

Preface

Félix Alexandre Guilmant (*March 12, 1837 in Boulogne-sur-Mer, † March 29, 1911 in Meudon/Paris) was given early musical training by his father who was a close friend of the French organ builder Aristide Cavallé-Coll. Guilmant later studied with Gustave Carulli (1801—1876) and Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens (1823—1881).

In his formative years, Guilmant's playing on the organ drew considerable notice and in 1871 he was appointed organist titulaire at Sainte-Trinité in Paris. Guilmant's artistry on the organ met with wide acclaim on his concert tours of England, Italy, Russia and the United States.

His skills as a performer, composer, and in improvisation bore the distinctive mark of the Cavallé-Coll organs' tonal palette and their many diapason stops. In addition to French compositions, Félix Alexandre Guilmant also played the music of other composers such as Mendelssohn, Merkel, Rheinberger and J. S. Bach. Guilmant was particularly taken with the works of G. F. Händel, whose musical themes repeatedly inspired him in his own creative output.

Félix Alexandre Guilmant was of modest height, wore a long beard and made performing on the organ the primary focus of his life. He strove to make organ music available to a wide audience of listeners. Louis Vierne is said to have once joked about Guilmant that his colleague viewed his work on the organ as though he were himself a missionary or priest. Despite the small size of his feet and hands which could just barely stretch to play the interval of a ninth, legato playing—both manualiter as well as on the pedals—was very important to him.

Unlike the growing trend of virtuoso playing, his performances were distinguished by slow to moderately fast tempi, immaculate technique, the most carefully detailed articulation with the objective of achieving transparent clarity, including clearness in the middle voices, a light, graceful and lively touch, emotional rubato playing, especially in slow movements, absolute confidence, completely unbroken legato with clearly delineated phrasing of musical events, rhythmic and metrical precision and a quality of exquisite nobility. He dispensed with all redundant motions with his fingers seeming to pass silently over the keys.

Additional inspiration for the interpretation of Guilmant's organ works can be gained from the disposition of his own Cavallé-Coll organ in his home and the Cavallé-Coll organ at Sainte-Trinité in Paris as they existed during his lifetime. These organs, as is the case with all unaltered Cavallé-Coll organs, stand out for the richly varied tonal beauty of the many diapason stops.

Please bear in mind that the Roman numerals in the score refer to the individual works for organ:

- P Pedal
- I. Grand Orgue (Great)
- II. Positif (Positiv)
- III. Récit (swell division, the dynamic markings refer to opening and closing the swell shutters)

Dresden, October 1, 2007

Günter Kaluza

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