

The Australian Broadcasting Commission

Press

**ANDRE
MARCHANT**



TOWN HALL, SYDNEY

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Annotations

PROGRAMME NOTES BY FELIX APRAHAMIAN (Author's Copyright)

1. Toccata for a Double Organ - - - - - *John Blow* (1649-1708)

John Blow, a native of Newark-on-Trent and chorister in the Chapel Royal, became organist of Westminster Abbey in 1669. Eleven years later he resigned this post in favour of his pupil, Henry Purcell. In 1695 he was re-appointed organist at the Abbey. Four years later he was appointed H.M. Composer to the Chapel Royal, the first to hold that office. He lies buried in the North Aisle of the Choir of Westminster Abbey.

A quality of Blow's style is its boldness. Dotted rhythms give this Toccata an added jauntiness. The "double organ" in the title implies an instrument with two manuals in contrast. Organs in England boasted no pedal keyboard at the time of Blow.

2. Les Cloches - - - - - *Nicolas-Antoine Lebègue* (1630-1702)

This composer was a famous man in his day. For forty years he was organist of the church of Saint-Merry in Paris. With three other organists he shared the distinction of being "Organiste du Roy"; Louis XIV, whom he served for twenty-four years, often heard and admired his playing. Whether or no he studied with Chambonnières is uncertain, but from his close association with known pupils of the founder of the school of French harpsichord composers, it may be assumed that he was familiar with the musical ideas of that excellent master. Lebègue is usually credited with being the first French organist-composer to exploit organ registration systematically.

Les Cloches is an early example of programme music in which Lebègue imitates the sound of church bells. Beginning quietly, the piece grows to a loud ending. The same bell theme is used throughout, in long values or short, passing finally to the pedals.

3. Fond d'Orgue - - - - - *Louis Marchand* (1669-1732)

A native of Lyons and a colourful figure of erratic character, Marchand is remembered as the musician who left Dresden hurriedly one morning in 1717 to avoid inevitable defeat by Bach in a trial of musical prowess. In Paris he held important organ appointments, and became famous as a teacher. His organ compositions were not published until after his death.

4. Récit de Chromhorne - - - - - *François Couperin* (1668-1733)

François Couperin "le Grand," so called to distinguish him from less eminent members of his family, belonged to a remarkable dynasty of musicians who were organists of Saint-Gervais in Paris from 1653 to 1826. Bach testified his admiration for the great Couperin on more than one occasion; he carried on a correspondence with him which is unfortunately lost—the letters were used, it appears, to cover jam-pots.

The two organ Masses which make up Couperin's *Livre d'Orgue* are early works written when he was only twenty-two years old, but they show an astonishing maturity. This *Récit de Chromhorne* is the third verset of the Kyrie from the first mass, that for the use of parish churches. It sets in relief an expressive melody in the treble on a reed stop of clarinet-like quality.

5. **Dialogue sur les Grands Jeux** - - - - *Nicolas de Grigny*
(1671-1703)

Nicolas de Grigny was organist of Rheims Cathedral. This noble Dialogue "for the loud stops" is the last of a series of versets on the plainsong *Veni Creator*. It comes from his *Livre d'Orgue*, a collection known to Bach who, when about eighteen years old, copied the book out for his own use, citing it in after years in support of his own method.

The *Livre d'Orgue*, which is the only work of Grigny in existence today, provides no extra-musical clues to the musical historian, for it has neither dedication, note to the performer, nor preface of any kind. Andre Pirro comments that its contents never have the appearance of written improvisation like so many pieces by his contemporaries, whose inspiration seems to have been the nimbleness of their fingers. No French composer of his time attains such depth at the same time conserving so much charm.

6. **Noël étranger** - - - - *Louis-Claude Daquin*
(1694-1772)

It was Jean-Jacques Rousseau who described the noël as "a kind of air wedded to certain hymns sung by the people in celebration of Christmas." This implies a type of melody easily assimilated, essentially popular and one which lends itself to treatment in the form of variations. A seventeenth-century organist-composer who excelled in this form was Daquin. He came of an exceptionally gifted family of Jewish origin, his great-uncle was doctor and *conseiller d'Etat* to Louis XIV, and on his mother's side he was said to have been related to Rabelais. Daquin was an infant prodigy, an organist at the age of twelve, and famed for his improvisations. He studied with the renowned Louis Marchand and succeeded that master as organist of the Cordeliers in Paris. Both Marchand and Rameau, whom he vanquished in an organ competition, had a great admiration for him.

The present Noël is the eighth in his *Nouveau livre de Noëls pour l'Orgue et le Clavecin dont la plupart peuvent s'exécuter sur les Violons, Flûtes, Hautbois, etc.*, published at the height of his career. It is typical of the collection which gives pleasure to players and listeners alike. Daquin's variations have charm as well as slickness. Secular in their appeal, and pointing to the nineteenth century emancipation of organ music from liturgical influences, they are true concert pieces.

7. (a) **Chorale-Prelude: "Jesu, Meine Freude"**
(*Jesu, my Joy*) - - - - - *Bach*

In the *Orgelbuechlein*, or "Little Organ Book", Bach set out to ornament the hymn-tunes of the Lutheran Church in organ pieces suitable for use on Sundays throughout the Christian Year. Of the one hundred and sixty-four pieces he planned, only forty-six were composed, but most of them are musical gems of the finest water.

The prelude on the chorale "Jesu, my Joy" is one of several Christmas pieces to be found in this collection. Bach sings his joy at the Nativity here perhaps more intimately than usual. From the minor mode of the beginning to the final major chord, the prelude progresses in a mood of confident peace and mystical adoration.

(b) Prelude and Fugue in C - - - - - Bach

There is a more obviously Christmassy flavour about the Prelude in C major, partly due to its leisurely nine-eight rhythm, and partly to the happy consonance resulting from its many passages in thirds and sixths. Also, two of its themes have a close affinity to those of the first chorus of Bach's Epiphany Cantata, "The Sages of Sheba shall come." The first of these is the opening scale which accents the notes of the common chord as it rises in threes; the second is a figure of four rising, or falling, semiquavers, which helps to bind the texture of the two manual voices. A feature of the pedal part is the downward leaping fanfare-like figure which it shares with the manuals, and which both hands and feet sound together at the Prelude's end.

The fugue is in the nature of a true *ricercare*, a very strict form, for its short, one-bar subject—the ancestor of a better-known one in Wagner's "Die Meistersinger"—is present in almost every bar. The manuals follow an intricate course alone until, towards the end, the pedals enter with striking effect, playing the fugue subject in augmentation against continued counterpointal ingenuity above. This is a musical fabric of the closest texture. Belonging to the last group of masterworks, written at Leipzig, this Prelude and Fugue show Bach at the summit of his powers.

Interval

8. Choral No. 3, in A Minor - - - - - César Franck (1822-1890)

From Perotin in the twelfth century to Messiaen in our own, many of the most prominent French composers have been Paris organists, even if, as in the rare case of Fauré, they have written no organ music. Franck, although a native of Liège, lived most of his life in Paris, and has come to be regarded as a French composer. He was for many years up to the time of his death organist of the church of Sainte-Clotilde, and much of his best work is for organ.

Franck corrected the proofs of his three Chorals on his deathbed, and they first appeared in print after his death. In them is found the purest and most complete expression of Franck's genius as a composer: they take their place beside the organ works of Bach, among the instrument's masterpieces.

The third and last Choral is Franck's swan-song. Simpler in construction and more direct in its appeal than the first two, it falls roughly into three sections: an *allegro*, which starts with some impressive flourishes with which the lines of the *choral* itself alternate; a slow section in which a long, sinuous melody passes from soprano to tenor and back again on a trumpet stop and culminates in a loud climax; a final section in which there is a return to the manner of the opening, but in a tenser mood. This time the *choral* does not alternate with the flourishes, but is heard above them. The final page is one of the noblest in the organ repertory.

9. **Scherzo** - - - - - *Eugène Gigout*
(1844-1925)

For more than sixty years, Gigout, André Marchal's teacher, was organist of the fashionable church of Saint-Augustin in Paris. Among his many other pupils at the Paris Conservatoire was the famous French composer, Albert Roussel.

Gigout's organ music, of which there is a quantity, shows clearly the two tendencies prevailing in this field of composition. He was highly skilled in modal composition, and his books of modal versets are intended for liturgical use. On the other hand, he left a number of pieces that are quite secular in their appeal, such as this light and fanciful Scherzo, which comes from a collection of ten pieces.

10. **Adagio and Final, from Symphony No. 3** - - - *Louis Vierne*
(1870-1937)

For 37 years, up to the day of his death at the keyboard of his organ, Vierne was organist of Notre-Dame de Paris. The post, one of the most coveted in Paris music since the twelfth century, was never more worthily occupied. Although attention may be directed to some excellent chamber music (violin sonata, 'cello sonata and piano quintet), most of his works are for organ. He completed the secularisation of French organ music, which Widor established in his organ symphonies. This break with liturgical tradition has resulted in a highly finished concert style of writing for the instrument.

Vierne, who had been in turn the pupil of Franck, Widor and Guilmant, enriched the repertory of organ music with six large-scale symphonies, one of which was reviewed and highly praised by no less a critic than Debussy, and about sixty smaller pieces contained in a number of suites. The symphonies are rarely heard in their entirety, but detached movements have become popular. The Third Symphony might well represent the summit of Vierne's achievement as a composer. In these two movements, the rapt *Adagio* and the brilliant *Final*, he seems to have captured most successfully the spirit of the beautiful cathedral which was always his inspiration. In the *Final*, there is something that evokes Notre-Dame, its facade, rose-window and the mingling of music and incense in its nave.

11. **Improvisation on a Theme submitted by Mr. Eugene Goossens.**

Musical improvisation is the art of creating music spontaneously, not on paper, but in actual sound. It is a branch of musical art in which few excel today, although many of the great composers of the past were famous improvisers. Bach was known to improvise when called upon to assess and demonstrate the tonal resources and mechanical qualities of an organ. Some of his most popular organ pieces began, very probably, as improvisations. That, too, was the origin of Bach's great "Musical offering", which began as an improvisation at Potsdam before Frederick the Great, who himself supplied the theme. Mozart, also, was famous in his day for his extempore performances at the keyboard. Among the masters of musical history, the list of improvisers could be extended indefinitely. In our own day, when, with rare exceptions, composers themselves do not shine as performers, and *vice versa*, the art of improvisation is almost lost. Music has now become so highly specialized that little room is left for this spontaneous act of creation in which tonight's organist, André Marchal, will exercise his skill, and in which he is acknowledged past master.