

# Organ Recital by Stephen Tharp

## 2011 International Performer of the Year Award

SUNDAY — 19 February 2012

The Church of St. Mary the Virgin, 145 West 46th Street (between 6th and 7th Avenues), 8.00 pm

Pierre Cochereau (1924-1984)

Sortie Improvisée sur "Venez, Divin Messie" (1974)  
(Transcribed by Stephen Tharp. First performance.)

Charles-Marie Jean Albert Widor (1844-1937)

Symphonie No. 10 "Romane," Op. 73

Moderato

Choral (Adagio)

Cantilène (Lento)

Final

George Baker (b. 1951)

Variations on the hymn-tune Rouen (2010)\*  
(\*Dedicated to Stephen Tharp, and composed in memory of Jehan Alain.)

### INTERMISSION

Gaston Litaize (1909-1991)

Lied, from "Douze Pièces" (1932)

Marcel Dupré (1886-1971)

Évocation Poème Symphonique, Op. 37

Moderato

Adagio con tenerezza

Allegro deciso

**A reception follows this concert** at which Mr. Tharp will be presented with the NYC AGO International Performer of the Year Award. This is the Chapter's highest honour, and is to be presented every year to a performer of outstanding achievement on the international stage. The award makes the recipient an honorary member of the Chapter for life. The reception will take place in the Parish Hall, through the doors in the west side of the nave.

**Special thanks to James Kennerley**, Organist and Director of Music at St. Mary's, for again allowing the Chapter and guests to enjoy this famous organ and stunningly beautiful church.

**Saint Mary's** wishes to acknowledge the extraordinary generosity of **John Rust**, who has been a great friend of the church for many years. His support, along with the efforts of **Larry Trupiano**, Organ Curator, has ensured that the organ remains in the best possible condition. We are forever grateful for their gifts.

# Program Notes

**Pierre Cochereau** was born in Saint-Mandé, near Paris. In 1929, after a few months of violin instruction, he began to take piano lessons with Marius-François Gaillard. Marguerite Long became his piano teacher in 1933, and three years later, Paul Pannesay. In 1938, Cochereau was introduced to the pipe organ by Marie-Louise Girod, a student of Marcel Dupré. He continued his organ studies with André Fleury and Paul Delafosse, whom Cochereau succeeded as titular organist at St. Roch in Paris in 1942.

After one year of law studies, Cochereau decided to dedicate himself to a musical career, and entered the Conservatory of Paris in 1943. He left the Conservatory in 1949 with first prizes in harmony (class of Maurice Duruflé), music history, fugue and counterpoint (class of Noël Gallon), composition (class of Tony Aubin), and organ (class of Marcel Dupré).

In 1955, he succeeded Léonce de Saint-Martin (1886–1954) as titular organist at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. The following year, his recording of Marcel Dupré's *Symphonie-Passion* was awarded the Grand Prix du Disque. The same year, Cochereau made his first of 25 recital tours to the United States.

Pierre Cochereau had a worldwide reputation as a concert organist and especially as a brilliant improviser. In his improvisations, Cochereau had created a musical language that was eminently personal, recognizable as of the opening notes. In regard to these formidable improvisational skills, Marcel Dupré said about his former student, "Pierre Cochereau is a phenomenon without equal in the history of the contemporary organ." One of the most torrential of these, the *Postlude on "Come, Divine Messiah,"* was done as the conclusion of a Christmas recording at Notre Dame, Paris in 1974. This transcription of the work, based on the original LP recording, receives its first performance tonight. The Notre Dame organ's well-known massive tutti with chamades is reflected in the registrations chosen for this work in particular.

**Charles-Marie Widor**, French organist, composer and teacher, studied in Brussels with Fétis (composition) and J.N. Lemmens (organ). He was organist at St Sulpice, Paris, for over 60 years (1870-1934) and professor of organ (1890) and composition (1896) at the Conservatoire, his pupils including Louis Vierne, Albert Schweitzer, Marcel Dupré, Honegger and Milhaud. Well-known as a man of great culture and learning, Widor was made a chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur in 1892, named to the Institut de France in 1910, and was elected "Secrétaire perpétuel" (permanent secretary) of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1914. In 1921, Widor founded the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau with Francis-Louis Casadesus. He was the Director until 1934, when he was succeeded by Maurice Ravel.

As a performer he is remembered for his rhythmic precision and traditional interpretations of Bach, whose music he often used in teaching. Though he composed prolifically in many genres he is best known for his organ music, most of it secular and conceived to make full use of the elaborate resources of the grandiose contemporary instruments, notably those of Cavallé-Coll. He created the organ symphony, a decorative, powerful multi-movement work that treats the organ as a kind of self-contained orchestra, using a wide variety of technical demands.

The four-movement *Symphonie "Romane,"* was composed in 1899 during Widor's holiday, and is the last of his 10 organ symphonies. The stylistic development between his earliest pieces and this work is clear: extrovert exuberance has now given way to a more subdued temperament. The path taken here is expressed in the use of plainsong themes in a freer, almost improvisatory style with greater spiritual depth. In particular, Widor employs the Easter gradual *Haec Dies, quam fecit Dominus* and the Easter sequence *Victimae paschal laudes*. Thus evolved a hugh, cyclical Easter symphony, with which Widor's spiritual ideal reached its climax. The top of the score bears the inscription: *Ad memoriam Sancti Saturini Tolosensis* (in memory of Saint Saturin of Toulouse). The third-century Saint Saturin (later known as Saint Sernin) was the first bishop of Toulouse. The city's great basilica (the largest Romanesque church in western Europe) is dedicated to him.

**George C. Baker** completed his organ studies with Robert T. Anderson at Southern Methodist University in Dallas in 1973 with a Bachelor's degree. In 1969, he won the Regional Competition, a year later the National Organ Competition of the American Guild of Organists in Buffalo, New York. Additional organ studies in France followed with Marie-Claire Alain, André Marchal, Pierre Cochereau, and Jean Langlais. In 1974, Baker won the Grand Prix de Chartres in organ performance. He obtained a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Michigan and joined the faculty of The Catholic University in Washington, D.C. In 1979, he was the recipient of the first prize at the International Organ Improvisation Competition in Lyon, France. His recordings contain the complete organ works of Johann Sebastian Bach (the first by an American) and Louis Vierne (together with Pierre Cochereau), as well as the world premiere recording of the organ compositions of Darius Milhaud, which was awarded two Grand Prix du Disque. In addition to his musical career,

George Baker obtained an M.D. degree from University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas in 1987 and began to practice medicine in 1991.

*Variations on "Rouen"* (an 18<sup>th</sup> century French hymn melody) is dedicated to Stephen Tharp and to the memory of organist and composer Jehan Alain, whose birth centennial we celebrated in 2011. Alain was a World War II hero who died in 1940 at the age of 29. His unique musical language continues to inspire organists and composers around the world. Noted French composers such as Maurice Duruflé and Jean Langlais have composed organ works in Alain's honor. Alain-style harmonies appear here and there in the Variations, as do references to the harmonic languages of Duruflé and Langlais. Stephen Tharp played the first performance of the work at the Meyerson Center, Dallas, TX in September 2010.

**Gaston Litaize** was born in Ménil-sur-Belvitte, Vosges, in northeast France. An illness caused him to lose his sight just after birth. He entered the Institute for the Blind at a young age, studying with Charles Magin, who encouraged him to move to Paris and study with Magin and Adolphe Marty at the Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles, which he did from 1926 to 1931. Concurrently, he entered the Paris Conservatoire in October 1927, studying with Marcel Dupré and Henri Büsser, as well as privately with Louis Vierne. Over the course of six years, he won first prizes in organ, improvisation, fugue, and composition, as well as the Prix Rossini for his cantata *Fra Angelico*.

He began working as organist at Saint-Cloud in 1934, and after leaving the Paris Conservatoire in 1939 he returned to the Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles to teach harmony. In 1944 he began a thirty-year directorship of religious radio programs, where he oversaw five weekly broadcasts. He took up a position in 1946 at St François-Xavier, Paris, where he remained the organist until his death. In 1975 he retired from the radio and began teaching organ at St Maur-des-Fossés Conservatoire. As a performer, Litaize toured France, Western Europe, the USA, and Canada.

Litaize wrote his *Twelve Pieces* for organ between 1931 and 1937. The lyrical *Song* from this collection dates from 1932.

**Marcel Dupré** was the foremost French organ virtuoso of his time, an heir to the great tradition of Romantic French organ playing and composing. Dupré was famed for his ability to improvise; he also composed substantial works and was a widely traveled recitalist and an influential teacher.

His pedigree as a French organist was impeccable. His father and two grandfathers were organists and choirmasters, and he was tutored privately by Guilment in 1898. Dupré studied at the Paris Conservatory (1902-1914) with Vierne, Diémer, and Widor. In 1914, after already having won conservatory prizes for organ and fugue, he received the Grand Prix de Rome for his cantata *Psyché*.

In 1920 Dupré gave a series of ten recitals in which he played from memory the complete organ works of J.S. Bach; he had learned the music during World War I, for which he had been found unfit for duty. He toured extensively as a virtuoso, giving as many as 110 recitals in a single trip and making ten tours of the U.S. alone between 1921 and 1948. Dupré celebrated his 1,900<sup>th</sup> concert in 1953. His written compositions include a series of 76 chorales, a concerto for organ and orchestra, and two symphonies for solo organ.

Dupré's academic appointments included a professorship at the Paris Conservatory from 1926 (an institution he directed from 1954 to 1956) and oversight of the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau (1947-1954). From 1934 until his death at age 85, he also served as organist (succeeding Widor) at St. Sulpice.

*Évocation*, Op. 37, one of three "symphonic poems" composed for organ by Dupré, is dedicated to the memory of his father Albert (1860-1940). Marcel gave its first performance in October, 1941 at St. Ouen, Rouen, France, where his father had been organist, and where Widor had played the inaugural recital. Dupré wrote, "My idea is to portray three sides of my father's character: he was a fearful person, like myself; he was tender; and he was proud, in the sense of dignified."

The expression of these characteristics is recognizable in the each of the three movements. The frequent harshness in the writing, which moves closer and closer to the edge of tonality, is undoubtedly associated with the time when the work was written, following two years of wholesale war and destruction. This is especially evident in the third movement, wherein motifs of machine-gun fire are very clear.

-notes compiled by Stephen Tharp