

Music Notes for February 3rd

Prelude: César Franck: Grand Chœur, op. 24, no. 28

Anthem: César Franck: *Psalm 150*

Offertory: Louis Vièrne: *Méditation* op. 31, no. 7

Communion: César Franck: *Panis Angelicus; Prière*

Postlude: César Franck: Sortie, op. 24, no. 29

Franck's music was quite popular in its day and his teaching at the Paris Conservatoire was extremely influential to the next generation of composers, including Duparc, Dukas, Chausson, d'Indy, Vièrne, and many of the pre-impressionists. Even avid concertgoers today, however, will only recognize a few of his works, most notably the Symphony in D, the Piano Quintet and a magnificent Violin Sonata. During his lifetime, he was most famous for his orchestral tone poems, often on mythological themes, and for his organ playing.

Born in Belgium in 1822, he became a French citizen in the middle of his life so as to be able to teach at the national conservatory. Employed at the church of St. Jean - St. François du Marais, he began to compose organ works for his own use during Mass. The prelude and postlude today come from his collection *L'Organiste*, written about 1860 but not published until ten years after his death, in 1900. The pieces played today are intended as service music with no particular occasion in mind, but the book also includes suggested pieces for Christmas, Easter, and other holidays.

The anthem is one of Franck's more frequently performed sacred works, his setting of Psalm 150, long a favorite of composers since it contains lists of instruments that should be employed to give praise to God. This text provides ample opportunity for word painting and orchestration: trumpets, psaltery, harp, strings, organ, and cymbals. Franck sets the psalm as a solemn but festive march, growing in its intensity as more instruments are added.

The offertory is a piece by Franck's pupil Louis Vièrne, an appropriate titled and quiet *Méditation* for either organ or harmonium. The harmonium is a small organ-like instrument about the size of an upright piano with reeds instead of pipes and was popular in the home all over Europe and in America as well.

The communion music consists of Franck's most famous composition, *Panis Angelicus*, from his *Messe à trois voix* (Mass for three voices), and a *Prière* (Prayer) taken from a late book of organ music. Though eclipsed by later French composers such as Debussy and Fauré, Franck's music has a beautiful harmonic language of its own that owes much to his study of music far beyond France, most notably Wagner and Liszt, the latter of whom was a great admirer and champion of his music.

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