

Live Stream solo recital at Grace Cathedral  
18 October 2020, 4 p.m.  
Michael Hendron, harmonium

### ***The Program***

Boléro de Concert, Op. 166.....L. J. A Lefébure-Wély  
Scène de l'Eglise, from *Faust*.....Charles Gounod  
Andantino, from *Cinq Pièces*.....César Franck  
Rhapsodie, Op. 7 No. 2.....Camille Saint-Saëns  
Le Monastère.....Clément Loret  
Marche, Op. 39 No. 3.....Alexandre Guilmant  
Marche des Rois Mages.....Théodore Dubois  
Final, from *12 Bibelots*.....Olivier Schmitt

### ***The Music***

LOUIS JAMES ALFRED LEFEBURE-WELY (1817–1869) served as titular organist in the Parisian churches of St. Roch, La Madeleine and St. Sulpice. A popular recitalist and prolific composer, he was known as “the prince of organists” in the Second Empire, and he wrote music for reed organs throughout his career. This Boléro de Concert, Op. 166, offers the Spanish national dance as a concert piece for the drawing room. Lefébure dedicated the Boléro to his student Madame la Comtesse Bois de Mouzilly, a noblewoman living in Paris, who clearly had a good six-rank harmonium in her salon.

The grand opera “Faust,” composed by CHARLES GOUNOD (1818–1893), premiered at the Théâtre Lyrique in Paris in 1859. It shortly became one of the most popular French operas. The publisher Choudens, who bought the copyright of the work, offered this transcription of the “Scène de l’Eglise” (Act IV, Scene Three) for harmonium. It opens with the organ interlude that introduces the scene, then we hear Marguerite’s prayer, and the music that accompanies Méphistopheles’ threats to her. Finally the music resolves into Marguerite’s arietta, her heartfelt statement of faith in God. I do miss the invisible choir part and the second organ cadence that closes the act, but this is a satisfying transcription that describes an entire operatic scene, not just an aria. Many smaller opera houses in the nineteenth century used a harmonium instead of a pipe organ.

Born in Liège, Belgium, CESAR FRANCK (1822–1890) achieved fame in Paris, both as a professor at the Conservatoire Nationale, and as organist at the church of Ste. Clotilde. He had been organist there for six years when his “Cinq Pièces pour Harmonium” were published in 1863—his first published work. (His last was an unfinished volume of pieces called “L’Organiste,” also for harmonium.) Unlike his later grand, sprawling pieces for pipe organ, Franck’s harmonium works are much more intimate, almost private acts of worship for the composer and for the player, but full of technical and musical challenges. The first piece in the 1863 set is an extended Andantino. It could easily serve as a Prelude, Offertory or Communion. I wonder if he devised it on the oak Alexandre harmonium, still located behind the high altar at Ste. Clotilde.

Before he was known internationally as a composer, conductor, concert organist and teacher, CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921) started his career as a church organist in Paris. His first job was at St. Merry, in the Marais district. While there, he played a harmonium for masses while the pipe organ was being renovated. In 1858, Saint-Saëns went on to work as organist at the church of La Madeleine, with its monumental Cavallé-Coll pipe organ, and where an Alexandre harmonium still stands in the nave. In his 19 years there, he composed his serious organ works and numerous choral pieces. In August 1866, he went to the far reaches of Brittany to witness the “pardon” festival at Ste. Anne-la-Palud. He travelled with Gabriel Fauré (his assistant at La Madeleine) and four painter friends—six young bachelors, apparently. During this trip, Saint-Saëns composed his Opus 7: 3 Rhapsodies sur des Cantiques Bretons. The set, dedicated to Fauré, was published in versions for pipe organ, piano-four-hands and for harmonium. The present church of Ste. Anne had recently been

completed in 1863; in a corner of the sanctuary there is still a Merklin Schutz harmonium of four ranks...exactly the specification called for in the score.

CLEMENT LORET (1833–1909) was born in Belgium, but spent most of his career in France, as an organist, composer and teacher. He studied with Lemmens and Fétis at the Brussels conservatory, and later taught organ at the Niedermeyer School in Paris. For thirty years he was organist at the Second-Empire National Basilica dedicated to Ste. Geneviève (now the Panthéon de Paris). From 1858–66, Loret also served as organist at the church of St. Louis d’Antin, a small gem of mid-Victorian Greek Revival decoration, now surrounded by taller and larger buildings near the old opera house. “Le Monastère” is one of Loret’s 12 Morceaux pour Harmonium, published in 1873. The music is programmatic, telling a story. I see a young man approaching an alpine monastery in the dark, hoping to join the order, but feeling some trepidation. He looks through a window and sees the monks at worship (we hear a chorale), then with some fraternal joking during a refectory meal. There is a grand procession, then perhaps the postulant is interviewed by a grumpy bass priest. The chorale is repeated, with an additional tenor voice, so we know he’s been accepted. Rumbles of thunder are heard outside; a rainstorm breaks over the monastery, but subsides quickly; and the community rejoices, repeating the chorale with great fervor.

ALEXANDRE GUILMANT (1837–1911) was a renowned and well-loved organist, composer and teacher. He taught at the Conservatoire Nationale, was titular organist at the church of La Trinité for 30 years, and travelled the world giving organ recitals. Indeed, he was the first major French organist to tour the United States. In his youth, he and his father built a reed organ

themselves; later he owned a fine Mustel harmonium that is still in the family. Among many works for church use, he wrote a 12-volume set of pieces called “L’Organiste Pratique,” published in two different versions: for harmonium or for pipe organ. The first volume, published in 1874, contains this “March (Sortie).” The March is tantalizingly restrained at its opening, with sustained, central notes to create drive. After the central Trio, played on the foundation 8’ rank alone, the theme returns *forte* on Grand Jeu (added via a heel lever), climaxing with a series of modulations and false endings, before resolving triumphantly in the home key of D major.

THEODORE DUBOIS (1837–1924) studied at Reims Cathedral, and later at the Paris Conservatoire, winning the Prix de Rome in 1861. He served as choirmaster at the churches of La Madeleine and St. Clotilde in Paris, before succeeding Camille Saint-Saëns as *titulaire* at La Madeleine from 1877 to 1896. He taught at the Paris Conservatoire from 1871 and was Director there from 1896 to 1905. He composed this “Marche des Rois Mages” in 1886, while working at La Madeleine. The piece was published in 1899 in a set of “Douze Pièces pour orgue ou piano-pédalier,” dedicated to his colleague Eugène Gigout, organist at St. Augustin. Although scored for pipe organ, the pedal part is so incidental that the piece is easily played on the harmonium. The sustained high B represents the Star that guided the wise men (the Magi Kings) to the Holy Family in Bethlehem.

There is a story that Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, who had built the organ at La Madeleine, walked into the church one day when Dubois was composing or rehearsing this piece; he heard the high note and presumed it was a cypher—the result of a stuck valve or mechanism within the organ. He rushed up to the organ

loft to find Dubois playing calmly, with a key weight on the top B of the Swell manual!

OLIVIER SCHMITT (b. 1980) is a composer, teacher, organist and a restorer of harmoniums. He is the titular organist of the church Saint-Martin de Hayange, in the Moselle Departement. Early this year, he completed the composition of “12 Bibelots” for harmonium, of which he dedicated the last piece, this “Final” in B minor, to me. The set will be published soon by La Symphonie d’Orphée.

### *The Instrument*

With roots in ancient China and medieval Europe, reed organs as we know them were developed on both sides of the Atlantic in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The **American organ** (regardless of actual origin) generally had suction bellows, a five-octave F-F keyboard, with an interior action divided at middle B/C—but not always. In 1840, the Frenchman Alexandre Debain produced the **harmonium** (a name he patented), which became the standard for most European builders. The harmonium had pressure bellows, a five-octave C-C keyboard with the “break” at alto E/F, and four standard ranks of reeds (16’, 8’, 8’and 4’). The *raison d’être* for all reed organs was to have the wind supply (and therefore musical expression) under the complete control of the player, by means of the foot-pumped treadles. (Until the advent of electricity, pipe organs were usually winded remotely, by assistants pumping the bellows.) Reed organs became very popular for domestic entertainment and for religious use; they were also used in theatres and pit orchestras. From 1840 to 1940,

hundreds of companies produced thousands of these instruments across Europe and North America. The three great French manufacturers were the Parisian firms of Alexandre, Debain and **Mustel**.

“Victor Mustel (1815–1890) founded a legendary dynasty in whose hands the harmonium reached perfection. He had two sons, Auguste and Charles, the latter being an excellent voicer. His grandson Alphonse was a noted performer and wrote a comprehensive treatise on playing the instrument. Victor was a perfectionist who built expensive instruments for serious musicians, with whom he found great favor...Meticulous attention to detail and finish resulted in an annual production of about 15 instruments.” (D. Frostick, *Choir & Organ*, Sept./Oct. 2008)

The Mustel harmonium heard today was built in 1887. In addition to the standard four complete ranks, this instrument also has a two-rank, 2' celeste (*Harpe Eolienne*) in the bass, plus three additional stops in the treble: a 16' *Musette*, a 16' *Celeste*, and a 32' *Baryton*. These additional ranks—plus mechanical devices called *Prolongement*, “*Métaphones*” and “Double-expression” winding—officially earned the instrument the name “Harmonium d’Art.” It was originally sold to a music and instrument dealer in London, England, and was later retailed in Cornwall. In the 1980s, it was partially restored by the Rev. Kieth Jarrett, a priest in Yorkshire. He sold it to Dr. James Bratton, an organist and professor in Denver, Colorado, who completed the restoration, cleaning and re-tuning of the 430 reeds to modern concert pitch, while retaining the original voicing. “Blackie” came to San Francisco in 2008.

## *The Artist*

Michael Hendron is the Assistant Verger at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, and is the current President of the Reed Organ Society. After ten years of piano lessons, Michael began playing the reed organ at age 16, when he and his father restored a Mason & Hamlin parlor organ. Since then, Michael has restored American reed organs for individuals, churches and museums, and has assembled a large collection of music written for the American organ and the European harmonium. For twelve years in Washington, DC, he worked as a decorative arts conservator at the Smithsonian Institution, and sang as a Bass section leader in an Anglican choir. A member of the Reed Organ Society since 1986, he has given numerous solo recitals (several of them under the auspices of the ROS), lectured on the instrument’s advertising and iconography, and has accompanied concerts of Victorian parlor songs. Since 2009, he has posted almost 700 videos of his reed organ performances on YouTube, under the channel name Mustel1887. Besides the Mustel harmonium heard today, built in Paris in 1887, he also owns a Mason & Hamlin chapel organ, built in Boston in 1915. This is his third concert at Grace Cathedral.