

CHAPTER 10

Trials and Joys (1970-1984)

The composer and concert performer between baroque and modernism

The American tours represented only one facet, although certainly glorious, of Jean Langlais' concert career. Europe also sought and celebrated his concerts, and he performed in Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands, in Switzerland, Italy and Scandinavia. These few headlines suggest the responses:

"WONDERBAATLIJK ORGELSPEL VAN JEAN LANGLAIS IN GOUDA"

("Marvellous Recital by Jean Langlais in Gouda")

Gerderlander, Gouda (The Netherlands), July 18, 1969.

"A GREAT MASTER AT THE KEYS"

Derek Robinson, Bristol (England), June 22, 1971.

"OVATIONEN FUR GROSSEN MUSIKER"

("Ovation for a Great Musician")

Neue Aachener Zeitung, Aix-la-Chapelle (Germany), December 11, 1972.

True to his own aesthetic choices and sailing against the tide of current fashions, Langlais continued to honor, with brilliance, the music of his predecessors in Sainte-Clotilde, whose various anniversaries he celebrated with brilliance: in 1970, the centenary of Tournemire, and two years later, the 150th anniversary of Franck's birth. For the latter occasion, he played Franck's complete *Douze Pièces* for organ in two concerts at Sainte-Clotilde, April 26 and May 3, 1972.

As Langlais' international reputation grew, foreigners thronged around him and his popularity in Europe as well as in America was at its zenith. Nevertheless, it was not until April 15, 1970 that his first organ recital devoted solely to his work took place--at St. Severin Church in Paris, organized by the French Association for the Protection of the Ancient Organ (A.F.S.O.A, created in 1967). This concert consisted of excerpts from several of his Suites, *Trois Paraphrases grégoriennes*, *Suite médiévale*, *Livre Œcuménique*, *Folkloric Suite*, *Incantation pour un Jour Saint*, *American Suite*, *Triptyque* (including the very difficult "Trio"), *Suite française*, and *Neuf Pièces*; it concluded with *Poem of Happiness*. This was a long program, eclectic and technical, played on an organ that was not suited to it because, as a successful copy of a German baroque organ by Alfred Kern, it did not have at all the characteristics corresponding to the essence of Langlais' work.

Soon after that, he recorded the same type of program on an organ even more removed from his personal aesthetic, the great Christian Müller at Saint Bavo in Haarlem.¹ This was a more perilous undertaking since the instrument, having a manual compass of 51 notes and a pedal compass of 27 notes, with no coupler for manual III, was pitched a half tone higher than Kammerton (Baroque pitch). Langlais, with his perfect pitch, suffered all night during the recording session!² This was the first record devoted entirely to his works, himself playing the organ.

The same year, 1970, a new commission³ from the Paris Conservatory for its year-end organ competition inspired Jean Langlais to write "Imploration pour la Joie," a short but difficult work, to which he would soon after add "Imploration pour l'Indulgence" and "Imploration pour la Croyance," thus creating *Trois Implorations*.

But this time, unlike its antecedents, "Imploration pour la Joie" shows no notable innovations. Langlais limits himself here to an a-B-a'-B' structure (lento in 3/4, then allegro in 2/4, with repetition in a different form), the short lyrical "lento" contrasting with a relentless and virtuosic allegro. Of note, nevertheless, in the final peroration, is a humorous mixture of a C major scale in the right hand and C sharp in the left hand. The work ends with a pirouette on the triad of C major in root position preceded by two dissonant clusters, a classic conclusion by Langlais-the-improviser.

If the second Imploration, "Pour l'Indulgence," in the serene vein of *Poem of Peace*, exploits a succession of harmonies in the second mode, the third Imploration, "Pour la Croyance" ("For Belief") surprises with its extraordinary aggressiveness. There, where one could expect a renewed version of the "Te Deum" of 1933 on the theme of the Faith, Langlais offers a vehement protest against what he saw as the drifting of Catholic music since Vatican II. This protest is in a new genre which uses "bad words to music" in the mischievous expression of André Marchal, and is stylized by brief dissonant tone clusters on full organ, slamming like punches in response to each phrase of the Credo IV, monophonic, then in canon for 2 and 3 voices. Note the very choppy character of the discourse; not one of the sections of this piece exceeds four measures (the length of the Gregorian Credo itself). Note also the final measures, which, after some semi-clusters, bursts, fortissimo, the chromatic total (sharps in the right hand and naturals in the left hand), "expressing what I was seeking for thirty years," explains the composer; it was a way for him to shout to the world:

"I believe with all my strength, but with all my strength but I also suffer from what I hear in the Church ..."

In the words of Canon Revert, spoken in Sainte-Clotilde during the funeral oration that he delivered May 30, 1991, at the solemn mass in memory of Jean Langlais, this "cry of suffering, vehement protest against anything that might degrade the treasure of the Catholic Creed" hurts--literally, since the dissonance strikes the ear, but also figuratively, because if "great pain is mute," the pain of Jean Langlais, too long held in, explodes here furiously.

¹ *Orgelwerken van Jean Langlais, Jean Langlais bespeelt het orgel van de Grote of St. Bavokerk te Haarlem*, Microsillon 33 rpm, Citadel Recordings, Holland, 1970.

² I assisted the composer that night, alongside Wim van der Panne, a Dutch student of Jean Langlais.

³ This was Langlais' third commission in eight years after *Essai* (1962) and *Sonate en trio* (1968).

According to Kathleen Thomerson:

I remember how upset Langlais was, in the 1960's, when chant and Latin were sung less in church. When I played the *Trois Implorations* for him...he spoke about how the "Imploration pour la Croyance" was his personal statement of protest in 1970 against the musical road being taken by church authorities and their control over the music. His anguish can be heard in the powerfully dissonant chords.⁴

He did not, however, reserve the vehemence of his indignation only for Catholic music. What he heard on the radio, which he listened to assiduously, or at contemporary music concerts, often displeased him greatly, and he readily denounced amateurism and the emptiness of some. That is why he subtitled his *Troisième Concerto* for organ, string orchestra and timpani, commissioned by the University of Potsdam, N.Y., "Reaction."

I subtitled it "Reaction" he explains, because I want to react against those who think they are writing something new for the organ by using half-pulled stops or sprinkling their scores with tone clusters for hands as well as feet. Me, I have placed at the center of this concerto a fugue in six voices. I'm not reactionary, but I wanted to prove that we could still write music for organ without falling asleep at the keyboards.⁵

Jean Langlais was acquainted with these "new" techniques... and opposed them with a total refusal to comply. Started on December 28, 1970, the *Troisième Concerto* was completed on Friday April 9, 1971 in La Richardais, and performed five years later, on October 22, 1976 in Pittsburgh.

Unlike the previous two concertos for organ, "Reaction" does not adopt the traditional division into separate movements, but connects discontinuous sections. Introduction-Vif-Fugue-Cadence-Conclusion: this is its structure, the central fugue forming the true backbone of the work--a morsel of bravura designed by a counterpoint specialist.

It is also distinguished by language, neither Neoclassical like the *Premier Concerto*, nor lyrical like the second, and by orchestration, since we find here timpani in addition to strings, exactly like in Poulenc's *Concerto in G minor*. But the difference from his two previous concertos is essentially rhythmic, with a constant atonal theme, and exploitation of every possible combination (inversion, transformation, augmentation, diminution), the harmonic language mingling atonality, modality and polytonality.

In the 1970s, Jean Langlais wanted to be a composer of his time and wanted to give the image of a musician who knows how to renew himself, with none of his works resembling the previous ones. Always he had in mind Paul Dukas' precept: "A composer must know how to belie his reputation."

Seeking in this way to forge a new language, Langlais, however, decided to take a break, and giving free rein to his personal aspirations, devoted an entire book of organ pieces, titled *Offrande à Marie* to the Blessed Virgin.

These six meditations are a true act of faith on the part of the composer at a time when, faced with contradictory thrusts of the musical world in general and the organ world in

⁴ Kathleen Thomerson, *Tribute to Jean Langlais*, sent to Marie-Louise Langlais, February 16, 2001.6. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

⁵ Langlais, "Souvenirs."

particular, he feels the need to look for the radiant presence, soothing and redemptive, of Mary, mother of God. Who knows, perhaps he is calling on Mary in the face of the Church and its clergy? Composed rapidly between November 21 and December 29, 1971, these pages are covered in an obsessive way with "Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis" from the Litany of Loreto. For the titles of each of these pieces, Jean Langlais uses one of the qualities of the Virgin Mary expressed in these Litanies: "Mater admirabilis" (Mother most admirable), "Consolatrix Afflictorum" (Consoler of the Afflicted), "Regina angelorum" (Queen of Angels), "Regina Pacis" (Queen of Peace), "Mater Christi" (Mother of Christ), and "Maria mater gratiae" (Mary, the mother of grace).

Jean Langlais and his teaching

Those who speak most eloquently about Langlais' teaching are certainly his many students. Among them, Lynne Davis Firmin-Didot⁶ writes:

I arrived in France at the end of September 1971 to study with Marie-Claire Alain and Jean Langlais, who taught at the Schola Cantorum in Paris. Madame Alain was very ill that year, so lessons with her had temporarily ceased. Those with Langlais became then all the more important. The weekly class at the Schola was on Saturday afternoons. I didn't yet speak French fluently, but that was not a problem since Langlais spoke English perfectly. He was the "maître", the teaching maestro, in the strictest, formal French manner. One didn't "discuss" an interpretation, as I had done at the University of Michigan with my teacher, Robert Clark. One accepted his instruction without question. And yet, beneath this strict, almost rigid demeanor, was a very generous, gracious side that Jean Langlais exhibited to me specifically on three occasions. These three times changed my life forever!

The first time was when I played some early French music for him. He suggested that I listen to Marie-Claire Alain's new recording of the complete organ works of Nicolas de Grigny. He knew this would be beneficial to me and didn't harbor any jealousies of my hearing and learning this music from another source.

When I played the *Prelude et Fugue sur le nom d'ALAIN* by Duruflé, he immediately said, "Oh, but you must take this to Madame Duruflé and study it with her!" Thus, with a special introduction from Jean Langlais, began my long studies with Marie-Madeleine Duruflé, which transformed my playing.

The third but not the least of these almost clairvoyant suggestions by Langlais was the following. He said, "You know, there is a brand-new organ competition at Chartres Cathedral. You should contact them about it." I did, in spite of the fact that my French was not that good yet, especially on the phone. The person who answered the phone was extremely polite and invited me to come and talk with them about the competition. This person was none-other than Pierre Firmin-Didot, who became my husband in 1981.

Other memories are of discovering Franck at Ste. Clotilde through concerts given by Langlais. One particular performance of Franck's *Prière* was especially moving. I learned later that his little dog "Paf" had died that very day.

Going up to the organ loft on Sunday morning mass was very special. His improvisations were glorious. Hearing Langlais exclaim about how beautiful and colorful the stained glass windows were at Chartres, in spite of being blind. He "saw" the colors in his mind.

⁶ Lynne Davis Firmin-Didot, Robert L. Town Distinguished Professor of Organ, Associate Professor, School of Music, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas. She sent to the present author a letter titled "Homage to Jean Langlais" on February 3, 2016.

Laughing with the other students and visitors when he told his jokes! Watching him as he showed us how he read music in Braille and how he punched out the paper to write.

Visitors one Sunday morning at mass were Robert Sutherland Lord and Catharine Crozier. During that mass, Langlais let me play Franck's *Choral in E Major*. For some reason, he was not happy with my performance, saying that Franck would not have liked it. Yet he was truly happy and satisfied when I played it later and won First Prize at St. Albans in 1975. He said to the jury "She did everything I told her!"

I was very lucky to have studied with and to have known him. I have him to thank for so many things in how my life evolved in France during those 35 years I lived there. This life today was made better and definitely more French, thanks to him.

Merci, cher Maître et très affectueusement à votre mémoire!

Another student of Langlais, Douglas Himes⁷, remembers:

I was introduced to the organist-composers of The Sainte-Clotilde Tradition—César Franck, Charles Touremire, and Jean Langlais—by the late Dr. Robert Sutherland Lord, University Organist at the University of Pittsburgh from 1962 to 2006...

In the spring of 1972, at the conclusion of my second year of studies with him, Dr. Lord took me to the epicenter of The Sainte-Clotilde Tradition. I arrived in Paris in May in time to hear the first of two recitals at Ste.-Clotilde in which Langlais played all of Franck's organ works in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth. My first exposure to authentic Franck interpretation came on the evening before my first lesson with Langlais, as I sat on a kneeler in the partially dark nave of the basilica, facing the organ, listening to him play Franck using only stops from the original Cavaillé-Coll organ. It was a life-changing experience.

The following day, Dr. Lord took me to Langlais' apartment in the Rue Duroc and introduced me to "Maître," with whom I was privileged to study periodically for the next four years...

The advantages of studying Langlais with Langlais are obvious, but studying Franck with Langlais was no less inspiring. Langlais' exposure to authentic Franck interpretation began in his youth as a student at the National Institute for The Young Blind in Paris when he was ten years old... He studied harmony with Adolphe Marty, and theory and solfège with Albert Mahaut, both brilliant blind organists who had won first prize in organ at the Conservatory in the class of César Franck. From these two professors and Charles Tournemire, Jean Langlais received the pure essence of the Franck tradition.

It was always with some difficulty that Langlais recalled his teacher at the conservatory, Marcel Dupré, whom he acknowledged as a "very scrupulous teacher."

Langlais told Robert Lord that Dupré had advised his students that: "The only thing you need to play Franck is a metronome in your right pocket and a metronome in your left pocket." This was starkly at odds with the first-hand testimony from Franck's pupils, who all attested that Franck played his own works "very, very freely." The conflict came to a head when Langlais played the *Fantaisie in C Major* as a pupil in Dupré's class at the conservatory. As he would indicate many years later in his edition of the Franck organ works, Dupré instructed Langlais to reverse the composer's registrations in the manual parts of the middle section, which Langlais knew to be opposite Franck's specification. Langlais recalled that he "became very courageous" and said: "I am very sorry to tell you that Adolphe Marty, who was a teacher at the School for the Blind, when he got first prize [at the conservatory] in the Franck class in 1886, he played the *Fantaisie in C*, and he played like me." According to Langlais: "Dupré became very furious, and we had a terrible, silent minute; and after that, he said to me: 'If Marty did that, do that!'"

⁷ Dr. Douglas Himes, from a long text entitled «Recollections of Jean Langlais as a teacher of Franck,» p.5. Sent to Marie-Louise Langlais, July 2, 2015. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

Dupré's distance from the Franck tradition was evidenced not only in his teaching, but also throughout his edition of the Franck organ works, published in 1955.

Speaking of this edition, Langlais said: "Dupré did away with all fermatas and almost all dynamics, and changed almost all registrations. For me, this edition is useless, a scandal, and an assassination."

Langlais's understanding of and sensitivity toward the organ music of César Franck was visceral. He seemed to know every note, every phrase, every tempo marking, every dynamic, and every registration indication in every piece. Only on very rare occasions during his teaching did he ever consult the Braille score to confirm his recollection of a detail.

I wish that I had thought to ask him how he "saw" a score in his mind's eye, for I am certain that he "saw" it in great detail. Regardless of the density of the musical texture, he could hear and name every note in every voice: "No, G-natural in the alto." His remarkable sense of inner voices is hardly surprising when one considers his training and innate abilities... One of the most humbling—and initially amazing—experiences of studying with him was occasionally having him correct my fingering. It might seem ironic to have a blind teacher correct one's fingering, but not so, when one considers that the purpose of proper fingering is to prevent the mechanics from obscuring the music. Langlais did not need to *see* an improper fingering; he could *hear* the musical results and would correct the fingering to remove the impediment to proper expression of the music.

Sensitivity to the architecture of musical phrases is essential to authentic interpretation of Franck's organ works, and Langlais' sense of phrasing was impeccable. His playing of the E-major Chorale will illustrate. Franck had enormous hands; he could strike a tenth interval and easily span a twelfth. Like other keyboard composers, e.g. Rachmaninoff, he wrote for his own capabilities. There are many passages in Franck's keyboard writing that he doubtless could negotiate with ease, but which present daunting challenges to performers with hands of normal size. One of those passages is the opening section of the E-major Chorale. While the writing is for manuals alone, many organists couple the manuals into the pedal with no pedal stops, playing the bottom voice on the pedals to alleviate stretching in the left hand. Langlais had small hands. I have sat next to him on the organ bench at Ste.-Clotilde while he played this chorale. He never coupled the manuals to the pedal, and he did not drop a single note or phrase.⁸

An oft-quoted maxim among organists and organ builders states: "The most important stop on any organ is the room." For nearly 60 years, Jean Langlais made music in the room for which Franck conceived his organ works. He had first-hand knowledge of the original Franck organ, before the first major renovation of the instrument under Tournemire in 1933. His intimate knowledge of both the organ for which Franck carefully specified registrations and the acoustical space in which those registrations were intended to sound, enabled Langlais to provide unique insight into Franck's selection of certain stops and the intended results of their use...

Jean Langlais was keenly aware of and humbled by his rôle as the final bearer of The Sainte-Clotilde Tradition. In my studies with him, I was always cognizant that most of what he told me had come from his teachers who had studied with Franck, had heard Franck play his own works, and—in one singularly rare instance—had played Franck's works alongside the composer. Occasionally he would offer a suggestion for interpretation, or a particular fingering, based on his own understanding, but he was always careful to note that this was *his* suggestion. In all of his teaching, Langlais imparted not only knowledge of, but also a deep reverence for, authentic Franck interpretation, which I have always sought to impart to my students.

⁸ Langlais had small hands, but like Tournemire, he had a large compass, being able to reach the tenth with one hand. This is clear in the music of both.

For more than 40 years, countless organists from around the world made pilgrimage to the gallery at Ste.-Clotilde and the studio in the Rue Duroc to soak up wisdom from the last faithful oracle of this marvelous tradition. As part of that legion, I can say with profound gratitude that studying with “Mon cher Maître” was one of the greatest privileges of my life. The knowledge and insights that I received from him have shaped my musicianship far beyond organ performance, and his spirit lives on in me, as it does in others whose lives were touched by this great man.

Here is another, rather humorous, testimony, by Marjorie Bruce, a former pupil of Langlais at the Schola Cantorum between 1972 and 1974⁹:

Langlais’s was a powerful presence. Even now, when I practice, I can hear the words « Mais non ! » resound with awesome clarity.

With a mixture of youthful enthusiasm and naïvety I arrived at my first lesson clutching a copy of Franck’s First Choral. The music of Cesar Franck was not only an area of special expertise but was also particularly close to Langlais’ heart. To proffer the E Major Choral at one’s first lesson was akin to bungee-jumping over Niagara.

One hour into the lesson I turned the first page of the score. What an experience it was ! At no time during that first hour had he uttered a word of discouragement. He demanded precision, close attention to details, rests to be longer, the finest of legato in the inner parts, phrases to be shaped – all this in a couple of bars. I rapidly learnt that the possibilities between staccato and legato were seemingly endless.

Heart attack and composition of Five Meditations on the Apocalypse

The hardships faced by Jean Langlais in the 1970s resulted not so much from quarrels about aesthetics as from serious health problems due, as might be expected, to the increase in his activities related to his rise in fame. On January 14, 1973, Jean Langlais had a severe heart attack which caused his immediate hospitalization in the intensive care unit of the Broussais Hospital in Paris. Death had passed very close... Now, by an odd premonition, Langlais had shortly before begun composing organ works from the Book of the Apocalypse (*Revelation*) of St. John.

But it was really during the long weeks of convalescence following his heart attack that he was able to read and reread the sacred text and deepen his spirit in light of what had just happened to him. So he designed a collection *Cinq Méditations sur l’Apocalypse*, each taking up a phrase or an episode that he had particularly marked during his reading. The book of *Revelation*, we recall, ends The Epistles, and thus concludes the New Testament.

It summarizes the revelations made by the angel to St. John of "the things which must shortly come to pass." Of the 22 chapters of this hermetic, fantastic, important text, Langlais retained certain phrases or images that he strove to translate into music; from these came the titles of the five component parts of his collection:

- "He who has ears, let him hear"
- "He was, He is and He is to come"
- "Prophetic Visions"
- "Come, Lord Jesus"
- "The Fifth Trumpet"

⁹ Marjorie Bruce, « Seeking clarity », *Choir and organ* (March/April 2007). 18.

1st Piece: **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”**

This introductory injunction is the conclusion of each of the addresses made to the seven churches of Asia over which the Apostle had jurisdiction: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea.

The figure of seven, as a symbol of the cosmos, represents the totality of space and time, and the universal character of the church, and Jean Langlais translates the complexity of St John's words using counterpoint (fugue with 4 voices with regular entrances from low to high each two measures, with exposition immediately followed by increasingly tightened stretto). On this, he superimposes in the pedal, seven times, the short theme of Gregorian chant in the 4th mode, on a soft clarion 4'.

For that which is fugato, played on the registration that Tournemire preferred (manuals: foundations 8, Voix céleste, Voix humaine, tremolo), the composer reuses the whole of the fugue for 4 mixed voices that he had written in 1937 to *Psalms CXXXIII* ("Unto Thee I Lift Up Mine Eyes").

2nd Piece: **“He was, He is and He will come”**

Based on the phrase "Grace and peace to you from him who is and was and is to come" (*Revelation* 1:4), this piece, one of the most abstract of the collection, attempts to define the concept of the eternity of Christ by means of the note F held during most of the piece, throughout the five sections that form the following theological succession:

1. "eternity": Under the held F, the melodic counterpoint voice ("He Was").
2. "The Christ whom we have crucified" (appearance of the Gregorian Passion hymn *Vexilla Regis* in heavy vertical harmonies, in a tormented chromatic mood and in a highly dramatic context.
3. "eternity": Under the held F, two-part counterpoint ("He Is").
4. "The Christ whom we have glorified" (presence of the Gregorian "Lauda Sion Salvatorem" in vertical harmonies concluding fortissimo with the following idea: The Passion has permitted Christ's Resurrection).
5. "eternity": Under the held F, one- and two-part counterpoint ("He Is to Come") involving angelic arpeggios which sound mysterious on quintaton 16', flute 4' and tierce 1 3/5', in a mystical and magical atmosphere which does not disavow Olivier Messiaen. Note that the "F" of "eternity" never appears at the same time as plain chant, and that on the contrary, the figuration of eternity is invariably linear and contrapuntal; Christ appears always vertically and harmonically, in the same spirit of opposition between monody and polyphony as in the "Te Deum" of 1933.

3rd Piece: **“Prophetic visions”**

Until to that point, Langlais seems to prefer the preamble to the Apocalypse. But here in this third piece, he attacks the body of the subject, "what soon must take place." The vision is terrifying, because the opening of the seven seals announces death by the sword, as well as by famine, wild beasts, earthquakes and floods, the exterminating angel, the monstrous beast of the Apocalypse, and the fall of Babylon.

All this is nightmarish, but instead of detailing the horrors, Langlais brings these visions together under the single term "Prophetic Visions," which are musically summed up in a 10-measure long dissonant rondo on full organ. The contrasting

couplets linger on an image (the angel who places the right foot on the sea and the left foot on the earth, represented by a double pedal solo with left foot and right foot wide apart) or on a symbol (peace and joy of the New Jerusalem sheltering the righteous in eternal life, of course indicated by Langlais by the "Sanctus" of the XVI Mass). The last part of the piece, built in very short sections, brings together various fragments, including the harmonization of the alleluia of the service of the Birth of Our Lord, and concludes on a chord of 10 tones, fortissimo and extremely dissonant.

4th Piece: "Oh yes, do come, Lord Jesus Christ"

Langlais is here commenting on what is virtually the last sentence of *Revelation* and thus of the New Testament ("The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" *Revelation 22:20*). The reassurance of the Christian is here translated into a confiding prayer with a luminous mysticism, a slow meditation on the salicional and bourdon 8', which doubles as an ardent supplication, increasingly intense, as the melodic line with added rhythm reaches the organ's highest pitches. This inner page is reminiscent of the "Meditation" from the *Homage to Rameau*.

5th Piece: **The Fifth trumpet**

Instead of ending the *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse* with the previous piece, promising salvation to the Christian as embodied in the phrase "Come, Lord Jesus," Langlais did exactly the opposite and went back to one of the most dramatic passage in *Revelation*, announced by the blowing of the fifth trumpet:

Then the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fall from heaven to the earth. He was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit; he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth,...and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone. (*Revelation 9:1-6*)

Totally immersed in this horrific fragment of the sacred text, Jean Langlais will transpose it into music and build a vast fantasy, as one would write an opera starting from a libretto, but without respecting the text's order of events--events which he will depict in an extremely realistic way.

First, in the introduction, the bottomless, dark "shaft of the bottomless pit," stylized with the 8' foundation stops in the swell, resounding in the low range and interspersed with silences. From the well rises smoke in spirals, illustrated by a motif of 3 notes (E-G#-A#), turning on itself in staccato. At that moment appears the famous "fifth trumpet," which gives the piece its title, an ornamental in triple 16th notes, echoed three times on the trompette 8', the clairon 4' and the mixtures of the swell,¹⁰ immediately followed by the evocation of the star falling from heaven to earth (a drop of three octaves, closing on the low E b of the pedal on the bombarde 16' only.)

Then comes, twice, the evocation (measures 119 and 135) of the "*great furnace* [whose smoke was] *obscuring the sun and the air*," with fortissimo chords repeating the melodic motif of "smoke" (measure 8) on a 9th chord built on the lowest D natural of the pedal. All these elements are re-stated in the chaos that lasts throughout this first and longest section of the "Fifth Trumpet."

¹⁰ I remarked to him that on an organ with powerful reeds of 8' and 4' on the Grand Orgue, or better, a chamade, the effect for this solo would be even more terrifying, and he agreed.

Before beginning the second part, Jean Langlais introduces the key element, which the sacred text expresses as: "*Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth.*" At first, expressed simply and presented in alternation with other leitmotifs, these grasshoppers have a harmless character, and their presence does not seem in any way threatening, being announced by a commonplace "birdsong" motive, à la Messiaen. But from the beginning of the second part of the work, this fleeting picture turns into a disturbing ostinato (measure 159). Figurative locusts now monopolize the attention in a hollow sonority of bourdon 16', flute 4' and larigot 1-1/3, supported by a succession of 7th chords registered on the combination of Voix humaine, Voix céleste and tremblant, while on the pedal the theme of the "smoke" unfolds its spirals in long notes on the clairon 4' alone. Suddenly the presence of insects intensifies, the initial 16th notes turn into 32nd notes. A cinematic comparison with Alfred Hitchcock's marvelous film *The Birds* comes to mind, where the early benign presence of some peaceful birds turns into a worrisome mass of birds that ends up savagely pecking human beings to death. Then comes a long culminating silence, the ultimate calm after the storm, because, according to *Revelation* :

And [the locusts] were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

This attack on people by grasshoppers will form the third and final part of "The Fifth Trumpet," the most violent, according to the hallucinatory description of Saint John:

On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. They have tails like scorpions, with stings, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months. They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

To most closely translate this text of unusual violence, Langlais uses perpetual motion on full organ, monody in 32nd notes in the hands punctuated by violent jumps in the pedal toward the lowest pitches, simulating repeated attacks on humans by the locusts; the composer lets himself be totally guided by the epic spirit of the sacred text, which concludes:

And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

Since the supreme punishment of men will be not death but life, which Langlais translated musically by two dissonant chords which resolve into a very long and totally chromatic cluster over the pedal C, almost seeming to put a final period to the *Imploration pour la Croissance*, written two years earlier.

Thus, twice, he--the believer, the optimist--suggests through his music that the culmination of life could be tragedy, which is stunning from such a strong Christian.

This powerful work, however, demonstrates how intact was Jean Langlais' tremendous capacity to paraphrase the scriptures, at a moment in his career when he seemed to have condemned himself to repetition; we can say that henceforth/from this point on, he is revived by the power of his own inspiration.

As he himself acknowledges:

These *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse* represent the culmination of my musical aspirations and my best work.¹¹

This kind of statement, coming from him, is sufficiently rare as to merit attention. Supporting his assertion is the commentary on this work by Joël-Marie Fauquet:

Even though, in order to paint his *Couleurs de la cité céleste*, his friend Olivier Messiaen had put together an instrumental palette as original as it is sumptuous, Jean Langlais, true to the organ through which he prayed so much, thought about these *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse* through the Cavaillé- Coll de Sainte-Clotilde where he is titular organist. They affirm the will to simplify, evident in recent years in the creative process of Jean Langlais, which can only sharpen the flavor of the modal turnings or Gregorian quotations and the sometimes bitter boldness of the harmonic language. It is therefore safe to say that these five pieces are a fundamental artistic and mystical synthesis.¹²

Olivier Messiaen himself sent a long letter to Jean Langlais about this new collection:

Paris, April 7, 1974

Dear Friend,

I received your *Cinq Méditations* for Organ.

Beautiful publication, and a dedication that is too kind! I just read the score with growing interest. You have magnificently understood this magnificent text. I especially appreciated the second piece with its repeated note, its "bacchian and dochmiac" rhythms, and its garlands on quintaton, flute 4' and tierce 1 3/5.

The "Prophetic Visions" are varied as they should be, and the "Fifth Trumpet" is really very astonishing, very terrifying and very original. I knew you had been very sick, and I hope you're much better now. Forgive me for not writing to you more often, but I am overwhelmed by the class, my concerts and extent of my travels and my commissions. I embrace you affectionately.

With all my admiration and affection,

Your old comrade

Olivier Messiaen.¹³

Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse was published (Bornemann 1974) and released on disk (Arion 1975) almost simultaneously. This recording was the first in France to be entirely devoted to a large organ cycle of Jean Langlais, who had to wait 68 years to see his organ music finally honored by a recording in his own country!

The following few press clippings show that the dual message, spiritual and musical, delivered by the composer, was well received by the public and critics:

. A sincere and striking work, probably Jean Langlais' masterpiece.¹⁴

. A visionary work, sometimes weighty, or more properly, classic in expression, sometimes carried along by amazing harmonic boldness. Pages of exhortation, of prayer, of consolation and of terror: a real musical Apocalypse, more upsetting than comforting, compelling one to meditate and submit.¹⁵

¹¹ Jean Langlais, "Souvenirs."

¹² Joël-Marie Fauquet, *L'Apocalypse selon Jean Langlais*, note included on the record jacket of the 33 rpm record of *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*, recorded at Sainte-Clotilde by Marie-Louise Jaquet under the direction of the composer, Arion ARN 38312, 1975.

¹³ Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

¹⁴ Alain Chopin, *Jeunesse et Orgue* 28 (1976).

¹⁵ Yves Millet, "Écoutez pour vous: Jean Langlais, *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*." *La Voix du Nord* (March 14, 1976).

. The most beautiful religious recording in recent months.¹⁶

. Deeply Breton, less in terms of its borrowings from the traditional music of his small homeland than in its lyricism, individualism and mysticism, Jean Langlais has put to use a long convalescence in 1973 to write the *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*, a text created to inspire a Celtic temperament.¹⁷

New Challenges in the mid-1970s

At the time in France, organ recitals were attracting big audiences, but a particular formula was bringing even more success: the "trumpet and organ," brought to its zenith by two leading artists, the 20th century French celebrity trumpeter Maurice André, and organist Marie-Claire Alain. The Combre publishing company, knowing the public's excitement, soon began to ask Langlais to write for these two instruments.

After much procrastination (so strong was his dislike of the "fashionable" formulas), Jean Langlais nevertheless undertook the project, and wrote--one right after the other--a *Pièce*, and then *Sept Chorals* for trumpet and organ, widening the field of possible instruments to include oboe, flute and piano.

At the premiere of the *Seven Chorales*, on January 13, 1974 at the St. John Protestant church in Mulhouse, east of France, a critic made the following comment:

A Work by Jean Langlais at St. John Protestant church, with André Bernard (trumpet) and Marie-Louise Jaquet (organ)

The *Seven Chorales* for trumpet and organ invoke well known themes such as "Out of the Depths," "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," "Our Father in Heaven," "Wenn wir in Höchsten Noten sein," "In dulci júbilo" (Good Christian Men, Rejoice), "Jesus, Priceless Treasure," "Praise to the Lord," where the trumpet plays the chorale, the organ reserving comment, from time to time bitter, archaic, poetic, grand, in canon with the pedal (In dulci júbilo), with a tragic grandeur (I think of "Jesu meine Freude," whose extreme sonority is too big for the temple and would be wondrous in a cathedral), in order to end on the last chorale ("Lobe den Herrn"), in turn the source of variations leading to a virtuoso sequence of trumpet and organ. All of this is in the direct and frank language so particular to Langlais.¹⁸

Looking at the composer's catalog, one notices that after the *Suite Concertante* for violin and cello in 1943, for 30 years Jean Langlais wrote no more chamber music until these works for trumpet and organ. Is it a question of a change in direction?

Not really, it seems. In fact, and his *Trois Oraisons* for voice, organ and flute that follows confirms this, Langlais most of the time composes one at a time, the success of a particular formula, like the trumpet and organ formula, pushing publishers to ask him for another work. Only in the last years of the composer's life does he detach himself from the obligatory presence of a keyboard instrument, piano or organ, and compose for solo instruments (*Séquences* for solo flute, *Études* for 1, 2 or 4 cellos, or *Ceremony* for a group of 12 brass).

¹⁶ La Croix, "Disques pour Pâques, Jean Langlais, *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*." (April 6, 1976).

¹⁷ Patrig Le Dour, "Jean Langlais, *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*." *Ouest-France* (April 20, 1976).

¹⁸ Joseph Mona, *L'Alsace*, January 15, 1974.

For now, the *Trois Oraisons* for voice, organ and flute (1973) combine two different genres: chamber music (flute and organ) and sacred vocal music (a voice over instruments in works with unambiguous subtitles: "Salve Regina," " Jam sol recedit igneus" [Now the fiery sun departs] and "Jesu dulcis memoria").

After the forced interruption due to the convalescence following his heart attack, Jean Langlais quickly resumed his activities as a composer, concert performer and teacher. Although he no longer undertook extensive and long tours in North America, for his health now made that impossible, Jean Langlais still went regularly to the USA.

The testimony of one of his students at the time, Pierre W. Whalon,¹⁹ brings to life in a very detailed and vivid way the personality of Jean Langlais in the mid-1970s:

By 1972, as I was in the midst of an identity crisis, Jean Langlais came to stay at our home in Fall River, Massachusetts, for a week for a festival of his music in Providence, Rhode Island. While I was a decent physics student, it did not fill a need in my soul which I hoped music could. My father was skeptical of this great switch in college major.

All week I served as Langlais' guide, and of course I told him of my torment. Finally I acceded to his demand that I play for him, on the practice organ installed in my bedroom. Langlais informed my parents that I had some talent, and that when I finished my studies (at Boston University), he would take me as a student in Paris. Needless to say, my father's skepticism disappeared.

So in September 1974, with the ink hardly dry on my Bachelor of Music diploma, I climbed the steps to the tribune of Ste. Clotilde, where I was to be found most Sundays until July 1977... At Boston University, I had met and married Linda Lyster, also an organist, and so we both became Langlais students. (The marriage failed during that time, an event that eventually had a lot to do with my becoming an Episcopal priest. But that is another story.) I got a job in a gambling joint off place Clichy to keep body and soul together.

During this time period, Langlais was recovering from a serious infarctus, which had terrified him. The experience led him to compose one of his most important works, *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*. My work with him was always colored by his work of recovery.

That first Sunday, George Baker came up to the loft, fresh from his *Grand Prix de Chartres*²⁰. Langlais was so excited that his student had won. I pictured a studious, conservatively-dressed man in his early 30s, speaking impeccable French. Instead, into the loft bounded this young man, 23 years old, in jeans and sneakers. "Bonjour, Maître, comment allez-vous?" George said. I had never heard French spoken with a heavy Texas accent before. He later played the recessional, a brilliant toccata, his sneakers not impeding his pedal work at all.

Welcome to the circle of Langlais students. I was to meet many truly great students of Langlais over the next three years: Pierre Cogen²¹, Marie-Louise Jaquet, Kathleen Thomerson, Naji Hakim, Ann Labounsky, Dorothea Fleischmannova, among many others.

Langlais was a hard teacher. While I had had piano and organ lessons, my concentrated work on the organ began only three years earlier, and my technique was heavy. He

¹⁹ Pierre Welté Whalon, presently The Right Reverend Pierre W. Whalon, Bishop Suffragan in charge of Episcopal Churches in Europe, residing in Paris, France. At Paris' Notre Dame Cathedral on Sunday, July 8, 2007, as an Anglican Bishop and as a student of Langlais, he was invited to take part in the service to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of the composer. For this special occasion, *Salve Regina Mass* was performed in the Cathedral, with Olivier Lamy playing the Grand Orgue part.

²⁰ Dr. George C. Baker, DMA, organist and composer, teaches organ improvisation at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

²¹ Jean Langlais' assistant at the organ of Sainte-Clotilde, adjunct titular in 1976 and titular until 1994.

asked me how it was possible that I had played his *Première symphonie*, when what I needed was to pound much less hard and play much more precisely. So he made me do the Bach Six *Trio Sonatas* in a row.

It was the crossing of the desert. Every lesson, this little man would sit on his sofa next to the studio organ at 26, rue Duroc, Braille score on his lap, and shout “*non!*” every few measures. Meanwhile, old Johann did what he does to every organist — make him or her play much better, or quit.

At one point Langlais said to me calmly, “If there is no improvement by the next lesson, I will have to let you go.” That was one of the lowest points of my life. My hero since age 3, the great man who had rescued my dream from my father’s skepticism, and who was giving me these precious lessons for free as a gift to my parents, was about to cut ties with me.

The next week I called in sick. The week after, in a cold sweat, I carefully played the third Trio. He was quiet. Afterward, I asked, all choked up, whether I could continue studying with him. “*Ça va,*” he said.

I studied music of de Grigny, Marchand, Clérambault, Couperin, Buxtehude, J.S. Bach, César Franck, Louis Vierne, Charles Tournemire, Olivier Messiaen, and of course his own works. He was always concerned with “*le style*” that each piece had. When I asked him how to determine these styles, he became annoyed and said that if I did not want to study these pieces with him, I could go elsewhere. I reassured him that I was only asking because there would come a day when I would need to determine such questions on my own. In the ensuing discussion, it became clear that Langlais had general rules for different periods and special individual concepts of each piece.

Overall, there were four “*touches*” possible for a note: legato, portato, staccato and piqué. These values had to be executed with precision, of course. One needed to play the piano regularly: Langlais played several Chopin *Etudes* on our piano in Fall River in preparation for his concert in Providence. “After 40, an organist who does not play his piano will soon not be able to play the organ.”

He was impatient with the fashion then prevailing of building faux-Baroque organs and trying to play in antiquated ways (no thumb in Marchand, for example). *Le style* was what made sense musically here and now. Over-ornamentation of de Grigny or Bach, for instance, annoyed him. “Play what is written,” he said. “Don’t you think the composer knew what he wanted?”

With the French Baroque composers some latitude in ornamentation was allowed, but not in Bach. The same prevailed with organ registration — follow what the composer wanted. “There is a mistake of orchestration in Franck’s *Symphony in D* that everyone knows. It is doubling a clarinet with a French horn. No conductor would dare correct Franck, however. Why should organists be different?”

On *rubato*, Langlais gave precious advice. “Make the high notes longer and the low notes shorter; make long notes longer and short notes shorter.” When playing Bach, one’s *rubato* should be such that “only the player and God know.” “The listener should only be aware that it sounds good.” He once quoted Liszt’s famous comment about Chopin: “Look at these trees,” Liszt said, “the wind plays in the leaves, stirs up life among them, but the tree remains the same. That is Chopin’s *rubato*.” But every composer needs a different *rubato*, Langlais said. Tournemire’s is the freest of all.

Tournemire was a difficult teacher — reclusive and wielding humiliation in lieu of encouragement (as with many French teachers, such as Nadia Boulanger).

Jean Langlais was the foremost interpreter of the works of César Franck in his lifetime. Even today I do not believe any organist has equaled his grasp of Franck’s music.

He credited Tournemire with imparting to him the tradition, as Tournemire himself had been a student of Franck.

Langlais also worked a bit with Louis Vierne, to whom he maintained an intense devotion, and who was also a major student of Franck. From these two masters through Langlais to us his students, the tradition has been passed on.

Langlais also studied with Marcel Dupré, whom he credited with developing his technique, and capturing a First Prize in organ performance at the Conservatory. He was much less laudatory of Dupré as a human being. Vierne was a whole other matter. Linda and I asked Langlais to accompany us to visit Vierne's grave, as our tiny flat was literally next door to the cimetière Montparnasse where he lies (as do Franck, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and many others). He thought it would be propitious to do so during the visit of Robert Sutherland Lord, the eminent Tournemire specialist.

I remember it very clearly. It was Ascension Day 1976. When we found it, dilapidated and lonely, Langlais respectfully doffed his trademark beret, touched the crumbling tombstone, and said, "Oh Maître! To think I have not returned here since we laid you in the tomb, 39 years ago! How foolish of me... forgive me."

He told many stories of Vierne. "He was a man of emotional extremes. He could not just be sad, he had to be tragic. He couldn't just be happy, he had to be ecstatic." "But he was the one all us Dupré students could go to and confess. With all he had suffered in life, Vierne was a very good counselor." "I played for him one of my *Gregorian Paraphrases*. 'Oh it's very dissonant,' he said."

Langlais was very fond of Jehan Alain, whose death he never ceased to mourn, and commemorated in *Chant heroïque*. "He wrote me a letter saying that all was well, he had his motorcycle, on which he would ride along with the troops and their tank. How foolish! What a loss!"

He was also very fond of Olivier Messiaen. One day after a lesson, he rang him up on the telephone. Instead of saying "Bonjour" or even "Salut", Langlais sang the first eight notes of that composer's *Alleluias sereins d'une âme qui désire le ciel*. "I always do that when I call." Messiaen's friendship and support were very important to him, as Langlais was convinced that his music was not worth much compared to that of the visionary Messiaen — "*le génie!*" But in fact, the opus of the poor Breton stonecutter's son has endured as well as the music of the son of the poetess and scholar.

To resume, Langlais was both a sophisticated, well-educated man, and a son of his village in Brittany. He could be crude, humorous, poetic, philosophical, and spiritual. His blindness had been his passport out of poverty. Crackling with energy, perpetually curious, at ease with "all sorts and conditions of men" — and women, no one was ever bored around him. His music has a direct quality that continues to speak to new generations.

And at exactly the same time the testimony of another of his American students, George C. Baker, adds a beautiful description of Jean Langlais at his organ of Sainte-Clotilde:

During two wonderful years (June 1973-August 1975), I had the good fortune of studying organ, improvisation and composition with Jean Langlais in Paris.

I took lessons in three locations : Langlais' apartment at 26 rue Duroc, the Schola Cantorum where I obtained the Prix de Virtuosit  in organ and improvisation, 1975, as well as Sainte-Clotilde... I vividly recall the first Sunday I met Langlais at Sainte-Clotilde. He sat down at the console, and the magic began. There were those delicious Langlais harmonies (like Vierne, he improvised in the style in which he composed), those singing harmonic flutes, that famous Voix Humaine with its endearing bleating tr molo, the Franck Trompette, and all the other colors we know from his recordings. I was mesmerized. Watching him maneuver about the console was truly a thing of beauty. His fingers caressed the stop knobs as he deftly made his registrations. Those fingers moved in a confident yet elegant fashion. His touch was crisp and neat, yet smooth and subtle. He never made any inappropriate or exaggerated gestures – his body moved only as it was needed.

After Sunday masses were over, we would descend the stone spiral staircase, and he would feed the pigeons in front of the church. Then we would go to his favorite

Vietnamese restaurant for lunch. Magical days these were for a young American organist!²²

A great specialist in the music of Franck and Tournemire, an admirer of the works of his peers Messiaen, Alain and Duruflé, Jean Langlais did not neglect Baroque music, as we know. He even composed in 1973 a *Suite baroque* for organ aimed specifically at the "restored" Silbermann organ in the Protestant Church of St. John of Mulhouse, whose inauguration he had been invited to play.²³ He designed his new "Suite" on the classic French model, taking into account the characteristics of the instrument he was going to inaugurate (2 manuals of 51 notes, an echo and a pedalboard of 27 notes, and no swell box, with typically 18th century sonorities). Overall, the seven pieces that make up the *Suite baroque* conform to their French classic models in their forms, moving from an introductory "Plein Jeu" to a concluding "Grand Jeu," through diverse dialogues (n°3 and 5), the "Flutes" (n° 4) and a "Voix humaine" (n° 6). He takes care to specify the extremely classic registrations. We note in particular the final "Grand Jeu" which combines, as it should, cornets and reeds, the opposite of the "Grands Jeux" from his *Suite brève* in 1947, where he combines the foundations, the mixtures and the reeds. By contrast, and one can expect this, the harmonic language of the *Suite baroque*, juxtaposing atonality, polytonality and polymodality, is well accepted at the end of the 20th century and we find this from the first measures of "Plein Jeu." In doing so, he could not help slipping into this collection some touches of irony, in the foreground of which is the second piece, "Trémolo en taille" (provocative title of the second piece, which is in itself an aberration since, strictly speaking, it means tremolo in tenor. But, of course, the tremolo is only a mechanical artifice shaking the wind of the organ; it is not an organ stop.) Langlais also expands the irony by requiring in the registration a "trémolo royal," a completely made-up name. This "trémolo en taille" is in reality a "Cromorne en taille" embellished by a shaking of the wind, which does not conform to the tradition of the old classic masters.

More than a pastiche, the *Suite baroque* appears in fact to be a charge against the rigid purism of "baroquistes" that Langlais considered extreme. It is in this sense that we can understand the systematic Lombardic rhythm of "Plein Jeu," the caricature-like ornamentation and the added scales of "Trémolo en taille."

Encouraged by the success of the *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*, the composer began writing *Huit Chants de Bretagne*, whose printed score and recording were simultaneously released (Bornemann 1975 and Arion 1976), as had been true of *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*. The composer wrote the following preface on the record cover:

In composing the *Huit Chants de Bretagne*, I wanted to cleanse myself of the complex and violent style of the *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse*. I turned instinctively to my Celtic origins. The result is a tribute to my homeland, to my compatriots. The Gregorian harmonizations of Tournemire, which are very dissonant but never destroy the melody, guided me in this work. Always I wanted to keep it simple.²⁴

²² George C. Baker, in the booklet accompanying his CD *Jean Langlais: A Centenary*. Solstice SOCD 240 (2007). 12.

²³ Marie-Louise Jaquet, the titular organist, had invited him to play for the inauguration, and he had wanted to write a work specifically for that organ, whose restoration as an "historical artifact" he mocked a bit, at the same time that he admired the 1972 restoration and voicing by the Alsatian organ builder Alfred Kern.

²⁴ Jean Langlais, *Huit Chants de Bretagne*, text on the record sleeve of Microsillon 33rpm, Arion, ARN 36331, 1976.

These eight pieces, conceived between September 1 and November 10, 1974, purposely have French titles translated into Breton, such as "Ar Baradoz" (Paradise), "Lavaromp ar chapeled" (Say the rosary), "Nouel Bertzonek" (Breton Christmas) or "Jezuz, lavar of eomp pedi" (Jesus told us to pray), names given to *Chants de Bretagne* n° 1, 2, 4, and 5. It filled the composer with pleasure once again to draw inspiration from his Breton roots.

Also in 1974 Langlais radically changes inspiration and in a completely different genre, offers a diptych for piano and organ, an instrumental genre which had practically disappeared after the Widor *Duos* or the works of Dupré for piano and organ.²⁵ This was a request from his colleague Rolande Falcinelli, organ professor at the Paris Conservatory, who had been invited to give a piano and organ recital on the radio; she was looking for a new repertoire for this rare instrumental duo.²⁶ This challenge inspired Jean Langlais who, remembering his difficult *Mouvement perpétuel* for piano of 1936, still unpublished, reused it in the second part of his new *Diptyque* by superimposing a substantial organ part. Then he created from scratch a first movement for the most part alternating piano and organ, built on the theme of *Mouvement perpétuel*. This *Diptyque* for piano and organ, thus put together with fragments from two different periods (1936 and 1974), seems altogether coherent, and the single piece of this genre in the catalog of Langlais' works joins the works which Marcel Dupré or Jean Guillou in the 20th century dedicated to this original duo. The premiere of *Diptyque* took place on February 11, 1976 at studio 104 of the Maison de la Radio in Paris, with Rolande Falcinelli, piano, and Marie-José Chasseguet, organ. Since then, several recordings (concerts and disks) by prestigious performers (Marie-Bernadette Dufourcet-Hakim, Thierry Escaich, Olivier Latry, Duo Musart Barcelona most recently) show that the work has definitely entered the repertoire.

In 1974 again, Langlais transformed *Cinq Mélodies* based on poems written by Ronsard and Baillif and written in 1954 for Jeannine Collard into *Cinq Pièces* for flute (or violin) and organ (or piano or harpsichord). While he changed the accompaniment very little, taking into account the flute's range and expressiveness, he substantially reworked the solo part, which he transposed an octave higher to highlight the brilliant treble of the instrument. He also took advantage of this new score to add to a series of virtuoso flute variations that develop over unchanged accompaniment. "As the singers were not interested in my past *Cinq Mélodies* composed for voice, I preferred to transcribe them for the flute or violin; it's basically a survival operation for my works," explained the composer with humor but also a hint of bitterness vis-à-vis the singers, who were guilty, according to him, of too often overlooking the French song repertoire.²⁷

Then came an unexpected event, which gratified Jean Langlais: the awarding, upon the nomination of his friend and former student Emmet Smith,²⁸ of an honorary Doctor of Music degree by Texas Christian University on February 1, 1975, at a ceremony which the musical press widely covered:

On Friday evening the long-awaited recital was played by the near-legendary organist of

²⁵ Marcel Dupré, *Ballade* (1932), *Variations sur deux thèmes* (1937), and *Sinfonia* (1946) for piano and organ.

²⁶ Particularly difficult to perform in France where most churches that have an organ do not have a piano.

²⁷ Langlais, "Souvenirs."

²⁸ Emmet G. Smith, professor of organ for 45 years at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas.

Ste. Clotilde. When Langlais was led onto the stage, both the artist and the audience experienced a moment of rare emotion as spontaneous applause burst forth for several minutes, requiring Langlais to abandon the organ bench repeatedly for bows of acknowledgment. An electrifying ambiance was created for what followed...Throughout the recital²⁹ the huge audience maintained a spell-bound silence as each work was set forth with complete authority. To watch a blind man handle all of his registrations on a large organ was fascinating to those who had not seen it done, but Langlais had the organ clearly in mind and carried it off without a slip.... At the conclusion the audience was on its feet, and only an encore would satisfy them. Langlais wisely chose his earlier work, *Te Deum*. After the *Te Deum*, Langlais, now vested in academic regalia, a present to him from the Fort Worth AGO Chapter, was brought to center stage for the reading of the citation by Chancellor James M. Moudy. Dr. Langlais stepped to the microphone and asked to make a statement. In the still room came words both simple and eloquent, expressing appreciation for this distinguished honor :

"I do not know whether or not I deserve this degree, but the Faculty Senate seems to think I do. I am thankful to my friend and colleague Emmet Smith for helping me to bring my work to the attention of this public, and I thank God for having made the possibility for me to be an artist."

The 1,300 persons reluctantly left the hall and several hundred of them adjourned to the Faculty Center for a gala reception. Friends of Langlais had come from New Jersey, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, California, New Mexico, Arkansas and Texas.³⁰

A photograph taken that night shows Jean Langlais in his doctoral robes receiving the degree:



Jean Langlais receives the honorary degree from Chancellor Moudy at Texas Christian University, February 1, 1975. On the left, Emmet G. Smith.

Figure 54. (collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

The composer was so proud of this distinction that he afterwards would wear the cap and

²⁹ He played Franck (Final), Tournemire, Langlais ("Scherzo Cats," "Choral N° 3" dedicated to Emmet Smith, N° 3 and 5 from *Cinq Meditations sur l'Apocalypse*) and improvised.

³⁰ "Langlais Week at Texas Christian University," *Music Magazine* (June 1975): 26-27.

gown to official events in Paris, such as the 150th anniversary of the invention of Braille at the National Institute for Blind Youth on May 22, 1975. Such an award seemed to him to honor--through him, who had never been to university--the world of the humble and the blind...

Ariane Segal, director of Arion disks, then put the idea in his head to record at Sainte-Clotilde the *Douze Pièces* for Organ by César Franck. The composer, although strongly reluctant at first ("*the undertaking, he underlined, is tiring, and, moreover, I have done it for the Americans*"), nevertheless finished by letting himself be convinced. The recording took place in May 1975 in three evenings of only two hours each. It was important to Jean Langlais to explain his musical decisions on the record sleeve for the set of three 33 rpm LP records entitled: *Jean Langlais: César Franck at Sainte-Clotilde*:

I did my best to respect scrupulously the registrations that Franck indicated...because I believe that he fully knew his organ, and that he wanted this color and not another.

We would not replace, in one of his orchestral works, a horn with a bassoon or an oboe with a trumpet. It is therefore necessary to be as faithful [to his score] in the case of his organ works... I may be criticized because of the tempos and freedom of style I have used to record these pieces, but I am sure I am right because all of Franck's students who were my teachers told me the same thing: "We have no idea of the freedom Franck took in the interpretation of his works."

I have brought together the pure Franck tradition of Albert Mahaut, who was the first to play all of Franck's works in concert, of Adolphe Marty, and then of Charles Tournemire, of course... I think therefore with certainty that I uphold the tradition of Franck.

Langlais had heard so many falsehoods about Franck that he later wrote an article entitled: "About the Style of César Franck in his Organ Works." The entire article is worth quoting, but we will content ourselves with the following excerpts:

I heard some people complaining about the length of the "Fantaisie en La." This impression was probably due to the mistake of the performer who played this work andante while it requires the tempo andantino... There is an edition of the organ works of Franck³¹ in which half of the nuances do not appear, all of the fermatas have been deleted, and most of the registrations changed. In a large American magazine, I described this edition as "assassination." With infinite sadness, I say it again here.

I remember, indeed, that one of my distinguished colleagues told me one day that the swell box was not needed to interpret Franck. What would one say of a pianist who performed the *Variations Symphoniques* without nuances and without use of the damper pedal?

Let me conclude by recalling a personal memory: one day I had the extreme audacity to task the great Albert Mahaut to play me "Prière,"³² a work whose style has always seemed to me extremely difficult to express.

"You're too late, dear friend," he replied, adding "I always promised myself not to play it after the age of 75, and that has passed."

- So, I say, will you allow me to play you this work?

- No, my dear, and for the same reason that I have outlined; I no longer recognize in myself the right to give advice!

What regrettable and admirable wisdom ...

I am not yet 75 years old; so before disappearing from the organ scene, I thought that perhaps the message I have just communicated could be of some interest to artists in

³¹ He is referring to the revised edition by Marcel Dupré, published by Bornemann.

³² This is the work that Mahaut played in 1889 at the Conservatory, which got him his first organ prize in Franck's class.

search of the truth.³³

However, the composer allowed a degree of freedom within this "truth," as evidenced by his successive recordings of Franck's works. It is interesting, in this regard, to compare the lengths of the "Grande Pièce Symphonique" that Langlais recorded three times between 1953 and 1975:

- Ducretet-Thomson (1953): 23 minutes, 52 seconds (Jean Langlais aged 46)
- G.I.A. (1963): 26 minutes, 12 seconds (Jean Langlais aged 56)
- Arion (1975): 27 minutes, 42 seconds (Jean Langlais aged 68)

There are nearly four minutes difference between the first version (the fastest) of 1953 and the last, slower version from 1975. As he aged, Jean Langlais enlarged his style and expanded the breathing time between phrases. Did César Franck do the same? No one will ever know...

With his "Unabridged Franck" [*Douze Pièces*] Langlais established himself as one of the best specialists in the work of his illustrious predecessor in Sainte-Clotilde, which is why, throughout the world, he was asked to play and teach these organ pages that he had known so well for so long.

However, great performer that he was, Jean Langlais did not forget that he was a composer first. In 1975, he also began to write a series of important cycles devoted to the king of instruments: In response to a commission from the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs in honor of "the Roman year," he wrote *Trois Esquisses Romanes* [Three Roman Sketches] for two organs, where he tried to recreate the musical atmosphere of the time with all sorts of strategies : melodic, using themes from the 10th to the 12th centuries ("Haec clara Dies," "Tu autem" by Saint-Martial de Limoges or "Jerusalem mirabilis," the basis of the call to the Crusades); harmonics, with the use of fourths and open fifths; and rhythms. The composer also took special care that the two organs never played at the same time, an especially dangerous practice in cathedrals, where the two instruments are located at opposite ends of the nave and where the reverberation time can be up to 8 seconds.

No sooner was this collection completed successfully than the same Ministry of Cultural Affairs commissioned the composer to write a sequel. This would be *Trois Esquisses Gothiques*, again for two organs. The essential difference from the previous work: the choice of themes, all post-13th century ("Veni Creator," "Virgo Dei genitrix," "Inviolata," Prose de la Dédicace des Eglises, and "Jerusalem et Sion filliæ").³⁴

In "Esquisse Gothique No. 3," writes Joël-Marie Fauquet, we are introduced to a world of movement. The core spirit of the "Sketch," the deliberate harshness of harmony, emphasizes the dancing character and the popular verve of the theme of Prose de la Dédicace des Eglises. It is significant that this outline plan adopts the estampie, the medieval form foreshadowing that of the rondo, where each verse brings a new idea and a new development of the initial idea. The impressive sound of the ten sequences that the

³³ Jean Langlais, "Propos sur le style de César Franck dans son œuvre pour orgue." *Jeunesse et Orgue* 37 (Autumn 1978).

³⁴ With respect to the "Esquisse Gothique N°1," Langlais had his American Student Douglas Himes' request that he compose a piece for his future wedding coincide with the Roman style piece that the French State had asked him to compose. This is why Douglas Himes titled an article he had published in *The Diapason* "A New Wedding Processional by Jean Langlais" (*The Diapason* (January 1978):1,16.). Once published, Langlais' new piece actually became "Esquisse Gothique No. 1."

two organs divide between them is interrupted by a stanza in which the theme of "Salve Regina" appears in all its luminous purity. The two organs join forces to conclude.³⁵

Three successive recordings in 1978 and 1979, testified to the interest in these pieces.³⁶ Continuing with his organ works, Jean Langlais decided in 1976 to re-use part of his 1959 *American Suite*, whose copyright had just been returned to him by the publisher Gray, which closed its business. He chose two pieces he liked, "At Buffalo Bill's Grave" and "Boystown, Place of Peace," and incorporated them into a new collection, together with two new pieces, "Stele for Gabriel Fauré" (transcript of his 1932 Motet *Ave Mundi Gloria*) and a very original "Double Fantaisie" for two organists, all of which justified the general title of the volume: *Mosaïque*, Volume 1. The "Double Fantaisie" for two organists in particular, won great success as a curiosity:

The novelty in the volume is the « Double Fantaisie » for two organists. Organ duets have never been very common or very popular, but Langlais has now provided a work that may be added to those by Samuel Wesley, Merkel and a few others. Langlais' piece is full of difficulties and even requires both players to play with both feet in one passage...³⁷

Encouraged by the score's favorable reception, the publisher, Combre, asked Jean Langlais to write a suite for them. This will be *Mosaïque*, Vol. 2, written between January and April 1976; the collection brought together five pieces of the most dissimilar character imaginable: "Gable," "Images," "Trio," "Complainte de Pont-Kalleg" and "Salve Regina."

The nearly simultaneous recordings of the Unabridged Franck (*Douze Pièces*), the *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse* and the *Huit Chants de Bretagne* by Arion focused the interest of the public and the critics on Jean Langlais, and other record companies became interested in him. One was the young French firm Solstice, created by François and Yvette Carbou, whose first catalog listing is entitled: *Langlais joue Langlais* (33 rpm LP recorded in March 1976 in Sainte-Clotilde).

Meanwhile, Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania awarded Jean Langlais an honorary Doctor of Music degree on October 21, 1976, during a week dedicated to his works. This was his second honorary degree awarded in the United States. On this occasion, an interview was conducted with him, in which the following passage appears:

Whenever he hears his compositions being played by others, he feels "very happy and modest." He would like to spend more time composing but whenever he is asked to perform, he does. "I like to compose. They are always asking me to play and I always accept," he said.

Langlais has no plans to stop composing. "A composer never retires, except when he loses his life. When I pass away, I hope to have another job," he said with a smile.³⁸

While he keeps his promise to tour in the US, preferring stays of a week or two, he returns to composition at the first opportunity. Thus he writes, at the request of trumpeter Maurice André, a very difficult *Sonatine* for trumpet and organ in three movements (Allegro-

³⁵ Joël-Marie Fauquet, from the booklet accompanying the 33rpm LP record *Les Orgues de Masevaux*. Arion, 1979.

³⁶ This work's "world premiere" recording was made by Jean Langlais and Marie-Louise Jaquet playing the two Beckerath organs in the Aldstädter Nikolai-Kirche in Bielefeld, Germany. Motette Ursina, 1978.

³⁷ Gwilym Beechey, *Reviews-Scores*. Vol. 102 (July 1979).

³⁸ Matthew Monahan, "Blind Musician-Composer Gets Honorary Degree." *The Duquesne Duke*, 21 October 1976, p.6.

andantino- mouvement perpétuel).

This work is in turn virtuosic and melancholy (the central andantino uses the nostalgic Breton theme "Jesus told us to pray" already used in the "Chant de Bretagne " n° 6); the *Sonatine* ends with a diabolical perpetual motion where the soloist barely has time to breathe between two avalanches of sixteenth notes. Maurice André himself complained to Jean Langlais, after having recorded the work for *Erato*,³⁹ nevertheless adding with a laugh, "But I did it anyway!"⁴⁰ It is certain that, thinking about the greatest trumpet player of his time, Langlais had multiplied the piece's pitfalls without fear that because of this challenge, his *Sonatine* risked finding few proficient enough players. Three simultaneous recordings of this difficult work proved him wrong...

In the mid 70s, Langlais was not idle in terms of composition, and ideas came from everywhere. Thus, as the Bishop Pierre Whalon recalls:⁴¹

Pierre Cogen, who was to record brilliantly the *Première Symphonie* at Sainte-Clotilde,⁴² routinely asked Langlais when he was going to compose a second symphony.

Having played the *Première Symphonie* myself, I seconded Pierre in asking several times. Langlais invariably answered, "If I write a second symphony, it will be à la Webern and last only 30 seconds."

One day, he surprised me by saying that he had actually started the piece. "But it is very short, and the titles are simple: prelude, postlude and a middle piece." I replied jokingly that he could call the central piece "Interlude." Langlais laughed.

When I returned the next week for my lesson, he said that he had added a fourth piece named "Lude" because "between Prelude, Interlude and Postlude, you need a 'lude'!" Soon thereafter I accompanied him to his transcriptionist, to whom he proudly announced that all his students could leave him alone, and there would be no third symphony!⁴³

This curious work, the *Deuxième Symphonie*, was composed at the same time as Volume 2 of *Mosaïque*, in late 1976. Before even reading a note, one is struck by its small number of pages (seven), its brevity (five minutes) and subtitles of its four movements (Prelude-Lude-Interlude-Postlude), all of which play on the common root Latin *ludus* (game), for the word "lude" does not exist in French. All these elements together with the subtitle of the work, "Alla Webern," suggest that Langlais tried to caricature, with certain irony, the massive century-old "Symphony" for organ, a genre he claimed to have sufficiently illustrated 36 years ago in his own *Première Symphonie*.

In addition, while an admirer of Anton Webern and his brief *Pièces pour orchestre*, Langlais wanted to shake up from top to bottom all the principles that govern the organ symphony. For complex construction where development is the keyword, he creates a suite of four tiny pieces (the "Prelude" has 28 measures, "Lude" only 13, "Interlude" 29 and "Postlude" 31) where what dominates is a constant rejection of development; everything is fragmentary, no measure resembles the previous one. Several phrases appear without there ever being any connection between them: theme (DIEU-MARIE) without accompaniment, virtuosic monodic passages, groups of chords with no connection or any tonal or modal

³⁹ *Trompette et orgue*, vol. 10. Maurice André, trumpet; André Luy, organ. 33rpm LP. Erato, 1979.

⁴⁰ Langlais, "Souvenirs."

⁴¹ Pierre Whalon, written testimonial, June 15, 2013. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

⁴² *Pierre Cogen aux grandes orgues de la Basilique Sainte-Clotilde, Musique française*, Cybelia CY 867, 1976.

⁴³ This will indeed prove false. As we will see later, there will be a Third Symphony!

reference, fragments of trios, constantly modified rhythms, atonality, unusual registrations (see the solo of "Interlude" on the bourdon, tierce 1 $\frac{3}{5}$ ', and tremolo), alternately strong and gentle.

In this work, Langlais seems to be searching for a new kind of contrast, based on a subtle interplay between timbre, melody, intensity, rhythm, harmony, with none of these elements giving a pretext for development nor taking precedence over any other. This new attitude marks a true shift for him, who never ceased listening to the music of his time, whose tendencies that most conformed to his own sensibility he tried hard to capture, but not in a systematic way. Hearing this new work where there is an obvious desire for non-development, for fragmentation and chaos, listeners were completely disoriented. It was probably the provocative goal that he desired.



Jean Langlais, 70 years old, at the Ste Clotilde console

Figure 55. (photograph by Jean-Louis Loriaut. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

At the dawn of 1977, the composer is about to celebrate his 70th birthday, and certain commentators are already able to take stock of his entire life. Robert Lord, in the American magazine *The Diapason*, sums up the career of Jean Langlais in a long article entitled "Jean Langlais - On the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday." He describes the Professor always seeking the perfect style of execution of the works of others, particularly Franck and the internationally renowned improviser, Tournemire, and adds:

I do not think that Langlais would best like to be remembered as a performer. His most important role is that of a composer. I would characterize the style of much of his music as classic. In other words, his music contains no excessive elements. His harmonies are clear and his melodic ideas well-defined. This results in a performance style which, unlike Tournemire, is uncomplicated and direct. The art of Langlais, then, is one of an economy of notes with a preference for concise forms, resulting often in rather short pieces. The climax is often achieved through the polyphonic combination of several themes which have been introduced earlier in the piece.

In summary, Jean Langlais remains an independent. He has put his own particular stamp on his musical legacies from the past. These are my impressions of the musician...
So, maître, all your American friends join me in wishing you good health, peace, joy and many more years of creative energy!⁴⁴

It seems that the artist, in this period of his life, has been touched by the retirement idea. Had he not, a few months earlier, resigned from the Schola Cantorum, because of excessive fatigue, at a time when his organ and improvisation class had 42 students of all ages and all nationalities? And did he not tell anyone who would listen that the concert tours wore him out? In those days, more and more frequently, he left Paris to sit in his little house in Plaisir, a suburb of Paris; there, with his wife, his children and grandchildren, he passed peaceful days, composing, reading, taking long walks in the neighboring woods. In the general opinion of his students and friends, he gradually seemed to step back from the hectic life that had always been habitual...

Yet his life as a composer continued, supported by various commissions from his editors. Thus, shortly after celebrating his 70th birthday, at the request of the publisher Combre, he began the third volume of *Mosaïque* in the spirit of diversity that had governed the development of the two previous collections in 1975 and 1976.

Of the six pieces that form *Mosaïque* Vol. 3, "Parfum," "Lumière," "Printemps," "Thèmes," "Pax" and "2ème Fantaisie pour 2 organistes," the latter is without doubt the most original. With nothing in common with the "Double Fantaisie" of *Mosaïque* Vol. 1, except that it is for two organists playing the same organ--four hands and four feet, this "2ème Fantaisie" is written without a theme, without tonality, without stable rhythm. Constructed in a single movement, it is difficult to play because neither performer has a landmark, particularly in the treatment of the final double pedal solo.

Another extremely difficult piece for the performer is "Thèmes," dedicated to his old friend, New Yorker Charles Dodsley Walker. Here, Jean Langlais multiplies at will the lines of sixteenth notes in double octaves in the feet and hands in added values, as he had done in his earlier *Poem of Happiness*. It takes as themes (the title of the piece) the first names of Charles and his wife Janet transcribed into Braille music according to the correspondence between the letters of the alphabet and musical notes, a process he will use all his life. Simpler are the other four extracts in *Mosaïque* Vol. 3 ("Lumière," "Parfum," "Printemps," "Pax"), from a technical point of view as much as from a conceptual point of view, taking their inspiration from trips, encounters or feelings.

On August 6, 1977, the composer lent his support to the closing concert of the Congress of the GDO (Gesellschaft der Orgelfreunde, the German "Amis de l'Orgue"). That day, at the organ of Sainte-Clotilde, he gave a memorable recital in front of over 700 organists, organ scholars and organ builders mostly from Germany, the majority of whom were hearing him for the first time in concert. It was a revelation to them, and from that time on, Langlais would be constantly invited to Germany to play and record. To give an idea of the impression he produced, here are some excerpts from an article entitled simply: "A MASTER"

Sometimes one wonders what the difference is between a high quality organist and "a

⁴⁴ Robert Sutherland Lord, "Jean Langlais - On the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday." *The Diapason* (February 1977).

very great master" of the organ. The instrument itself does not specifically highlight the artistic personality of the performer as is the case with the pianist and his touch, the violinist and his bowing.

And yet... when one finds oneself in front of a great performer, the question is immediately answered. Jean Langlais is one of "these absolute greats" and his Sunday concert at the Church of the Holy Trinity (in Wiesbaden) demonstrated that without question. What serenity in his playing, what expansive space for phrases to breathe, what incredible distinction in his phrasing! He is a true master of nuanced legato at the same time that he is a poet of sound and a creator of a colorful atmosphere... It is in the improvisation on three themes that were given to him that Jean Langlais made us reach the summit of his art. Instead of a series of poorly defined variations that usually characterize improvisations, listeners heard a presentation of these themes and of their musical and religious content that was dense and extremely rigorous in its form.

The presentation ended with cascading chords whose virtuosity was never superficial. In this improvisation, Langlais took us back to a time when organ playing and the art of composition were one.⁴⁵

After the GDO Congress, its president, Dr. Wolfgang Adelung, wrote Jean Langlais a long letter of thanks in French, in which he showed himself to be particularly appreciative. Here are some excerpts:

Master,

You kindly gave your support to the International Congress of the Association "Die Gesellschaft der Orgelfreunde" which was held in Paris from July 31 to August 6, 1977, and which brought together over 700 organists, organ scholars, experts, master-builders, church musicians and friends of the organ from many countries.

The representativeness of the instruments featured on the program and the participation of eminent titular organists of the great Parisian organ lofts placed this conference at a level of a cultural event of such magnitude and density as it had never before attained.

This encounter with the cathedrals and churches of France, with organists, and with the very rich literature of your country was also - for most of us - our first direct contact with an aesthetic which we had only learned about in books. The truly exceptional days we have experienced will be written about extensively in academic journals and they certainly will prelude to many exchanges in the years to come...⁴⁶

The true cultural shock that the German organists experienced, especially the discovery of the art of Jean Langlais at Sainte-Clotilde, initiated for the composer a period of constant requests for concerts. Everything happened as if--the era of the great tours in America being ended--Germany and the Germanic countries took over. One of the first things Langlais did was to record for the German company Motette his *Six Esquisses* for two organs. It is this recording that the *Bielefelder Zeitung* is referring to in its article under this headline:⁴⁷

Für die gotisch-romanischen « Skizzen » wählte Langlais die Beckerath-Orgeln

Schallplatten-Aufnahmen mit der Priser Komponisten in der Nicolaikirche.

(For the recording of his Gothic-Roman "Sketches" Langlais chose the Beckerath Organs at St Nicolas Church)

Meanwhile, in 1978, Thomas Daniel Schlee, young Austrian organist and composer responsible for the collection "Universal-Orgel Edition," a disciple of both Messiaen and Langlais, offered the latter a collaboration that would bear fruit with the appearance between 1978 and 1989, of five great collections for organ, various pieces (including *Prélude et fugue*,

⁴⁵ Pr. Dr. GH, "A Master." *Wiesbaden Kurier*, November 8, 1977.

⁴⁶ Dr. Wolfgang Adelung, President of the G.D.O. Letter to Jean Langlais, October 10, 1977. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais.

⁴⁷ *Bielefelder Zeitung*, April 5, 1978.

opus 1, for organ) and two of the three *Concertos* for organ and orchestra, the n° 2 and 3.

To add new pieces to this series, the composer wrote *Triptyque Grégorien* for organ ("Rosa Mystica," "In Paradisum," "Alleluia") inspired by plain-song tunes like "Salve Regina" (solemn tone), "In Paradisum" and two "Alleluias" for the Feast of the Ascension.

Changing to Bornemann publishers, Langlais undertook another kind of exercise, the development of an organ book following an increasing number of voices, from which came the title of the collection, *Progression*.

He starts with a "Monodie" which is very difficult even though throughout its seven pages it only has a single melodic line, but often distributed in sixteenths and double octaves divided between the manual and the pedal. The composer continues this style exercise with a piquant "Duo" and then a "Trio" subtitled "Tears" (because dedicated to "my very sweet friend whom I mourn, my little dog Paf"), in which he uses the expressive interval of the tri-tone (B-F), contained in the name of his dog (PAF : B-F-A). From the next piece, "Offering" (four voices), the composer escapes some of the constraints that he had found necessary when he did not follow strictly the requirements for writing four and five parts. Because he was repelled by rigid systems, he does not hesitate to violate his own rules. In this way, his "Fugue et Continuo" abandons writing for five voices, and instead embraces a new form of a fugue in three voices (soprano-alto-bass), supported by a succession of continuo-type chords. This completely original version of the free fugue proves that Langlais' creative curiosity was always engaged.

In early 1979 the Worcester Cathedral Choir Association (Great Britain) asked Langlais to write a polyphonic English Mass for four voices and organ. This will be his thirteenth and last vocal mass, divided into five movements (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei). This mass, titled "Grant us thy Peace," will be premiered two years later on August 23, 1981, at the Cathedral of Worcester (GB).

The overall design of this Mass is new, since it is far from evoking the atmosphere of a defined era, as the *Missa Salve Regina* and the *Mass in Ancient Style* do. Instead, the composer mixes styles, introducing the Kyrie in a clearly modal atmosphere (in D) in order to suddenly branch off on a melodic fragment in the second mode, abandoning that just as abruptly to connect without transition modality - chromaticism - atonality - succession of tri-tones, so that there is never a center, no dominant pole, each new fragment appearing without any resolution or predictable rhythm. The last chord of Kyrie, in a pure minor, is however embellished with "B," which is completely strange, unless one considers a natural 9th as a consonance...

We note the suppleness of melodic and rhythmic phrases, the melodic figures passing freely from whole notes on the white keys to 8th notes on the black, which proves that, contrary to what we might have thought in the earlier *Solemn Mass "Orbis factor,"* the English language did not pose a particular problem of prosody to Jean Langlais, and it did not prevent him from writing soft and flowing music. These multiple changes make this *Mass "Grant us thy Peace"* a work at once both new in design, notably in its bold harmonies and in its failure to resolve chords, but still in the logical line of his earlier Masses. Historically and structurally, it represents the culmination of the composer's research on the matter.

Reviewing the period 1973-1979, one notes the importance of organ music in the catalog of Langlais. The reputation of the composer as organist was of course a factor, but Jean Langlais had a personal reason for favoring organ performance: the desire not to impose on his wife, the copyist of most of his works since 1931, these efforts necessitating--in the scores for choir or orchestra--that she write innumerable separate parts.

But inexorably, Jeannette Langlais' health was deteriorating. In May 1979, she was suddenly struck down by a stroke which, a few weeks later, would prove fatal.

She was 74 years old.

Widowhood and Remarriage

The sudden and unexpected loss of the person who, for nearly 50 years, had been his most loyal support, overwhelmed the composer, who sank into deep despair.

"My life is over," he said, "and I only want one thing: to rejoin at the earliest moment she who is departed. For how can I go on totally alone?"⁴⁸

Such distress and such devastation in a man usually so strong in the face of pain, deeply upset the people around him. What to do with him? What to do for him? Jeannette's funeral took place at the church of Escalquens, and she was buried alongside her parents in the small adjoining cemetery.

Upon his return to Paris, I went to pick him up at the airport, and at Plaisir where he had been living since Jeannette's stroke, we took a short walk outside his house. He told me of his turmoil, and I told him: "I will not leave you alone." He proposed marriage. I accepted.

Given the circumstances and his recent widowhood, the ceremony took place August 28, 1979 at St. François-Xavier church in Paris in the strictest privacy.

Gaston Litaize, the organist, was on vacation, so there was no organ or even music for that matter; as for the celebrant, Father Aubin, he had in the past officiated at the wedding of... Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod at Saint-Germain-des-Prés!

Life took its course, and with it new works were born: *Trois Noëls avec variations*, then a *Prélude grégorien*, dedicated to his American pupil George C. Baker.

But Jean Langlais resolved very quickly to raise to the memory of his first wife a musical monument which he entitled *Offrande à une âme, Diptyque pour orgue*, composed in three different places and in three periods of time: Escalquens, Plaisir and Paris, between September and November 1979. This work, of an unusual length of about 25 minutes, consists of two parts of substantially equal dimensions, subtitled "Vers la Lumière" (Towards the Light) and "Dans la Lumière" (In the Light.) The initial idea behind the construction of this long diptych is the passage of the soul from death to eternal life, according to the commentary on each of the two movements in the score:

"**Vers la Lumière**" : "Like the bird of the great mystery, one evening her soul flew away... (toward the Light)

"**Dans la Lumière**": "Lord, grant her eternal rest (... in the Light)."

This work, demanding and difficult to access, in the catalog of Langlais undoubtedly takes

⁴⁸ A statement he made several times to his family and close friends.

in the catalog of Langlais the place of the Requiem that he never wanted to write... The composer seems to have thrown all his strength and creative power into this farewell message, written under the sign of faith, and he would not leave it to anyone else to play the premiere of *Offrande à une âme* at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris on March 28, 1981. As he had done in "The Fifth Trumpet" (*Cinq Méditations sur L'Apocalypse*), where he had followed to the letter the scriptural verses and transformed into leitmotifs various images (bottomless pit, smoke, locusts), similarly here, Langlais follows the two "key ideas" of the ascent of the soul "Towards the Light" and the peace of the soul "in the Light," successively presenting these key elements of this Diptyque in memory of his wife.

First, there is the "bird of great mystery," evoked in measure 1 by a bird singing in the treble, without accompaniment, on flute 4' and tierce 1 3/5' in the swell; then immediately after, the representation of death appears in descending chromatic long note values on the 8' flute, voix humaine and tremolo.

Then come several elements of the Gregorian Mass for the Dead; first, the response "Subvenite" (sung at the entrance to the church before the Mass for the Dead begins), accompanied very simply by open fourths and fifths.

That motive, quickly abandoned, gives way to the Introit of the Mass for the Dead, "Requiem aeternam," immediately following the "Kyrie," of which he keeps only the first phrase.

Then, passing over the gradual, the sequence and the offertory, which normally follow the "Kyrie," Langlais goes directly to the "Sanctus" and "Agnus Dei" which he treats fully before returning to the motive of the "bird of great mystery," which precedes two new elements, completely foreign to Gregorian chant: the carillon of the church of Escalquens in whose cemetery she is buried, and the first name, "Jeannette," set to music according to the usual Braille method. All the non-Gregorian leitmotifs (birdsong, representation of death, carillon, first name) will be freely connected in the most elaborate fantasy, leading irresistibly toward the "thème de la Lumière" (theme of the Light), figured, as required, by the "Lux aeterna" (communion of the Mass for the Dead), announcing the second part of the work, "Dans la Lumière." The second part of the diptych, "Dans la Lumière" (In the Light), will be the exact counterpart of the first.

This time the composer again focuses on describing the arrival of the soul in the Light, always using leitmotifs: the name Jeannette, the complete "Lux aeterna," the unexpected arrival of "Lumen Christi" of Holy Saturday treated almost exactly as in the 1949 *Incantation pour un Jour Saint*. The triple call of "Lumen Christi" leads to a large toccata whose first notes form the theme Jeannette, accompanied, in long pedal notes, by the Gregorian antiphon "In paradisum" sung at the Absolution in the Mass for the Dead.

This brilliant toccata (interrupted by a new triple call of "Lumen Christi") ends on a tone cluster formed exclusively by the white keys of the organ, the ultimate Christian symbol for Jean Langlais of the Divine Light that now surround his departed wife, her soul now resting with God.

Langlais here expresses once again his Christian faith, putting together the human emotion of grief with his faith in resurrection; his sadness over the loss of his beloved wife being directly followed by joy at her passage into heaven.

After this personal and painful work, Jean Langlais picks up the thread of his life as a concert artist and composer, especially since many commissions were coming to him. For Universal Edition (Wien), first, he had the idea of reusing five of the eight movements of his 1959 *American Suite* (now that he had the copyright back) to form a *Troisième Symphonie* for

organ with different subtitles: "Big Texas" changes to "Introduction," "Californian Evocation" to "Cantabile," "Scherzo-Cats" to "Intermezzo," and "Storm in Florida" to "Orage" the latter movement, moreover, being reduced by 50 measures. In and of itself, this *Troisième Symphonie* initiated a new phase in his career -- the composer's ultimate snub of the organ Symphony!

At the request of the director of Portsmouth Boys Choir, Father Whitehead, Jean Langlais then wrote a *Corpus Christi*, group of six vocal parts for 4 equal voices and organ on Latin texts of Gregorian melodies of the "Office of the Most Blessed Sacrament." Exactly at the same time, he composed for the monks of the German abbey at Marienstatt short harmonisations for 4 mixed voices and organ⁴⁹ on themes suggested by Father Gabriel Hammer, organist of the abbey and one of his most ardent supporters. In the text accompanying the four CDs published by the German firm Motette in 2007,⁵⁰ its director, Johannes Ricken, wrote:

Now in 2007, on the 100th anniversary of Langlais' birth, we feel that it is an obligation to pay homage to the legacy of this great master, who worked closely with our label and often travelled in Germany in order to perform memorable recitals, such as those he gave in Marienstatt Abbey in the Weterwald region, organized by our friend, Cistercian Father Dr. Gabriel Hammer. Some of the recordings featured here were made, with Langlais' permission, during these recitals.⁵¹

This renewed activity, after such a trying period of his existence, was undoubtedly for Jean Langlais the direct consequence of his new life and of the birth on May 25, 1980, the day of Pentecost, of our little Caroline. At 73, the composer, who only a few months earlier had appeared headed for semi-retirement, started reconsidering his life and began to envision all kinds of future projects. With great confidence, he accepted the responsibility for this new child who had entered his life "as a miracle," he used to say. In a letter full of humor written to his Canadian student Jan Overduin, he says, amused:

As you can imagine I am very happy of my new child, Caroline. Now I have two daughters, one is 45 years old, the second one only 10 months!⁵²

His new life was, of course, very different from the previous one because of the baby... and the new dog, Scherzo, an abandoned one he adored and who will be his best companion until his death. Extremely undisciplined, this very intelligent animal knew very well how to guide his master on the street, steering him around all obstacles even though he had never been trained for that. Then, the apartment was filled with hectic life, especially at mealtimes, when everyone was crying to be fed at the same time: Jean, Caroline and Scherzo. Of course the dog always came first, although his favorite meal was bread crusts; then the crispy crusts lay all around the apartment, and it was necessary to vacuum after every meal! All the students coming for their lessons at this time remember that...

This new family situation was coupled with an upsurge of new works, primarily *Rosace*

⁴⁹ In *Marienstatter Orgelbüchlein*, Breitkopf & Härtel Nr. 8293, Wiesbaden, Germany, 1987.

⁵⁰ *Jean Langlais Centenary Celebration, 1907-2007*. Motette, MOT 50821. Germany, 2007. Text from p. 5.

⁵¹ Including "Jean Langlais spielt J.S.Bach," a very rare all-Bach recital, and "Jean Langlais improvisiert in Marienstatt," both played on the Rieger organ of Marienstatt Abbey.

⁵² Letter from Jean Langlais to Jan Overduin, dated March 20, 1981, cited in "Jean Langlais as Teacher" in *Hommage à Langlais*. The University of Michigan School of Music, 1996, p. 20.

(Rose Window), a collection of four organ pieces, the last two of which celebrated his new life. Of "Croquis" (Sketch), embroidered around an old popular lullaby "for my daughter Caroline," Rolande Falcinelli wrote:

Tenderness, humor, yes; with the finest and most authentic psychological insight, the portrait of a young child through her games and unpredictable reactions, sketched in a few pencil strokes of astonishing accuracy.⁵³

As for "Feux d'artifice" (Fireworks), the concluding piece in *Rosace*, Kathleen Thomerson explains the character of the work in this way:

The final piece, "Feux d'artifice" (Fireworks), commissioned by the French Ministry of Fine Arts, is a tour de force, and well deserves the designation "Fireworks." Combustible and explosive passages cascade from the organ keys when Marie-Louise Langlais-Jaquet, to whom the incendiary display is dedicated, performs this work. Prestissimo full organ sections alternate with slower measures of predominantly 8' flue work. A surprisingly cool moment is presented twice in brief references to a French old folksong associated with moonlight, with organum first of fourths and then of sevenths (!); Langlais has said that after the fireworks are over, the moon is still in the sky. In the organ version, however, fireworks have the last words: cadenza and fermata. The premiere was given by Mme. Langlais on February 22, 1981, at the Riverside Church.⁵⁴

Fireworks being described by a blind person, that was Langlais!

A tumultuous end of the year 1980 for Jean Langlais, marked also by a comeback in his life as a concert artist, as this list of engagements between April and October 1980 shows:

- April 13: Lausanne (Radio Suisse Romande)
- May 27: Weert (The Netherlands)
- May 16: Beaume-les-Dames (France)
- June 1: Marienstatt (Germany)
- June 2: Bonn (Germany)
- June 3: Bad Nauheim (Germany)
- June 4: Giessen (Germany)
- June 6: Wien-Saint-Augustin (Austria).
- August 3: Masevaux Festival (France)
- August 10-17: Competition and concerts at Bayreuth (Germany)
- August 11: Salzburg (Austria)
- September 7: Knechtsteden (Germany)
- October 5: Stuttgart (Germany)

The year 1981 will see Jean Langlais' final short trip to the United States, from September 19 to October 1, with the highlight being the presentation of a third honorary degree, a Doctor of Music, by Catholic University in Washington, D.C. on Saturday, September 19, 1981. The architect of this week honoring Jean Langlais in Washington was George C. Baker, who became organist at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and professor of organ at the Catholic University.

The ceremony was, as always, magnificent and moving, and Langlais was very proud to learn that the next day, September 20, his music would be played in all the churches in Washington, including the Cathedral, where we went. To our amazement, the Archbishop

⁵³ Rolande Falcinelli, concert program of July 22, 1983, part of the "9th Week of Music at Belley" (July 18-22, 1983), dedicated to Jean Langlais music.

⁵⁴ Kathleen Thomerson, *The American Organist*, February 1982.

stopped the procession to come shake the hand of the composer and thank him for the quality and value of his music ...

"MUSICAL MASTER," "LANGLAIS SHOWS MASTERY IN MUSEUM ORGAN RECITAL," "ORGANIST JEAN LANGLAIS LIVES UP TO HIS LEGEND" were some of the headlines the press gave to their articles about the recitals Langlais performed on this trip to Washington, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Utica, NY, thus saluting for the last time an artist who had been, from 1952 to 1981--up to the end of his strength--tirelessly carrying the message of French music from one coast to the other of this vast North American continent.

Each of these final recitals in the United States ended with the "Double Fantasy for two organists" (*Mosaïque*, Vol. 1), which we played together at the organ and which enchanted the American public:



Jean and Marie-Louise Langlais playing the "Double Fantaisie" (*Mosaïque* 1), USA, September 1981.

Figure 56. (photograph by Laura Petrie. Collection Marie-Louise Langlais)

Upon his return from the United States, several commissions were waiting, especially from Thomas Schlee of Universal Edition. At Schlee's insistence, the composer again picked up some early works which he had almost forgotten about, in particular his *Prélude et fugue*, opus 1, as well as the sole survivor of *Six Préludes* (1929), the "Adoration des bergers" (Adoration of the Shepherds). These two pieces would be published in 1982. The title "Adoration des bergers" became "Chant des bergers," but a printer's typographical error turned it into the "Song of the Shepherdesses" (!). To this piece Langlais added "Prière des mages" (Prayer of the Magi), an unused fragment from his *Troisième Concerto "Réaction"* for organ and orchestra.

But Thomas Schlee also was waiting for Jean Langlais to compose a new large scale organ work. This would be *Prélude et allegro*, about which the editor wrote the following in the preface:

Prélude et allegro was composed at the present editor's instigation in response to a commission by the Welsh Arts Council. It was completed in Paris on July 1st, 1982.

This work represents the culmination of Langlais' sequence of large-scale, free (i.e. not exclusively chorale-oriented) concert pieces, such as *Essai*, *Poem of life*, *Offrande à une âme*. Structurally it may also be regarded as a counterpart – belonging to a much later period – to Langlais' first organ composition, the *Prélude et fugue* (UE 17462). In both cases a typically French harmony is the foundation of the "Prelude."

Whereas in the early work an unequivocal thematic link⁵⁵ with the "Fugue" was established by the anticipation of the fugal subject, in the present work the theme which underlies the "Allegro" makes episodic appearances in the "Prélude"... A virtuosic coda provides the work with an effective "concert-style" close.

A new diptych, this time for two trumpets and organ, *Pastorale et Rondo* saw the light of day soon after. It contains reminiscences of earlier pages, like the Breton theme "Jesus told us to pray" or in "Rondo," a reworking of the "Pasticcio" from the 1956 *Organ Book*. The publisher Elkan-Vogel was more than happy to publish for instrumental training this work that was so popular with the public.

The end of 1982 brought the composer a lovely surprise. A letter from the Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, informed him of his accession to the rank of Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters. Meanwhile, he learned that he had made his entrance into the very exclusive columns of the "Petit Larousse Illustré" (1983 edition) with the following entry:

Langlais (Jean), French composer, born in La Fontenelle (Ille-et-Vilaine) in 1907. Organist of Ste. Clotilde in Paris, he continues the tradition of Tournemire.

While giving recitals and composing new works, Jean Langlais did not forget "his" organ at Sainte-Clotilde, and he wished to add two modifications that went along with the history of the organ: restore the Swell to Great suboctave coupler which he had had removed in 1962 at the time of Beuchet's restoration, and, especially, to put the Cromhorne (Clarinet) of Cavallé-Coll back on the Positif division, where it had been during the time of Franck. Recall that in 1933 Tournemire had placed it in the Swell division so that it would be expressive. The organ builder Jacques Barbéris carried out these changes at the request of Langlais.⁵⁶

Two concerts took place before a large audience, to demonstrate the importance of this restoration. Here are some excerpts from the report:⁵⁷

During the year 1983, the builder Jacques Barbéris and colleagues proceeded to rebuild the internationally famous pipe organ in Sainte-Clotilde. The work involved removing dust and restoring the pipes, restoration of Swell to Great suboctave coupler (especially required for the performance of Franck's "Grande Pièce Symphonique"), and the return to the Positif division of the clarinette 8'--originally a Cromhorne, as written on the 19th

⁵⁵ Thomas-Daniel Schlee, Preface to *Prelude et Allegro pour orgue*. Universal Edition N° 17475, Wien, 1985.

⁵⁶ See Jean Langlais' letter of April 8, 1982 to Jean Cau, consulting engineer to the Monuments Historiques.

⁵⁷ Pastor Claude-Rémy Muess, "Restoration of the Great Organ at the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde in Paris." *Jeunesse et Orgue* (November 1983). 12.

century pipes—which had been transferred to the Swell. No other changes were made to the instrument. It was inaugurated at two concerts on November 15 and 22, 1983.

The first concert was performed by the titular organist, his wife, Marie-Louise Jaquet-Langlais, and by Pierre Cogen, co-titular,⁵⁸ who interpreted works by composers whose organistic work was—or is—at the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde. There was one exception, the chorale "Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele" designed to showcase the restored sound quality of the Cromhorne on the Positive division,⁵⁹ which Marie-Louise Jaquet-Langlais played in addition to the "Fantaisie en La" by César Franck.

The second concert, the following Tuesday, was a tribute to Jean Langlais. Homage was paid by two of his former students, greatly talented young organists with promising careers, Naji Hakim and his wife Marie-Bernadette Dufourcet...

At the end of the program, Jean Langlais climbed the steps of its platform to improvise. To the great joy of the listeners, he chose to comment on two Gregorian themes: "Te Deum Laudamus" and "Virgo Dei genitrix." All of Jean Langlais' piety as well as all his marvelous skill as an improviser, his wealth of invention and the consummate art of his rhythms, volumes, timbres and their combinations, burst forth during those all-too-brief moments.

You could not wish for better rededication of the instrument of which Jean Langlais has been titular since 1945 ...

In the second inaugural concert, on November 22, 1983, Naji and Marie-Bernadette Hakim played the two new pieces that Langlais had dedicated to them, "Midi" and "Matin," part of a cycle of *Cinq Soleils* ("Matin," "Midi," "Soir," "Etoiles," "France") a commission by the Festival Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges for its 1983 and 1984 seasons. Pastor Claude-Rémy Muess commented :

One can say incandescent, radiant, of the first of these two works. Without doubt, only a blind man is able to sing such a vibrant hymn to light. The second exudes gentleness, serenity, the peace of twilight. And we think of the "Hymne au soleil" (Hymn to the Sun) by Vierne, this other richly inspired non-seeing man.

Having reached this stage of his life, Jean Langlais, aged 76, yielded to repeated solicitations from certain of his publishers and finally agreed to write texts with educational scope. He had always refused to write a treatise on improvisation, citing the complexity of the undertaking, even though, according to experts, he was one of the best teachers in this demanding discipline. But Universal Edition knew how to convince him to explore the possibilities of the pedal board, a musical game that he will take up as a challenge, as he wrote in his "Preface" to this volume:

In composing the seven pedal studies, I attempted to combine virtuosity and music. The pieces focus on seven specific techniques. This constitutes the pedagogic element. However, purely musical considerations are at no time neglected. Herein lies the justification of the chosen title: seven concert studies – in other words, compositions written equally with the virtuosos and the audience in mind.⁶⁰

The *Sept Etudes de concert* comprise a veritable catalog of difficulties specific to the pedal player, from pure velocity ("Chromatic," "alternation," "trills") to a polyphony requiring the simultaneous use of the heel and toe ("Counterpoint

⁵⁸ After the retirement of Pierre Denis from his position of assistant to Jean Langlais at Sainte-Clotilde, Pierre Cogen, one of Langlais' former students, took the job.

⁵⁹ And on this occasion, the audience could discover the magnificent color and the power of this stop as a result of its relocation to the Positif.

⁶⁰ Jean Langlais, Preface to *Sept Etudes de concert pour pédale seule*. Universal Edition. Vienna, 1984.

I", "Counterpoint II"), through speed in the movements ("Staccato"), and finally, all elements juxtaposed in a rhapsodic way in the concluding piece of the score, "Alleluia," which even adds new difficulties with glissandi and octaves. Lovers of "walking acrobatics" will profit from the sixth study, "Trills," which, in five pages, severely tests the flexibility of the ankles, separately and together, to the point of exhaustion. But in doing this, Langlais combines virtuosity and music. His virtuosity is never in vain, and he proves it once again by using, for example, Gregorian chant, especially in "Alleluia" in which the lead melody is the song of the Easter season "O Filii et Filiae," already present in the "Fugue on o filii" of his *Folkloric Suite* (1952).

The response to this new collection, in which critics discerned only technical prowess, was hardly gentle, as this description by Guy Bovet suggests:

Langlais, whose famous "Epilogue" of *Hommage à Frescobaldi* already made his career in the concert hall where skilled pedal technique still passes for a virtue, commits another offense with this group of pieces, in which he asserts that "... pure music was not neglected." The listener will judge.

One finds in it ... an amusing but very difficult piece in staccato, "Trills", that will give you cramps in the ankle, and a majestic final "Alleluia." Lovers of acrobatics will find something worthwhile, but frankly and in all friendship, the author of these lines does not really see the musical interest that may lie in renouncing what is still the base of the organ: the manual keyboard.⁶¹

Not concerning himself with these comments, Jean Langlais continues his educational research and focuses this time on a "method"; he will give Combres publishers the *Méthode d'Orgue*, co-written with the present author.⁶²

He divided this "Method" into three parts: 1: Study of the pedals (36 pages of music out of 50 pages), 2: Supplementary ideas about the organ, 3: Overview of improvisation (one page only); the remaining pages consist of translations (in German and English) of the different texts. The whole, apart from the "Study of the pedals," was short, according to the express wish of the publisher who had set the maximum length at 50 pages. Criticism rained down, immediately condemning the brevity of the text and the disproportionate length of the "Study of the pedals." Specialists who expected a great "Improvisation Method" felt misled, and one of them wrote:

Méthode d'Orgue seems to promise a thorough presentation of the training procedures used by this influential teacher. This title suggests that we will be let into the special, if not secret, techniques which are the basis of Langlais' influence. What the 50 pages contain is surprisingly less... The subtitle lists a "Survey of Improvisation." This turns out to be one page of epigrams without any musical notation.

How disappointing from a master of improvisation! The reader by this time has recognized that this is no complete method of organ instruction but rather a collection of pedal exercises with appended observations on other matters.⁶³

Right! W.P. Eifrig was perfectly correct, except that he probably did not know that the publisher Combres had commissioned from Langlais a short instruction book aimed primarily at beginners; thus one where the pedal part was supposed to predominate, which was the

⁶¹ Guy Bovet, "Nous avons reçu..." in *La Tribune de l'Orgue*, December 1985.

⁶² Jean Langlais et Marie-Louise Jaquet-Langlais. *Méthode d'orgue*. Editions Combres, 1984.

⁶³ W.F. Eifrig, "Book Reviews." *The Diapason*, December 1986.

case. In this section, in fact, Jean Langlais very cleverly proposes a method adapted to both baroque technique (alternate toes) and symphonic technique (heel and toe), with great economy of means and especially in a rapid progression that allows a beginner to use the pedals with ease after a few weeks. While I was saddened that this rather negative review appeared in a major American magazine with a large circulation, the composer had this sly quip: "This will sell the Method."

He was right, as sales doubled between 1987 and 1988 and have not stopped since! In any case, this anecdote reveals his profound indifference toward criticism in general...

To illustrate in music his *Méthode d'Orgue*, Langlais devised, in parallel, *Huit Préludes*, progressing from 1 to 8 voices, conceived in the same spirit as *Progression* in 1979, but in a much simpler form. He sticks strictly to the number of voices expected for each part ("one voice," "duet," "trio", "four voices," "five voices"... up to "eight voices," subtitled "Troisième Fantaisie pour 2 organistes," which can be played by one or two organists at the same keyboard in a style close to the double choir).⁶⁴

During this time, concert tours intensified. Extremely painful osteoarthritis of the shoulder, however, made his May 23, 1984 recital given at the organ of the Grand Auditorium of Radio-France in Paris⁶⁵ particularly excruciating. Handicapped by this, at the last minute the composer had to cancel a planned trip to Germany which was to combine, in the space of eight days, seven concerts and the recording of a disc.

In June he left Paris for La Richardais, in a state of extreme fatigue. One can easily understand this when one realizes that, in terms of composition, between April 1971 and June 1984, he went from opus 166 (*Troisième Concerto*, "Réaction" for organ, strings and timpani) to opus 224 (*Méthode d'Orgue*), a total of 58 works composed, dictated and published in a 13-year period.



⁶⁴ Curiously, although the *Méthode d'Orgue* was published by Combre, the practical exercises, the *Huit Préludes*, were published by Bornemann. The two publishers competed with each other to pressure Jean Langlais, each with the goal of obtaining educational works.

⁶⁵ At this concert, he played, between other works, his *Pièce en forme libre* for string quartet and organ with Quatuor Novalis.