



EUGÈNE REUCHSEL

**LA VIE DU CHRIST &
BOUQUET DE FRANCE**

SIMON NIEMIŃSKI ORGAN

Eugène Reuchsel (1900–88)

La Vie du Christ & Bouquet de France

Simon Niemiński *organ*

The Rieger organ of St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh

About Simon Niemiński:

*'Niemiński's supple, sinewy and sensitive playing
perfectly attuned to instrument and music'*
Choir and Organ

*'[...] innate musicianship and sensitivity,
coupled with his prodigious technique'*
Organists' Review

La Vie du Christ

Evocations d'après l'Évangile de Saint Luc
(1986/7)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 1. L'Annonciation | [2:44] |
| 2. La Nativité | [2:41] |
| 3. Le Baptême | [2:41] |
| 4. La Prophétie accomplie | [2:40] |
| 5. Les Béatitudes | [2:54] |
| 6. La Pécheresse pardonnée | [2:09] |
| 7. La Tempête apaisée | [2:25] |
| 8. La Multiplication des Pains | [1:33] |
| 9. La Transfiguration | [3:20] |
| 10. La Parabole de la lumière | [2:15] |
| 11. La Grâce de Dieu | [3:46] |
| 12. Les Enfants jouent près de Jésus | [1:25] |
| 13. L'Aveugle | [2:57] |
| 14. L'Entrée à Jérusalem | [1:44] |
| 15. La Cène | [2:58] |
| 16. Le Crucifiement | [3:31] |
| 17. La Résurrection | [1:53] |
| 18. La Promenade à Emmaüs | [2:09] |
| 19. L'Ascension | [3:36] |

Bouquet de France (1986/7)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| 20. Le pauvre Labourer | [3:29] |
| 21. Rossignolet du Bois joli | [2:51] |
| 22. La Fille aux Oranges | [1:31] |
| 23. Le Retour du Marin | [2:35] |
| 24. Là-haut sur la Montagne | [3:06] |
| 25. Douce Merveille | [2:49] |
| 26. Voici le joli Mois de Mai | [2:20] |
| 27. Ma Mère m'envoie-t-au Marché | [1:10] |
| 28. Berceuse | [2:47] |
| 29. V'là la Saint-Martin | [1:57] |

Total playing time [74:10]



Eugène Reuchsel: *La Vie du Christ* and *Bouquet de France*

Eugène Reuchsel (b. Lyon, 21 July 1900; d. Pollionnay near Lyon, 22 September 1988) came from a dynasty of musicians who were prominent in the musical life of Lyon. His grandfather was Léon Reuchsel (1840–1915) who served as organist of the church of St Bonaventure in the Place des Cordeliers for more than fifty years. He was also a composer and conductor who directed the choral society *La Lyre sacré* (when he performed César Franck's *Messe solennelle*, Franck himself came to play the organ part). Léon's first son, Amédée Reuchsel (1875–1931) studied at the Royal Conservatoire in Brussels. After completing his studies, he returned to Lyon before taking up a post as organist of Saint-Denis-du-Saint-Sacrement (in the 3rd arrondissement) which boasted a Cavaillé-Coll organ as well as a magnificent Pietà by Delacroix.

Eugène Reuchsel grew up in this intensely musical environment. His first piano teacher was his grandfather Léon, who started giving Eugène lessons at the age of three. The boy made rapid progress and he continued his studies at the Paris Conservatoire where his teachers included two of the most important French pianists of the time: Édouard Risler and the legendary Francis Planté (who had

heard Chopin play and whose friends included Liszt, Berlioz and Rossini). Reuchsel won a premier prix for piano when he was fifteen years old – an award noted by Fauré in a letter to his lover Marguërite Hasselmanns written on the same day (7 July 1916) during a break in the examinations: 'I can't hide from you that I'm writing this from Mollard's café, between the competitions for piano (men) and for cello. [... Eugène] Reuchsel, [Jules] Gentil and [Marius-François] Gaillard all won prizes.' A report appeared in the following day's edition of *Le Figaro* which sheds a rather poignant light on the competition:

As with all the male classes at the Conservatoire, the competition yesterday morning (piano, men) suffers cruelly from the necessity of mobilisation. Only eleven competitors took part [...] but despite the reduced numbers, the standard was no less excellent and demonstrated once again the high standard of the teaching. [...] M. Eugène Reuchsel, who is still only 15 years old, is a true artist. He played the competition piece – the first Ballade of Chopin – with faultless virtuosity. That goes without saying, but he also brought to his playing an expressiveness that was refined and personal.

This report suggests that Reuchsel was already an exceptional talent in his teens, and his playing was further developed by studies

with Busoni. His solo career took off quickly after this youthful success. In 1917 he gave a series of three concerts of French contemporary music at the Salle des Agriculteurs in Paris, described in the newspaper *L'Action française* as 'the first appearances in Paris of the brilliant artist Eugène Reuchsel, a member of a distinguished family of musicians from the Lyonnais region.' In January 1920 he appeared for the first time at the Concerts Lamoureux, playing Saint-Saëns's Piano Concerto No. 4. Reuchsel's performance was praised in *Le Figaro* for 'the extreme refinement of his phrasing'. In March 1920, the journal *La Ménestrel* hailed 'a triumph for the young and brilliant pianist, Eugène Reuchsel, who played the Sonata in B-flat minor by Chopin, the Hungarian Rhapsody No. 12 by Liszt, and the Prelude and Fugue in A minor by Bach to perfection.' While Reuchsel's earliest appearances had included performances of recent music (including works by Debussy, and by his father, Amédée Reuchsel), he increasingly specialized in playing Chopin and Liszt. On 22 and 26 December 1930 he gave two Liszt recitals at the Salle Erard in Paris and the critic in *Le Figaro* not only praised the rarity of two such programmes in less than a week but also the playing: 'M. Reuchsel demonstrated astonishing

precision, flexibility and expressive force in his demanding programmes.'

At this point we have to wonder why Reuchsel is not far better known, at least as a pianist. One possible explanation comes from the direction Reuchsel's career took from the late-1920s onwards. While he continued to give occasional concerts in Paris, most of his concerts were given elsewhere. He toured extensively in the French regions (as well giving acclaimed concerts abroad, in cities such as Madrid and Geneva) and in 1927 he settled in the south of France, at Le Rayol-sur-mer in Provence, in a house called 'Croknotes' designed for Reuchsel by the Catalan art-deco architect Édouard Mas-Chancel. As well as having room for two concert grand pianos, Reuchsel also installed an organ in the main reception room, its blower concealed in the basement of the house.

He also began to travel regularly to the French colonies in Africa, enjoying spectacular success in Morocco and Algeria. An article on Reuchsel in the first number of the Algerian journal *France-Afrique* gives an idea of how warmly he was appreciated there. Entitled 'An apostle of music: Eugène Reuchsel', it notes that he had just completed his 'annual tour of North Africa with customary success' and goes on to

quote the Algerian music critic Leon Barbès:

Reuchsel does more than give us passing pleasure. He evokes in us great waves of emotion which do not calm until long after his departure and which leave us filled with dreams and the love of this music. [...] Eugène Reuchsel is more than a great virtuoso: he is an animator and a priest of music.

It was also in North Africa that Reuchsel started to demonstrate his gifts as an organist. The monthly journal *Le Maroc catholique* reported on a *Concert spirituel* given by Reuchsel at Rabat Cathedral in February 1935:

Until now we have known Eugène Reuchsel as a brilliant pianist, delicate and sensitive, whose favourite composers are Liszt and Chopin. On 8 February at the cathedral of St Pierre he gave us a *concert spirituel*, revealing to us Eugène Reuchsel as an organist of great and beautiful talent. It's unnecessary to emphasise the perfect technique of this artist and his absolute mastery of the instrument; it is precisely this which allows him to devote himself entirely to interpretation. [...] His style and technique were perfect in pieces by Vierne, Bach, Scarlatti [...] and music by César Franck. [...] Reuchsel the organist has shown himself to be just as perfect as Reuchsel the pianist.

Having found such success in French Colonial Africa, and after two decades as a travelling virtuoso, Reuchsel turned increasingly to composition, arranging and teaching – though he remained active as a performer and in the early 1950s he made recordings of Liszt and Chopin for French Polydor. His visits to Africa brought some unusual honours, including the Order of the Black Star of Benin, and he gave hundreds of concerts in colonial countries, travelling the breadth of the continent from Dakar (Senegal) in the west to Djibouti in the east.

In 1934 Pierre Schneider published Reuchsel's harmonisations of three old French songs and many more folk songs collected in the French regions were soon to follow, including a set of fourteen songs from Périgord, Nice, Angoulême, the Limousin, Dauphiné, Bresse, Languedoc and Alsace which appeared in 1937. These were to have important consequences for some of his later works, including *Bouquet de France*. In 1939, the Paris firm of Lemoine published the first two books of Reuchsel's *Promenades en Provence*, a series of thirteen pieces for organ composed between 1938 and 1973 (the third volume was issued in 1974). These are programmatic pieces: evocations of landscapes and buildings that were

presumably conceived by Reuchsel at his house organ in Le Rayol. The titles range from the Impressionist images of 'Multicoloured sails in the port at Toulon' and 'The sunlit clouds at Cap Nègre' to more spiritual subjects: 'Visions of the Abbey at Sénanque: Faith in God, Joy in God' and – unusually – an organ piece about an organ: 'Les grandes orgues de la Basilique de Saint-Maximim.' These were followed in 1984 by a new set of pieces entitled *Huit Images de Provence*.

Bouquet de France – a large suite of pieces based on traditional French tunes – was composed in 1986–7. These ten pieces combine Reuchsel's gift for evocations of place (as in *Promenades en Provence*) with his interest in French folk song. Each of the ten movements is based on a traditional song, starting with 'Le Pauvre Laboureur' from the Bresse region in eastern France. Reuchsel's treatment of the tune is increasingly elaborate as the piece develops, his harmonic language spiced with added sixths, sevenths and ninths. The closest equivalent to Reuchsel's luxuriant treatment of these melodies can perhaps be found in Joseph Canteloube's arrangements of songs from the Auvergne, but what makes the *Bouquet de France* so unusual is that

they are secular folk songs reimagined for the organ. Reuchsel's treatment of 'Douce merveille' (No. 9 in the set), based on a Christmas Noël from Strasbourg, is a characteristic demonstration of his imaginative approach to harmonising these tunes. In this case, he sets the melody over a rocking, lullaby-like ostinato of hazy and piquant chords. *Bouquet de France* is dedicated 'A mon fidèle ami, le grand organiste Pierre Labric'.

The date of Reuchsel's **La Vie du Christ** is given on the printed score as 1986–7, suggesting that it was composed at the same time as *Bouquet de France*, perhaps in tandem with it – and some of the folk tunes in *Bouquet* reappear in new guises in *La Vie du Christ*. This substantial work was commissioned by Kenneth Starr, the organist of St Patrick's Church in Boston, USA. Starr often played in France and until his death in November 2017 he encouraged numerous composers from the USA, France and elsewhere to write new music for the organ. Starr was particularly enthusiastic about Reuchsel's music and the dedication reflects this: 'For my dear and brilliant interpreter Kenneth Starr, the instigator of this evocation, with friendship and gratitude.' The result is Reuchsel's most ambitious work: a depiction in nineteen movements

of episodes in the life of Christ, from the Annunciation to the Transfiguration. Reuchsel's music language is much less astringent than that of some of his contemporaries – his harmony would have hardly shocked his erstwhile teacher Fauré, let alone Debussy or Ravel – but his acute sense of drama and his ability to fashion effective miniatures (the longest of these pieces – the concluding Toccata on Christ's Ascension – takes less than four minutes) makes for a very satisfying whole. As well as thunder and mystery, there's great tenderness too, for example in the fifth movement which evokes the Beatitudes.

Eugène Reuchsel is conspicuous by his absence from most musical reference works (he is nowhere to be found in *The New Grove*, for example), and he deserves to be better known. While his compositions may not be particularly innovative in terms of harmony, the virtuoso demands he makes on organists are something new, requiring a level of pianistic dexterity that presents players with the sort of challenges we might expect from a Liszt specialist like Reuchsel. His large-scale organ works have a distinctive character and sureness of construction that make them thoroughly worth discovering. Reuchsel's career – as a pianist, teacher and, above

all, composer – is most effectively summed up in the two late pieces on this disc. He was buried in the cemetery at Le Rayol and his gravestone has an inscription: 'La musique fut notre secret, notre idéal, notre joie de vivre'. That life-giving joy in music is a quality that seems to shine through his work.

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**Specification of the 1992 Rieger Organ
St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh**

Great (Manual II)

1. Bourdon	16
2. Principal	8
3. Stopped Diapason	8
4. Harmonic Flute	8
5. Octave	4
6. Nachthorn	4
7. Quint	2 2/3
8. Superoctave	2
9. Mixture	VI
10. Mixture	IV
11. Cornet	V
12. Trumpet	16
13. Trumpet	8
14. Trumpet	4
Tremulant	

Swell (Manual III - enclosed)

26. Bourdon	16
27. Diapason	8
28. Souffle	8
29. Flûte à cheminée	8
30. Gambe	8
31. Voix Céleste	8
32. Prestant	4
33. Flûte pointue	4
34. Nazard	2 2/3
35. Quarte de Nazard	2
36. Tierce	1 3/5
37. Sifflet	1

38. Plein Jeu	VI-VIII
39. Basson	16
40. Trompette	8
41. Hautbois	8
42. Voix humaine	8
43. Clairon	4
Glocken	
Tremulant	

Positive (Manual I)

15. Gedackt	8
16. Salicional	8
17. Principal	4
18. Chimney Flute	4
19. Octave	2
20. Recorder	2
21. Sesquialtera	II
22. Larigot	1 1/3
23. Mixture	IV
24. Rankett	16
25. Cromorne	8
Tremulant	

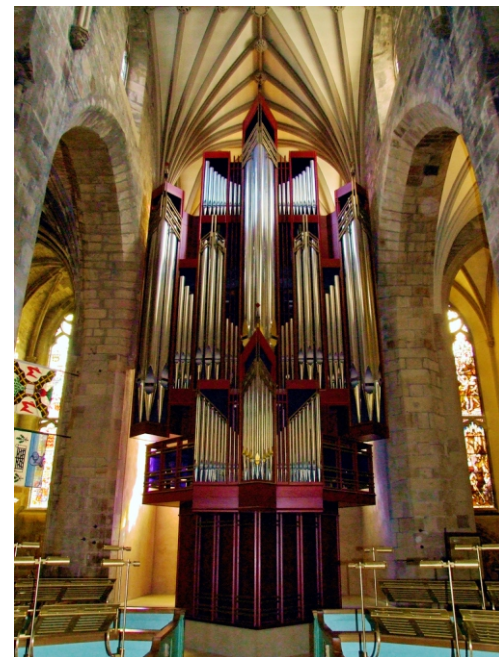
Pedal

44. Untersatz	32
45. Principal	16
46. Open Wood	16
47. Sub Bass	16
48. Octave	8
49. Gedackt	8

50. Choral Bass	4
51. Flute	4
52. Mixture	V
53. Bombarde	32
54. Bombarde	16
55. Fagotto	16
56. Posaune	8
57. Clarion	4
Glocken	

Compass: manuals C-a3 (58 notes)
pedals C-f1 (30 notes)
Couplers: III/I, I/II, III/II, I/P, II/P, III/P
Combinations:
12 generals
16 individuals per division on
16 memory levels
Sequencers
General Crescendo
Tutti

General cancel



Simon Niemiński

Simon Niemiński was born in London and is Assistant Director of Music at St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney. He studied in London at the Royal College of Music, at Cambridge University where he was Organ Scholar of Pembroke College, and as Organ Scholar of York Minster. Before moving to Australia in January 2018, he was Organist of St Mary's Metropolitan Cathedral and Director of Music at The Robin Chapel in Edinburgh, having previously been Organist and Master of the Music at Edinburgh's other (Scottish Episcopal) St Mary's Cathedral.

As a recitalist, he has played at venues around the UK and beyond. Recent concert engagements have included recitals at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, St Florian's Abbey in Austria, The Royal Canadian College of Organists' national convention in Ontario, Washington National Cathedral, USA, and twice as the featured recitalist in the International Organ Festival in Japan. Over the airwaves he has featured in programmes including *The Organist Entertains* on BBC Radio 2, to *Choral Evensong* several times live on Radio 3, and *Pipedreams* in the USA.

He has recorded eleven solo albums to date, and reviews have included (of his recording of Reuchsel's complete *Promenades en Provence*): 'This is a splendid release [...]

There is a lot of poetry here.' (*The American Record Guide*) and 'Simon Niemiński's playing is utterly convincing and at one stroke establishes him as a recording artist of the first rank.' (*Organists' Review*). Recent recordings include the world premiere of Giles Swayne's monumental solo organ work *Stations of the Cross*, and a disc of works by 'light' music composer Alfred Hollins and his contemporaries (recorded in St Louis, Missouri) for Hollins' 150th anniversary.

www.niemin.ski.

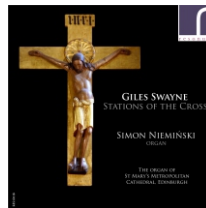
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