

LIVERPOOL PARISH CHURCH  
OUR LADY & ST NICHOLAS

*César Franck*  
*1822-1890*

*A celebration of his  
organ music  
to mark the  
200th Anniversary  
of his birth*

*Liverpool  
1822*

## **César Auguste Franck (1822-1890)**

César Franck was born two hundred years ago on 10th December 1822, although a native of Belgium, Franck made his home in Paris from 1844 and is now generally regarded by musicologists as a French composer. He trained at the Paris Conservatoire and became organ professor there at the age of 50, and although his ideas on composition were frequently shunned in his lifetime he was undoubtedly the greatest single influence on the founding of a new school of organ music in France. Franck's interest in organ technique had been heightened by the instruments being built by Aristide Cavallé-Coll, which incorporated the manual coupling devices and new "orchestral" solo stops. A combination of Franck's Romantic allegiances, and the fact that he presided for many years at the splendid Cavallé-Coll instrument in the Basilica of Sainte Clotilde, Paris, blazed the trail for a symphonic approach to organ music developed by his pupil Louis Vierne and Charles Marie Widor who succeeded him at the Conservatoire. c. 2022, Joe Riley MA, FLJMU, FRSA

To mark the 200th Anniversary of his birth, usually on the 2nd Sunday of the month from December 2022 to November 2023, Ian Wells and John Winstanley will play a piece of César Franck's organ music either before or after the Parish Eucharist.



The memorial to César Franck outside the Basilica of Sainte Clotilde in Paris

## **Programme for the year**

### ***11 December 2022 - Prelude (from Prelude, Fugue and Variation, Six Pièces, Op.18) played by Ian Wells***

Published in 1868, Prelude, Fugue et Variation exploits the new colours of the Cavallé-Coll organs that were being built at the time. The piece enjoyed a great deal of popularity; hence, Franck later transcribed it for two pianos, and for harmonium and piano. He even performed the version on harmonium with pianist Vincent d'Indy in 1874. In 1910, pianist Harold Bauer transcribed it for solo piano. It is dedicated to Camille Saint-Saëns. The haunting oboe melody of the pastoral *Prélude* is a typical Franckian theme - mostly stepwise and with an emphasis on specific notes of the scale. c 2018, Serene Yu

### ***8 January 2023 - Pastorale (Six Pièces, Op.19) played by John Winstanley***

The Pastorale is dedicated to Aristide Cavaille-Coll who built the Ste Clothilde organ together with most of the major French organs of the nineteenth century. His organs and their sounds are the inspiration not just for Franck but most of the major organ composers of nineteenth and twentieth century France. As implied the piece is pastorale or bucolic in nature with a gentle theme forming the outer sections but with a more tempestuous middle section almost copying Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony in having a storm in the middle of the peasants frolics, it could almost sound like the chase section from a silent movie.

c 2022, John Winstanley

### ***12 February 2023 - Fantaisie in C (Six Pièces, Op.16) played by John Winstanley***

The Fantasia in C is set in 4 sections and again is quite an introspective piece, rarely becoming loud, with an solo aria like section in the middle sandwiched between two very gentle flowing short pieces.

c 2022, John Winstanley

### ***12 March 2023 - Cantabile (from Trois Pièces pour grand orgue) played by Ian Wells***

Franck gave the first performance of the *Trois Pièces* on 1 October 1878, in the Salle des Fêtes (Festival Hall) of the new Palais du Trocadéro, which had been built for the Universal Exhibition held in Paris that year. Written specifically for the occasion, which was probably the most important recital of Franck's career, they are concert pieces with no specific religious intent. But two of Franck's most devoted disciples couldn't help ascribing a spiritual element to

the exquisite *Cantabile*, however, Vincent d'Indy noting that it is 'the typical prayer of an artist who is also a true Christian', and the ever-devout Tournemire eulogizing: 'The soul's unsatisfied desire—a saint's inner supplication—incessant pleas—faith in divine mercy.' Whatever the context, the *Cantabile* was something of a hit for Franck. c 2013, Stephen Johnson

### **16 April 2023 - Final in Bb (Six Pièces, Op.21)**

**played by John Winstanley**

The Final is the fireworks of the set and is the most showmanship like of the pieces. It is dedicated to Louis Lefebure-Wely who was half English. He was organist at St Sulpice and had started to set a fashion for flamboyant playing and improvising that would become a feature of French organ music. From the point of view of this piece he was renowned for having a very good pedal technique (ironically Franck had to learn how to use the pedals) and this piece reflects that in starting with a longish pedal solo, in fact its probably the most demanding pedal part Franck ever wrote. The opening and closing sections use the theme set out in the pedals at the start the inner section has a more sedate theme accompanied at first by a sort of marching motif and then a running left hand part before getting back to the original pedal theme.

c 2022 John Winstanley

### **14 May 2023 - Pièce Heroïque (from Trois Pièces pour grand orgue)**

**played by Ian Wells**

Martial rhythms provide an arresting opening with marked use of the swell reeds. The song-like central section is introduced by a series of 'kettle-drum beats' and provides what Felix Aprahamian has memorably referred to as the 'oasis'. The main tune is played on the flute harmonique, contrasted with a small reed - a typical Franckian ploy, found in a number of works, as part of his general approach to organ writing. The same theme appears at the close of the work as a triumphant hymn of victory. c. 2022, Joe Riley MA, FLJMU, FRSA

### **11 June 2023 - Fantaisie in A (from Trois Pièces pour grand orgue)**

**played by John Winstanley**

The Fantaisie in A is from Franck's Three pieces written in 1878. It is very typical of the very structured style of Franck's composition. It starts with a unison theme presented in slightly different ways appears throughout the piece. It is one of the more pianistic pieces that he wrote for organ and has another feature typical of Franck, enormous chord spans. Franck could span a chord going from middle C to the G over an octave above. Unfortunately, he ignored the fact that most people did not have the same hand span, not only writing large

chords but having counter melodies going on which are in part dependant on large hands. The result is that all sorts of ways have to be found around the problem, the need for which would have baffled Franck. c 2022, *John Winstanley*

**9 July 2023 - *Élégie and Canon in Eb***  
***played by Ian Wells***

These two miniatures probably come from Franck's large output for harmonium as both are written on only two staves. The *Élégie* is in E minor and unusually employs an extended single line melody for the second section. The overall form of the piece is ABAB with a short coda. The tune is in the top part in Section A and the lowest part in Section B. The *Canon in Eb* is in a contrasting major key and is basically a two part canon (the same tune in the right hand played against itself in the left hand, four beat behind) with an addition of an unrelated third part which binds the two canonic parts together. c 2022, *Ian Wells*

**13 August 2023 - *Choral Nr. 1 in E***  
***played by John Winstanley***

*Choral Nr. 1 in E* was either dedicated to Eugene Gigout or Alexandre Guilmant depending on the edition used, both were well known slightly younger organ contemporaries, and some of their music is still a major part of French repertoire. This, in common with the other chorals is not a hymn like piece as such although the main theme which takes a couple of pages of introduction to get to has a hymn like quality. The theme having arrived it is treated almost like a set of variations appearing with a different accompaniment in each appearance until the very last one which is full blown harmonisation on full organ. c 2022, *John Winstanley*

**3 September 2023 - *Grand Choeur in Eb no. 2***  
***played by Ian Wells***

This piece was written for harmonium and has been arranged for organ by John C. Brydson. It is dedicated to Roland (Rolly) Middleton Esq. Mus. D., FRCO, Organist of Chester Cathedral (1949-1964). The first section contrasts loud staccato chords with a more legato quiet tune before the introduction of a dotted figure. The first section returns, before a quieter section for a solo reed after which an extended section gradually builds to the return of the first section. There is also a return of the quieter section with added dotted rhythms before four final loud, short chords on full organ. c 2022, *Ian Wells*

**8 October 2023 - Choral Nr.2 in Bm**  
**played by John Winstanley**

Choral Nr. 2 in B minor is dedicated to Theodore Dubois, he was Franck's first assistant at Ste Clothilde. Like the others he was well known and Director of the Paris Conservatoire. Perhaps his most ignominious claim to fame is that he kicked Maurice Ravel out of the institution for writing music that he considered a disgrace to France. Most people will have heard of Ravel if only because of *Torvil and Dean* and the *Bolero* Ravel, apart from organ enthusiasts most will not have heard of Dubois. The Choral is a *Passacaglia*, a piece based around a theme in the bass. It is heard at the outset in the pedal and is like a great chiming bell set against punctuated chords. After its appearance there are some fantasia type interludes before it re-appears builds to a big climax after which the coda recedes away peacefully. Unfortunately it is not possible to really produce the sound Franck intended at the end. In all his pieces his directions for the use of stops were based on the organ at Ste Clothilde. The *Vox Humana* which he specified in this piece as in many others in quiet reflective sections was very typical. It's not present on St Nick's or many English organs for that matter, and unfortunately it is not very easy to re-produce the effect, however it only partly detracts from the overall effect or tranquillity. c 2022, John Winstanley

**19th November 2023 - Choral Nr.3 in Am**  
**played by Ian Wells**

Franck had told his pupils that he was 'going to write some chorales, like Bach's, but with a different plan'. They owe more to the later Beethoven quartets than the chorale preludes of Bach. His scheme, in fact, was to compose the chorale melodies themselves and weave them together into variations, as he explained: 'The chorale is not what you think it is. The true chorale evolves in the course of the work.'

Of the three Chorales, the A minor is perhaps the most popular. Its tripartite form is made up of an *Adagio* with solos for oboe and trumpet, set between two *Allegros*. The melodic elements of the rapid figuration that opens the work, include additional material to the main Choral melody, while the third section provides a recapitulation of the composer's ideas using syncopated accents on occasion. The final page, which ends on a *Tierce de Picardie* in A major, has rightly been referred to as one of the noblest sequences in the organ repertoire.

c. 2022, Joe Riley MA, FLJMU, FRSA

### **Meet the Organists:**

IAN WELLS is Organist at Liverpool Parish Church (Our Lady and St Nicholas) and Assistant Choral Director and Honorary Deputy Organist of Liverpool



Cathedral, having been Assistant Organist at the cathedral for nearly 26 years, he relinquished this post at the end of 2007, to devote more time to his family and to teaching. He has been associated with Liverpool Cathedral and its music for most of his life, beginning as a chorister and then studying organ with Ian Tracey. He was Organ Scholar to both Noel Rawsthorne and Ian Tracey before being appointed Assistant Organist and Choral Conductor in 1982. During this time he was deeply involved in the daily round of cathedral choral services. He also took part in concerts and tours throughout Europe including performances

in Paris, Chartres, Barcelona, Brussels, Prague, Amsterdam, Cologne, Venice and Riga. He was Director of Music of Holy Trinity Church, Southport from 2008-2017 and Conductor of the Southport Bach Choir from 2008-2012 and was Head of Upper School and Director of Music at Tower College, Rainhill from 2001-2020. A graduate of Lancaster University from the specialist Honours course in Music and Worship, and an associate of the London College of Music. He also tutors privately in piano and organ.

JOHN WINSTANLEY started organ lessons with Caleb Jarvis the City Organist at St George's Hall in 1967 and played at churches during his first under-

graduate spell in Liverpool ending up as Derek Sadler's deputy at St Nick's, as a result he played for a Songs of Praise Broadcast from there in 1975. For part of this time he was also accompanist to the Liverpool Archdiocesan choir, playing for concerts in the Metropolitan Cathedral. Later while at Medical School he was Organ Scholar at Mossley Hill Parish church which at the time meant playing for Choral Evensong every week, plus Choral Mattins and Eucharist and summer trips to various Cathedrals in the summer deputising for the regular choirs. During this period he had lessons from Noel Rawsthorne gaining a Fellowship from Trinity College London. Subsequently he played the organ at St Agnes Ullet Road for



the weekly Choral Evensong and Benediction. Moving to Manchester and being a Surgeon imposed a break on regular playing however he continued to play for a choral group that did itinerant Choral Evensongs and recommenced lessons with Gordon Stewart and then Jeffrey Makinson at Manchester Cathedral. After retirement he became Organist at the Manchester Oratory where, on his 65th birthday he did a recital as part of the Cheatham Hill Festival. When in Brittany he plays at the local churches and has given concerts during the summer tourist season. His real love is playing nineteenth and twentieth century French organ music.

### **Contact the clergy...**

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