

Central United Methodist Church of Rogers, Arkansas
Proudly Presents

A Morning at St. Sulpice in Paris
Broc Hite, Organ

Sunday, August 14, 2022, at 4:00 pm
In the Chapel

Prelude in G Major	Alexandre Guilmant
Offertory from <i>Five Pieces for Harmonium</i>	César Franck/Pierre Guoin
Elevation	Alexandre Guilmant
Communion	Louis Vierne
Postlude No. 1 from <i>Four Postludes</i>	Jean Langlais

Creation of the Program

Putting together today's program was sparked by the Elevation and Communion, which I scheduled to play last month at First Methodist of Bella Vista, but never ended up playing. I am playing them both publicly for the first time today. The first two pieces on the program are also new to my repertoire, with the Langlais Postlude being the only piece I have previously performed.

Today's program is intentionally created from purely liturgical pieces. This simply means a piece with a title like "Communion," which evokes the mood of that part of the service. That contrasts with a chorale prelude, which is an arrangement composed around a familiar hymn.

Chorale preludes are composed on centuries-old tunes like Luther's *A Mighty Fortress* or *O Sacred Head Now Wounded*. They also can be elaborations of more recent hymns like *What A Friend We Have in Jesus* or *Amazing Grace*.

German and Dutch composers wrote chorale preludes as early as the 17th century, but French composers did not follow that trend. This compositional split makes sense given that Scripture became much more important as a part of the Protestant service, whereas the mystery of God expressed through Communion remained the focus of Catholic worship.

In addition to the Paris connection of the composers - each served a major church as a permanent organist - the organs they played were built by the same person: Aristide Cavallé-Coll. This builder was famous for a new style of instrument called the symphonic organ. The instrument is much larger than the Baroque and Classical model it replaced and is capable of a great variety of sounds and dynamics.

If you travel to Paris and are there on a Sunday morning, I would encourage you to visit a church that has one of these instruments. I prefer St. Sulpice in the Fifth Arrondissement because it's two-for-one: You get to enjoy great liturgical music during the mass. Plus, after the mass is finished, you are treated to a short concert. If that's not enough, there's a Pierre Hermé diagonally across the street that's open on Sunday!

About the Pieces

The function of the prelude in a large liturgical church is to bring the clergy and choir into the sanctuary to begin the service. Whether improvised or composed, it tends to be short. This *Prelude* (1893) by Guilmant fits that tradition.

The Franck *Offertoire* (1864) is written for the harmonium, an instrument that had many fans from the mid-19th to the early-20th century. It was a viable alternative to the pipe organ for small churches and homes but was eventually replaced by electronic organs.

Since the harmonium player had to pump with the feet to make it play, this *pump organ* had no pedalboard. The version you hear today was adapted to the pipe organ, with its full pedalboard, by Pierre Gouin.

The *Élévation* (1876) is the part of the communion preparation where the elements are held up and blessed. In today's church, Catholic or Protestant, this takes a matter of seconds. However, in a cathedral mass of the 19th century, this took a lot longer.

When you listen to this piece, you are taken into a world where there was no sound system. The only way you knew what was going, besides catching a glimpse of the altar through a sheen of incense, was to hear what the choir was singing or the organ was playing.

The Vienne Communion is a Late Romantic piece (1896-1897) by a composer who is known more for the Modern style he developed in the early 20th century. By a stroke of coincidence, Daniel Roth played this piece at the communion for the 11 am mass today at St. Sulpice.

This Langlais Postlude No. 1 (1950) is the only 20th-century composition on the program. For those of you who don't like partly atonal music, it's pretty short! I feel strongly that if classical music is to survive, we have to connect to a variety of music composed across the centuries. It's okay if you don't love every piece equally!

