

as the concert goes on; 2) Franck goes on stage to congratulate the performers and dedicate the work to Saint-Saëns; 3) Saint-Saëns storms off stage, angry at having been involved with the piece at all. There may be more of a story underneath, surrounding both men's attachment to or longing for the ravishing Augusta Holmes, but that doesn't explain everything. No matter the interior reasons, which will be forever unknown, there is an atmosphere of baroque ecstasy and unconstrained sensuality that made even friends of Franck uncomfortable at the premiere. Although Saint-Saëns may have been privy to too-much-information about Franck's secret desires and a bit nauseous from so much modulating, he wasn't alone in being shocked: Delaborde remarked: 'Le Père Franck me ravage'; Liszt (no shrinking violet) blushed. The piano quintet is, by any measure, not quite the sound that anyone would expect to hear from the organ-loft.



PIANO QUINTET IN F MINOR
CESAR FRANK
CLIFFORD CURZON
VIENNA PHILHARMONIC QUARTET

The lives of Camille Saint-Saëns and César Franck were similar in some ways, and the two composers crossed paths many times in Paris, but both their lives and music, beyond a few surface similarities, bear little resemblance to one another. Franck was groomed to become a piano virtuoso – such as Saint-Saëns would become some years later – but the young César’s father’s (apparently quite foolish) efforts to put the young César before the French public were clumsy at best and cruel at worst. In a final disgrace, his father withdrew him from conservatory before he could compete as a composer for the Prix de Rome, partly to hurl the young man one last time at the concert scene, and partly to save money so that his younger brother Joseph could afford to pursue the virtuoso fantasy-life in César’s place.

Franck was by most accounts a very fine pianist, a very fine organist, and an extraordinary improviser, but there was no great light shone on his pursuits. He spent many

fairly grey years as an organist at St. Clothilde Cathedral in Paris and as a sometime teacher in and around the Paris Conservatoire (Franck wasn’t actually a professor until 1872). Gradually, though, over the course of quite a few years, he developed a very devoted and earnest following of composers, including Ernest Chausson, Henri Duparc, and Vincent D’Indy, among many others. He also, in fits and starts, wrote a fair amount of music. Many of his works remain footnotes of church-music history, but there are a few pieces which stand out extraordinarily, not only in his output, but in the repertoire as a whole: in particular, the Prélude, choral, et fugue for piano; the Symphony in D minor; the violin sonata; and the piano quintet.

The story of the premiere of the piano quintet is extremely bizarre. From the outside it looked like this: 1) Saint-Saëns sight-reads at the piano (he was indeed very good at this), visibly enjoying himself less and less

PIANO QUINTET IN F MINOR CESAR FRANK CLIFFORD CURZON VIENNA PHILHARMONIC QUARTET

- I. Molto moderato quasi lento 15:25
- II. Lento, con molto sentimento 10:01
- III. Allegro non troppo ma con fuoco 8:11
- Total Time: 33:37

Piano - Clifford Curzon

The Vienna Philharmonic Quartet

Cello - Emanuel Brabec Viola - Rudolf Streng - Violin - Willi Boskovsky - Otto Strasser - Violin

Recording Info: Recorded by Decca 1960 at Sofiensaal, Vienna

Producer: Erik Smith Engineer: James Brown



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