became renowned for his skill as an improviser. He succeeded his old teacher François Benoist as Professor of Organ at the Paris Conservatoire in 1871, where he inspired extraordinary love and loyalty from his pupils. Franck held both his church and conservatoire positions until his death in 1890.

Chief amongst the *Bande à Franck*, as his pupils became known, was Vincent d'Indy, whose reverence for his master led him to appoint himself as the keeper of Franck's legacy; his near-deification of his professor can make him an unreliable source of information, filtering everything he wrote through rose-tinted spectacles of reverent admiration. The reality of Franck's appearance and character was rather different from d'Indy's saintly portrait of him – he was a small man who buzzed with nervous energy, perpetually in a rush, who could be seen dashing through the streets of Paris wearing a top hat, a black frock-coat and grey trousers which were too short for him – and yet something about Franck left a deep impression on the musicians he taught.

Maurice Emmanuel described Franck as being 'more a pianist than an organist; but even more a musician than a technician;' this observation is an important insight into Franck's pedagogical outlook. His organ class at the Conservatoire was unique amongst instrumental classes in that he focused not on technique and repertoire but on composition, primarily through the means of improvisation.

Accounts from his students reveal that Franck believed that his clear ideas about form and harmony could be most effectively taught through improvisation; indeed, Vierne records that five of the six hours of class each week were devoted to it. This approach was controversial, not least with Ambroise Thomas, the Director of the Conservatoire, who believed that the teaching of composition was best left to the professors of that department, headed by Jules Massenet. Camille Saint-Saëns too was critical of Franck's teaching, saying that it consisted mainly of compliments and encouraging comments, which only served to turn his pupils into ardent disciples.

According to Emmanuel, Franck's classes usually began with the *maître* improvising a short piece himself, then giving practical advice on how to do the same. His pupils' efforts were frequently followed with the words '*Venez dimanche à Sainte-Clotilde. Je vous montrerai.*' ('Come to Sainte-Clotilde on Sunday. I will show you.') He had a comprehensive musical



*The Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde, as painted by Max Berthelin in 1857*

knowledge, introducing Bach's preludes and fugues to his organ class, and using the scores of Beethoven, Schubert, Liszt and Wagner as examples to his pupils. However, whilst ensuring they were aware of historical precedents, Franck encouraged his pupils to find their own solutions to their musical difficulties, and was delighted when they developed real independence of musical thought. He placed particular emphasis on the order of modulations; there is a record of Claude Debussy, briefly a pupil of Franck's, being urged to 'Modulate, modulate!' The young composer declared that he was perfectly happy with the key he was in, and promptly left the class.

And so, from a lifetime of this fusion of Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, and improvisation, came the summit of Franck's output for the organ: the *Trois Chorals*. These were the last organ pieces he wrote, completing them in August and September 1890, a few months before his death later that year. They were published posthumously in 1891; the



dedications in the original editions, as well as much of the registration, are editorial. Whilst a number of organists and academics have worked to try to uncover the composer's own intentions, creating several new scholarly editions, it is the 1891 versions that are used as the basis for this recording. For over a century and a quarter, it is these editions which have, for better or for worse, 'become' the Franck *Chorals* to generations of organists; and their reputation as masterpieces of the repertoire have derived ultimately from this first publication. The Parisian organ tradition continues to be a living, breathing tradition, incorporating elements passed down from teacher to pupil over the years, and it is hoped that, far from being a rejection of recent scholarship, this recording can be a small but joyful tribute to the school of organ playing of which Franck and Tournemire were such an important part.

The *Trois Chorals* trace their musical lineage from the chorale-based works of the baroque: Buxtehude, Pachelbel

and Bach all wrote chorale preludes which ornament a hymn melody. As Tournemire points out, when the chorale as a genre appeared to have been exhausted, the Beethovenian fantasia, as found in the late string quartets, breathed new life into this old form. Franck took this as his starting point, and combined both the baroque and Beethovenian approaches in his own chorals. These pieces are, broadly speaking, large-scale fantasies in which a chorale melody gradually emerges as a secondary theme, before being developed in conjunction with the opening material and forming the conclusion to the musical argument. Yet each of the chorals is markedly different from the others in terms of mood, structure and textural variety.

The first, in the luminous key of E major, was completed on 7 August 1890. Franck wrote to a friend: 'I have written a long organ piece that I have entitled simply "Choral". A chorale it is, indeed, but with plenty of fantasy.' Whilst the chorale idea is introduced early in the work, it is not until



the closing pages that the theme is heard pure and complete, and definitively in the major key. As the composer wrote to d'Indy: 'You will find that the "Choral" is not what you expect. The real chorale evolves during the course of the prelude.' Variations and embellishments of the thematic material lead the listener through a kaleidoscope of minor tonalities before the chorale theme finally emerges triumphant.

By way of contrast, the second of the chorals is described by Albert Schweitzer as the most deeply felt of the three. It opens with a passacaglia with three complete variations on the opening theme. The use of fugue at the start of the second section is a further nod to Bach, whilst the inexorable crescendo towards the conclusion is unashamedly romantic. In Tournemire's words: 'Let us throw the metronome away. May the mystical inner flame powerfully manifest itself and may the cathedralesque vaults resound with this overflowing paraphrase of divine love… Let us try to evoke the

splendour of cathedral vaults and let us furnish them with our sonorous and mystical draperies.' Calm returns at the end, with the chorale melody transfigured in radiant B major.

Tournemire maintains that the *Troisième Choral* is the simplest of the set. It opens with a motif strongly reminiscent of Bach's A minor prelude (BWV 543), whilst the modal inflections in the harmony of the choral harken back still further: 'the Gregorian melody is there, very near…' writes Tournemire. The beautiful central adagio in A major is an oasis of calm in the midst of the storm, although Tournemire's advice is unequivocal in its call for rhythmic freedom: 'The respect of metronomic rhythm would be heresy and absolutely contrary to Franck's intentions. We definitely affirm this and will entertain no discussion.' (In short: be flexible, or else!) Both the opening toccata-like figuration and the chorale are combined before a monumental final line of music brings to an end the compositional output of a composer of integrity and spirituality.



Tournemire's writings on his master's chorals give a fascinating glimpse into his own musical credo. Born in 1870, he was an exact contemporary of Louis Vierne, and became one of Franck's youngest pupils; whilst Franck never taught his chorals, Tournemire was one of two people (the other being Guillaume Lekeu) to have played through them at the piano with Franck himself, playing the pedal part whilst the *maître* took care of the manuals. From 1898 until his mysterious death in 1939, he was organist of Franck's church of Sainte-Clotilde, where his reputation as an improviser became legendary. As a composer, he wrote no fewer than eight symphonies and four operas, but it is primarily for his organ music that he is remembered today, and in particular, for his massive cycle *L'Orgue Mystique*.

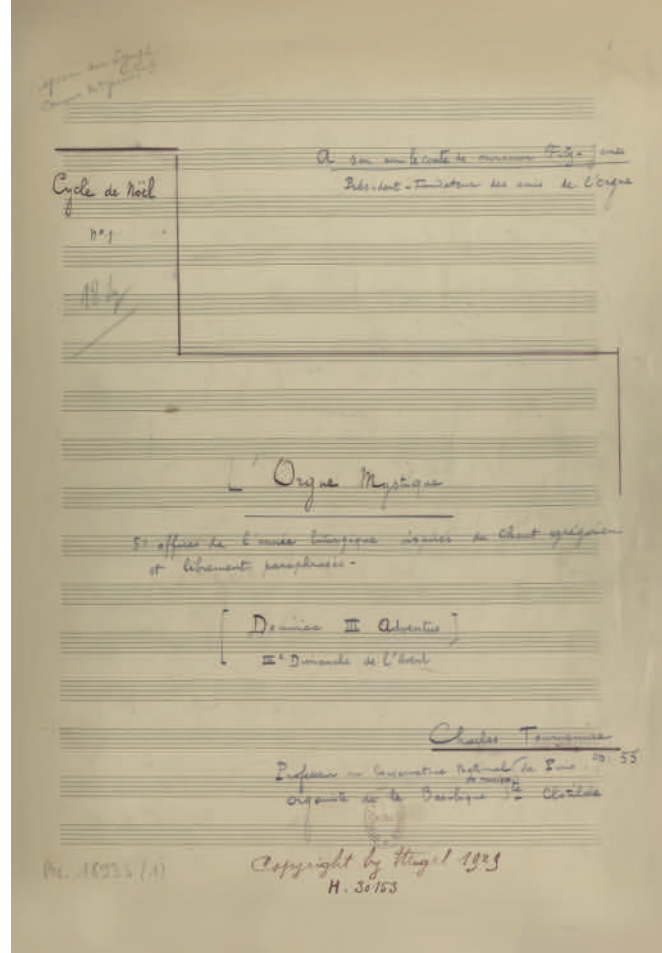
*L'Orgue Mystique* is a set of 51 suites for liturgical use, one for each Sunday of the liturgical year (as it then existed) that required organ music, as well as for major feasts. Each suite consists of four short pieces: an Introit, an Offertoire, an

Élévation, and a Communion; and a substantial concluding *pièce terminale*, all based on the Gregorian chants of the day. Tournemire's intention was that Easter Sunday would stand as the *soleil central* of the cycle, and so he selected two themes from Matins of Easter Sunday as leitmotifs which would recur throughout the whole cycle: *Ego dormivi*, and *Venite exultemus Domino*. In addition, the famous *Te Deum* melody also appears frequently, binding the work together.

The three excerpts of *L'Orgue Mystique* included here illustrate some of the varied moods that Tournemire suggests in these *pièces terminales*, which are far from being the kind of French *sortie* that one might expect from some of his contemporaries; rather than encouraging people to leave and return to the world outside, these movements encourage a period of meditation at the end of Mass. This is deeply liturgical music, rooted in the perpetual cycle of the Church's year, contemplating each feast and solemnity as it comes round. The freedom and flexibility on which



*The title page of the autograph manuscript of the first cycle of* L'Orgue Mystique



Tournemire is so insistent in his writings about Franck make perfect sense in the chant-infused, improvisatory music of *L'Orgue Mystique*; indeed, he stands as crucial link between the musical philosophies of Franck and Messiaen. Tournemire once claimed that he could not improvise well without the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. One can easily imagine him, seated high in his organ gallery at Sainte-Clotilde, beginning to play as Mass concludes; as the building gradually empties, his playing grows gentler, until he is alone at the console. Finally, he returns the church to silence and prayer…

The *Triptyque* is the final movement of the suite for Trinity Sunday, dedicated to Louis Vierne. Tournemire takes his lead from the office hymn *O lux beata Trinitas*, with its reference to the fiery sun going on its way; the blazing sunset is vividly evoked with swirling figurations on full organ at the outset, gradually calming and receding into the twilight. From the initial tutti, the movement closes with a single cor de nuit



playing a distant echo of the *Te Deum* before the last glint of light fades into the darkness.

The *Postlude* from the suite for the Immaculate Conception, by way of contrast, is scored exclusively for flutes and strings. Founded largely on Marian chants, most notably the *Ave maris stella*, this suite is dedicated to Dom Joseph Gajard, the famous choirmaster of Solesmes. The movement unfolds delicately, twice expanding into sumptuously registered writing for the strings, where more perfumed harmonies colour the air, before evaporating like wisps of incense.

The feast of the Purification falls on 2 February, and commemorates Christ's Presentation in the Temple. For this feast, Tournemire produces one of the most outstanding highlights in all of *L'Orgue Mystique*. He takes as his starting point two of the processional chants for the day, *Lumen ad revelationem gentium* and *Adorna thalamum tuum*, the first being part of the prayer of Simeon, who had been promised that he would not see death until he had seen the Saviour. The

movement opens with these two themes presented one after the other. Notably, not a single accidental appears in this opening section, with Tournemire employing white-note harmony; in keeping with the liturgical colour of the day, and with the light of the Candlemas procession in mind, the soundworld is unmistakably 'white' in colour. At no point are the reeds used; clarity and brightness are used instead of sheer volume, with the movement's greatest climax calling only for mixtures and open boxes. Over gently rocking fourths, the *Lumen ad revelationem gentium* chant sings out over sustained chords, tenderly ornamented with undulating garlands. This music returns at the movement's close; the old man Simeon, his face illuminated from seeing the Light of the World, stands in the Temple, peering into the distance of eternity… now, Lord, your servant can go in peace. The experience of recording this piece was unforgettable; it was the final track to be recorded, in the silence of the small hours of the morning, in a dark cathedral.



These two composers, then, Franck and Tournemire, master and pupil, stand at the spiritual heart of the French organ tradition. Their contrasting styles complement each other; Franck's esteem for his young student is matched in Tournemire's reverence for his master. Both made a lasting contribution to the organ tradition, and their art was refined Sunday by Sunday during the sacred liturgy. In this ever-increasingly noisy and fragmented world, their inspiring music of spiritual and emotional depth deserves to be heard by all who have ears to hear it.

PETER STEVENS

*Recorded by kind permission of Fr Sławomir Witoń, Dean of Westminster Cathedral, and Simon Johnson, Master of Music.*

*With thanks to David Hinitt and James Orford (and Albert the Labrador) for their expertise, hard work and encouragement; to Henry Metcalfe and Orlando McDermott for their good-humoured assistance at the console during the recording sessions; and to Matthew Searles and the team at Ad Fontes for all their support and hard work, and for the opportunity to make this recording. Special thanks also to Colin Walsh and Martin Baker, whose inspiring teaching, musicianship and enthusiasm sparked my love of Franck and Tournemire.*



*Peter Stevens during a recording session at the grand organ of Westminster Cathedral*


HENRY WILLIS & SONS

# THE GRAND ORGAN OF WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

## CHOIR *Enclosed*

Contra Dulciana . . . . . 16’
Open Diapason . . . . . 8’
Viola . . . . . 8’
Cor de Nuit. . . . . 8’
Cor de Nuit Célestes . . . . . 8’
Sylvestrina. . . . . 8’
Gemshorn. . . . . 4’
Nason Flute . . . . . 4’
Nazard . . . . . 2 ⅔’
Octavin . . . . . 2’
Tierce . . . . . 1 ⅗’
Trumpet . . . . . 8’
*Tremulant*



## GREAT *Unenclosed*

FIRST DIVISION
Double Open Diapason . . . . . 16’
Open Diapason No. 1 . . . . . 8’
Open Diapason No. 2 . . . . . 8’
Octave. . . . . 4’
Octave Quint . . . . . 2 ⅔’
Super Octave . . . . . 2’
Grand Chorus (15-19-22-26-29). . . . . V
Double Trumpet . . . . . 16’
Trumpet . . . . . 8’
Clarion . . . . . 4’

SECOND DIVISION
Bourdon . . . . . 16’
Open Diapason No. 3 . . . . . 8’
Flûte Harmonique . . . . . 8’
Quint. . . . . 5 ⅓’
Principal . . . . . 4’
Flûte Couverte . . . . . 4’

Tenth . . . . . 3 1/3’
Twelfth . . . . . 2 2/3’
Fifteenth . . . . . 2’

## SWELL *Enclosed*

Violon . . . . . 16’
Geigen Diapason . . . . . 8’
Rohr Flute . . . . . 8’
Echo Viole . . . . . 8’
Viole Celeste (AA) . . . . . 8’
Octave Giegen . . . . . 4’
Suabe Flute . . . . . 4’
Twelfth . . . . . 2 2/3’
Fifteenth . . . . . 2’
Harmonics (17-19-22) . . . . . III
Vox Humana . . . . . 8’
Oboe . . . . . 8’
*Tremulant*
Waldhorn . . . . . 16’
Trompette . . . . . 8’
Clarion . . . . . 4’



## SOLO *Enclosed*

Quintaten . . . . . 16’
Violoncello . . . . . 8’
Tibia . . . . . 8’
Violoncello Célestes . . . . . 8’
Salicional . . . . . 8’
Unda Maris . . . . . 8’
Concert Flute . . . . . 4’
Piccolo Harmonique . . . . . 2’
Cor Anglais . . . . . 16’
Corno di Bassetto . . . . . 8’
Orchestral Oboe . . . . . 8’
*Tremulant*
French Horn . . . . . 8’
Orchestral Trumpet . . . . . 8’
Tuba Magna (unenclosed) . . . . . 8’

## PEDAL *Unenclosed*

Double Open Bass . . . . . 32’
Open Bass. . . . . 16’
Open Diapason . . . . . 16’
Contra Bass. . . . . 16’
Sub Bass . . . . . 16’
Violon (Swell) . . . . . 16’
Dulciana (Choir) . . . . . 16’
Octave. . . . . 8’
Principal . . . . . 8’
Flute . . . . . 8’
Super Octave . . . . . 4’
Seventeenth . . . . . 3 ⅕’
Nineteenth . . . . . 2 ⅔’
Twenty-Second. . . . . 2’
Contre Bombarde. . . . . 32’
Bombarde . . . . . 16’
Trombone. . . . . 16’
Octave Trombone . . . . . 8’



## ACCESSORIES

Eight foot pistons to the Pedal Organ
Eight pistons to the Choir Organ
Eight pistons to the Great Organ
Eight pistons to the Swell Organ (duplicated by foot pistons)
Eight pistons to the Solo Organ
Eight general pistons
General cancel
Stepper, operating general pistons in sequence
Two reversible pistons to Full Organ, *ff* and *fff*, with indicators
Apse console general cancel

256 general and eight divisional piston memories
Balanced expression pedals to the Choir, Swell and Solo Organs

Manual compass 61 notes; pedal 32 notes
The actions are electro-pneumatic

## PETER STEVENS

Peter Stevens is Assistant Master of Music at Westminster Cathedral. Born in Lancashire in 1987, he was educated at Chetham's School of Music, subsequently holding organ scholarships at Manchester Cathedral, St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, and King's College, Cambridge. He came to Westminster Cathedral in 2010, taking up his present position the following year. In addition to accompanying the Cathedral Choir in their daily services, recordings and concerts, he has given solo recitals across the UK and Europe. In 2013 Peter became Director of the Schola Cantorum of the Edington Festival, following three years as Festival Organist. His teachers have included Thomas Trotter, David Briggs, and Colin Walsh.




*Recorded at* WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL, 13–14 July 2023

*Recording Engineer* DAVID HINITT
*Recording Producer* JAMES ORFORD
*Executive Producer* MATTHEW SEARLES

*Booklet Proofreader* AARON KIELY

*Front illustration: Silhouettes of César Franck and Charles Tournemire atop the façade of the grand organ of Westminster Cathedral*

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# L'ORGUE SPIRITUEL

*Organ music by César Franck and Charles Tournemire*

Peter Stevens

The organ stands at the spiritual heart of music heard in French Catholic liturgy. In this disc, Peter Stevens invites us to encounter two contrasting titans of this world, César Franck and Charles Tournemire, at one time teacher and pupil, who forged compositional idioms that continue to dominate the world of the organ and its use as an instrument capable of inflecting the spiritual sensibilities of French culture. The *Trois Chorals* of Franck are three fantasies, in which swirls of colour, harmony and at times sheer virtuosity evoke heartfelt emotional and spiritual convictions. Works from *L'Orgue Mystique* of Charles Tournemire build on this legacy, particular with its profound sense of metrical freedom, but root this deeply in the Church's seasons and the rich inheritance of Gregorian chant. The grand organ of Westminster Cathedral gives voice to these masterpieces, in the hands of one of this generation's finest exponents of the genre.


Total running time: 72' 03

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