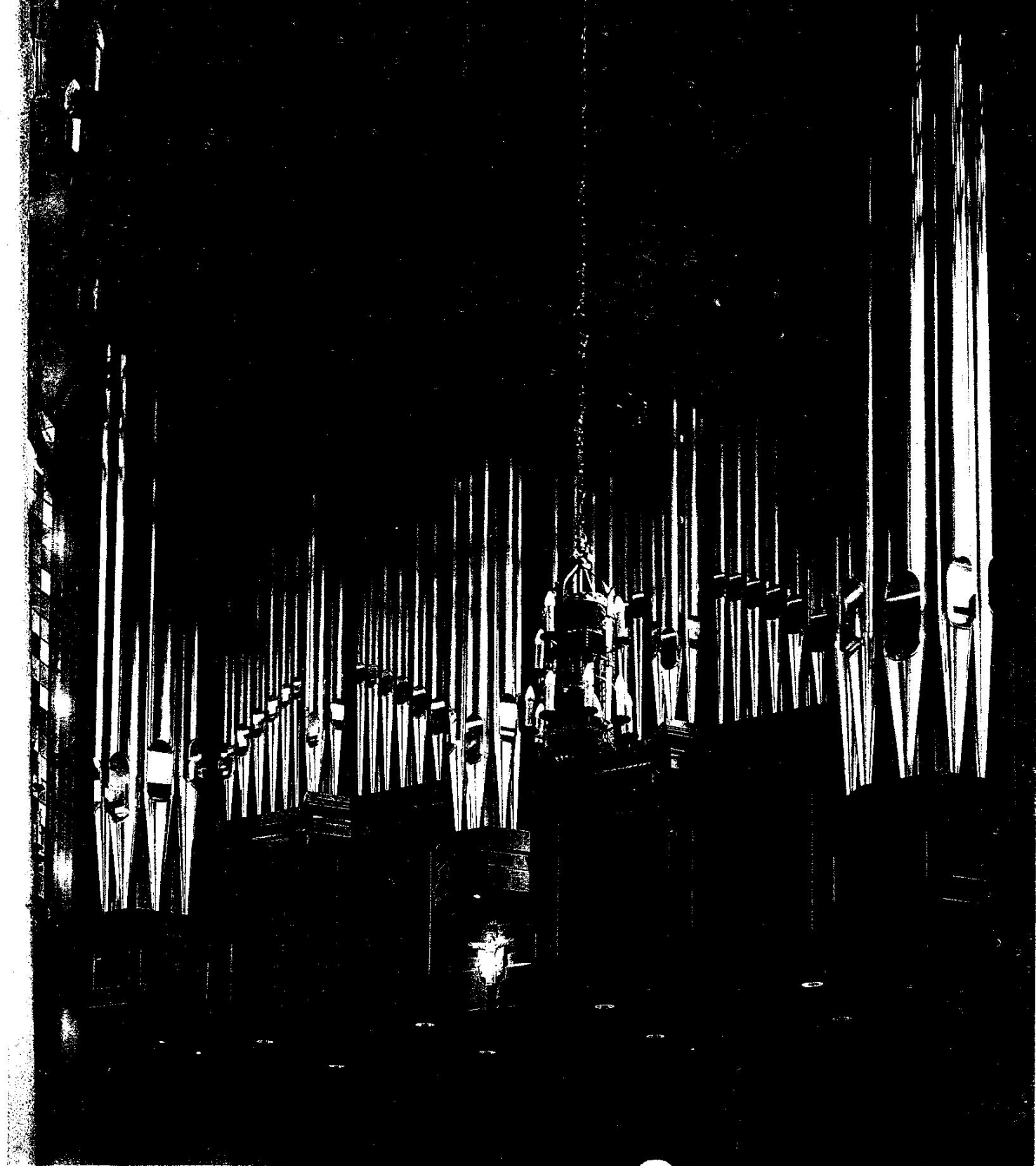


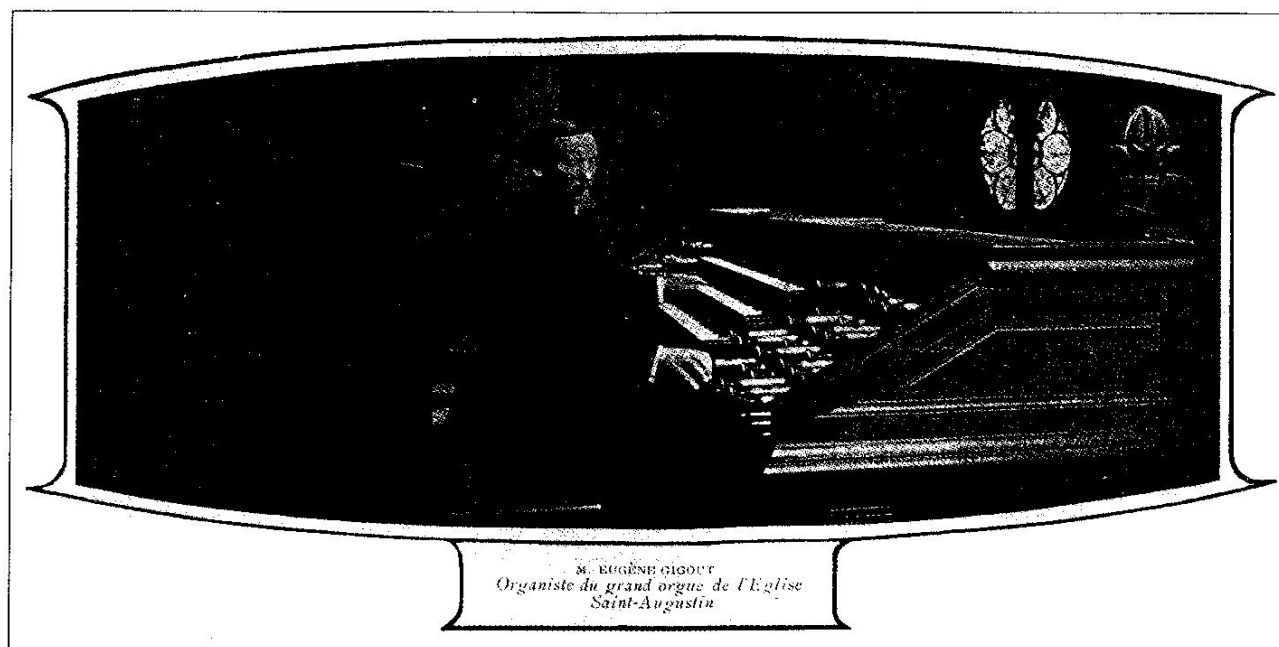
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EUGÈNE GIGOUT AND HIS "COURSE FOR ORGAN, IMPROVISATION, AND PLAINCHANT"

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Eugène Gigout at Saint-Augustin
(Courtesy of Rollin Smith)

Because of the large number of famous French organists of the late-19th-early-20th century who were educated at the Schola Cantorum and the Conservatory in Paris, it is understandable that the reputations of other training schools were eclipsed by these two institutions. One such example was Eugène Gigout's organ institute, a private school that trained musicians in every facet of church music and organ performance from 1885 to 1911. The present article will investigate the nature of this school and the reputation of its director-founder.

Though he is remembered today only for a handful of organ works, Gigout was nevertheless a prolific composer whose musical accomplishments were extensive. Following studies at the Niedermeyer School (under Louis Niedermeyer, Camille Saint-Saëns, and Clément Loret), he became organist at the Church of Saint-Augustin in 1863, a position he held until his death in 1925. A featured artist in the early years of the organ series at the Trocadéro, he became well known as an organ virtuoso in France, England, and Spain. In addition to his recital criticisms published in *Le Ménestrel*, he contributed numerous articles to journals concerning needed reforms in the interpretation of plainchant and its application to current liturgical practice.

The Establishment of His School

From 1860 to 1885, Gigout taught harmony, solfège, plainchant, and fugue at the Niedermeyer School; however, Clément Loret had remained professor of organ since his arrival there in the mid-1850s. In 1885, Gigout

left the Niedermeyer School and sought financial help from the government to subsidize a private organ school. A formal announcement concerning his newly founded school was made in July 1885:

M. Gigout will be opening a complete course for organ, improvisation, and plainchant at the Salle Albert-le-Grand which, when directed with the leadership and the experience for which he is known, before long will produce inestimable results for the musical art.¹

The curriculum was divided into elementary and superior levels:

The first level comprises manual and pedal technique, the principles of improvisation, figured bass accompaniment, harmonization of plainchant according to the theories of Niedermeyer, and the study of Gregorian rhythm; in the second level come the interpretation of classical and modern masters, the study of registration, improvisation (chorale preludes, church modes, development of themes in free and fugal form), and finally the accompaniment of plainchant.²

In addition to producing competent organists to help fill church positions in France, Gigout sought to mold his students into solid and well-rounded musicians. The tenets of this school were grounded in the principles that he had received from his training and subsequent teaching experience at the Niedermeyer School. Though his curriculum essentially mirrored the courses he had taught there, it was recognized that "There is no need to explain further that this is a traditional and complete instruction and that the talents of the professor guarantee its success."³

In the early years of the school, Gigout taught primarily in the Salle Albert-le-Grand, though some of the recitals of his students took place in other locations. Of one such concert a reviewer wrote:

The concert, given in the large workshop of Cavaillé-Coll by M. Gigout so that the students of his organ course could be heard, obtained the greatest success before the distinguished audience that had been invited by the eminent organist of Saint-Augustin. Easily confirmed was the progress achieved by the students of this course since the two recitals given this past winter at the Salle Albert-le-Grand. Through the study of improvisation and plainchant, which completes the serious teaching given to his students, M. Gigout assures our churches of having talented artists. Among those young organists who performed last Saturday, we cite M. Macry, whose brilliant and clean playing particularly attracted the attention of the astute listeners, and MM. Vivet and Terrasse, who demonstrated their appreciable talents. In the middle of the program, Mlle Soubre, MM. Boëllmann and Gigout, and the choir of M. Georges Blondel were warmly applauded.⁴

The concerts given in connection with the school occurred periodically throughout the year. In an attempt to present his students in regular concert appearances, Gigout realized several goals. He created opportunities for them to gain performing experience, introduced the Parisian audience to new talent, and brought his efforts to the attention of the public. An end-of-the-year recital in 1888 displayed the variety of repertoire performed by his students, a repertoire that was a mixture of the older classics for the organ and music by modern French composers:

M. Gigout closed this year's organ, plainchant, and improvisation course with a very beautiful recital where he presented some of his finest organ students. We cite specifically M. Vivet in the *Fantasy* by Saint-Saëns and the finale of a sonata by Mendelssohn; M. Pickaert in a fugue by J.S. Bach and a very tricky *Scherzo-caprice* by M. Émile Bernard that this young man played brilliantly; M. Lacroix in a concerto by Handel and the *Fantasy* by M. Gigout; finally, MM. MacMaster and Maillot who, on more than one account, won the commendations of the numerous artists present at the concert in pieces by M. César Franck, M. Guilmant, and J.S. Bach.⁵

The Hôtel on the Rue Jouffroy

In the late 1880s the activities of the school were moved from the Salle Albert-le-Grand to the hôtel at 63 bis, rue Jouffroy, where Gigout lived with his adopted nephew Léon Boëllmann and their respective families. Paul Locard writes that "The two families decided to live together under the same roof. This was for some years an intimately charming life, free from care or unpleasantness."⁶ In 1890, Boëllmann officially became Gigout's assistant, replacing him during his frequent absences from Paris:

The recitals that the master organist frequently gives in the month of March each year in England will be given this year in April. M. Gigout will be in Bordeaux on the 14th and 16th of March, in Nantes on the 19th, and has promised to go to other towns for charity benefits. M. Boëllmann will fill in for M. Gigout during his absence.⁷

Living in the hôtel on the rue Jouffroy provided not only a cordial family atmosphere that allowed Gigout and Boëllmann to compose and teach without distraction, but it also brought together some of the most promising musical talents in Paris:

The frequent musical gatherings took place around a charming instrument by Cavallé-Coll. Side by side on these programs could be seen the names of such worldly personalities, connoisseurs of the art, as Eugène d'Harcourt, Albert Roussel, Claude Terrasse, Armand Vivet, Georges Krieger, and Amédée de Montrichard, who, each in their various ways, brought honor to the teaching of their dear master.⁸

Widely publicized at this time in Paris, Gigout was one of the few organ performer-teachers (outside of the Conservatory or, later, the Schola Cantorum) who achieved such prominence:

An impeccable virtuoso with a solid, elegant, and impressive performance style, an erudite musician, liberated from a thousand difficulties and an expert in all of the contrapuntal artifices, M. Gigout is counted among the eminent professors in which we can take pride. He founded an organ school that has taken upon itself daily to mold professional organists and, in a more valuable sense, a great number of young men and women sincerely taken by the spirit of music, who impart unto the illiterate world a little musical truth and beauty through these annual recitals. . . . His teaching is of an admirable clarity, full of examples, [and] free from redundancy. . . .⁹

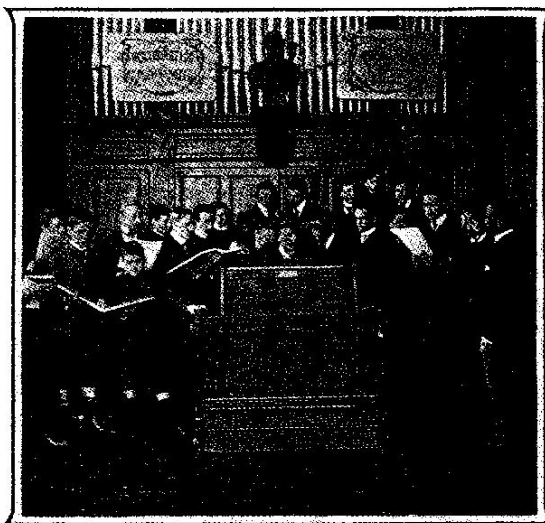
Clarence Eddy, a leading figure in the American organ school of the late 19th century who traveled to Paris in this decade, described his contact with Gigout and his organ school. Furthermore, he implied that many of the performing opportunities that Gigout

provided were rare in other Parisian studios at that time:

M. Gigout has in his house a very charming two-manual organ which he uses for his own pupils, and he has what he calls an organ school, and his pupils practice there when there is an opportunity. He frequently gives recitals with his pupils at his studio, which other teachers cannot do for lack of the opportunity. In Paris you are not allowed to give recitals in a church, and the only other private organ I know of in Paris is that of M. Widor, which is in his studio and is never used for anything else than lessons. . . . In reply to your question as to the repertoire he [Gigout] plays, I would say that it embraces the finest class of organ music of all schools, a great deal of Bach and of all the best modern composers. He is very conscientious and a very fine musician. He has made a number of tours on the continent, especially in Spain, and is extremely well known.¹⁰

Eddy's account attests to Gigout's earnestness in presenting a high quality of music for the benefit of his students, the public, and his art. According to Eddy, he was third in rank among the organists who were active in Paris at this time, Guilmant and Widor heading the list.¹¹

In an attempt to program "all the best modern composers," Gigout's musicales were often devoted to performances of the works of Saint-Saëns, Boëllmann, Franck, and other contemporaries.¹² For example, several weeks after the festival celebration of the 50th anniversary of the first public concert in Saint-Saëns's musical career, Gigout presented a similar musical soirée on June 12, 1896. Even the reviewer for *Le Ménestrel* commented that



LA CLASSE D'ENSEMBLE
sous la direction de M. Eugène Gigout



LA CLASSE D'ORGUE
sous la direction de M. Eugène Gigout

Gigout's classes at l'École Niedermeyer
(courtesy of Rollin Smith)

... understandably proud to have been a student of Saint-Saëns, M. Gigout learned from him the art of improvisation by assisting him during services at the Madeleine; in order to honor him, Gigout invited his own students to play [for him] many of Saint-Saëns's beautiful organ compositions, some recently composed.¹³

The organ works on this concert included *Trois préludes et fugues*, Op. 99 (No. 3 is dedicated to Gigout); the *Fantaisie*, Op. 101; and the *Rhapsodies sur des cantiques bretons*. Referring to the fine performances given by Gigout's students, *Le ménestrel* reported that "These young people, especially MM. Joseph Rousse, Levatois, Paul Verdeau, and Aymé Kune, have truly demonstrated the integrity of M. Gigout's teaching."¹⁴ The remainder of the concert was devoted to vocal and instrumental works by Saint-Saëns, with the composer and Albert Gélouso performing the *Sonata* for four hands, Op. 75.

By the turn of the century, Gigout had become one of the most sought-after organ teachers in Paris. The number of lives that he touched throughout his more than 60 years of teaching is truly impressive. Besides having the friendship of such masters as Fauré, Saint-Saëns, Franck, Gounod (who entrusted Gigout with the musical education of his son),¹⁵ and Chabrier, Gigout was also Albert Roussel's first teacher in Paris.

Roussel's early musical training had been with Julien Koszul, director of the conservatory in Roubaix. Upon Roussel's move to Paris in 1894, Koszul recommended that he continue his musical studies with Gigout. Pleased by his initial impressions of Roussel, Gigout wrote to him in May 1894 offering some kindly advice:

Monsieur and dear future student,

Your manuscripts show a delicate artistic nature. Once you have read through and listened to a great deal of music of all styles and from all periods while pursuing our technical studies, you will be counted among the most fortunate in the art. Be careful not to lend a too willing ear to fleeting artistic trends. The old, the very old masters must be the object of a special admiration; through them, it will become possible for you to think clearly and remain young in spirit.¹⁶

This four-year period of study with Gigout helped Roussel to perfect his compositional skills. The works of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, and Handel formed the basis of Gigout's pedagogical focus with him.¹⁷ Roussel went on to study and later to teach at the Schola Cantorum. Counting among his illustrious teachers such masters as Vincent d'Indy, Roussel acknowledged the positive influence that Gigout had had upon his development. Coming from a highly respected composer whose reputation was established by his symphonic and chamber music, the following testimony takes on special significance:

The eminent organist Gigout welcomed me with open arms at the little hôtel that he shared with his adopted nephew Boëllmann . . . and under his direction I began the study of piano, organ, harmony, and counterpoint. I cannot attest more highly to the sureness and strength of his teaching. Of tremendous insight, free from all scholastic prejudice, precise in his remarks, and, from a purely musical point of view, on a level above the rules of academia, I remember him as being the most perfect teacher that a young musician could have for the purpose of refining his art. It has been said what a wonderful organist and marvelous improviser he

was; if one adds the simplicity of the artist, the kindness and devotedness of the man, one is at a loss to recall a more noble person of which music can be proud.¹⁸

Some years later Roussel added that

Gigout was for me a professor of a rare quality. Broad-minded and clear-sighted, far from repressing or opposing the least of my inclinations, he promoted my progress in a voice that was able to be different from his own, but which his open-mindedness made him view with tolerance.¹⁹

Jean Huré substantiated these impressions, commenting that "He was enlightened and opened endless horizons to all, having nothing of the empty liberalism that gives equal praise to the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly."²⁰ Archibald Henderson, an organist from Scotland who studied in Paris in the 1920s, believed that

He was one of a great group: Guilmant, Saint-Saëns, Widor—all men of distinguished accomplishment. Gigout, as well as being a fine organist, was also a man of culture, refinement, and exceptional charm, and these qualities colored his playing as well as his personality. He was a living reminder of a fact, sometimes forgotten in these days, that it takes more than mere technical facility to make an artist; and if the organist is to command the respect which his responsible office merits, he must aim at making himself a good artist as well as a good executant.²¹

Without doubt, a well-rounded curriculum formed the basis of Gigout's pedagogical approach. Throughout his life he firmly believed that one must attempt to master basic musical skills thoroughly in order to be an effective musician. He writes in the preface to his revision of Lemmens's *École d'Orgue* that

It is indispensable for a finished organist to be able to improvise, as it is constantly necessary in the Catholic church to do so. In order to be able to discharge his duties as an organist expeditiously, the performer must thoroughly understand harmony, melody, fugue, the art of plainchant, and the ecclesiastical atmosphere inseparable with our ideas of church music. . . .²²

In 1909, Gigout was invited to participate in an international music congress in Milan along with other eminent French musicians. During this conference he expressed some opinions about pedagogy that summarize the philosophy that had formed the basis of his teaching career:

It is necessary for young musicians who intend to learn composition or the organ to study counterpoint thoroughly from the beginning of their work and, at the same time, harmony (the classification of chords). Diatonic and polyphonic styles should be emphasized in particular. This program leads certainly to a good realization of chorale preludes, a splendid goal for organist-improvisers and future composers alike. . . . I scarcely know any better preparation for the study of vocal or instrumental free fugue, and, through it, for the practice of the art in any of its forms.²³

The teaching of improvisation held an important place within the curriculum of the school. According to American organist William C. Carl, Gigout never hesitated to urge the importance of the study of improvisation, and would add, "It is all very well to

prepare an extensive repertoire of well-chosen works, but improvisation should take preeminence. Be sure and see that it is encouraged and taught in the United States."²⁴

Archibald Henderson observed that later in life Gigout concentrated on the teaching of improvisation and the accompaniment of plainchant:

After a number of visits to the organ loft at Saint-Augustin, Gigout kindly invited me, as a guest, to one or two special meetings of his organ class at the Conservatoire. As is well known, Gigout succeeded Guilmant as professor of organ at the Conservatoire, and as a pupil of Widor I was, of course, interested to become acquainted with Gigout as a teacher and to hear the work of his class. Guilmant and Widor were great performers; indeed, two of the greatest players of their time. Gigout, while an admirable organist, excelled in improvisation and in the accompaniment of plainchant. These features in the work of the French organist were those stressed and practiced in Gigout's class, solo playing being of a less brilliant standard than in the classes I have heard of Guilmant and Widor.²⁵

Maurice Durufle, who entered Gigout's organ class at the conservatory in 1920, recalled that Gigout's teaching

. . . was based almost exclusively upon the study of fugue. We learned few pieces, and only Bach. We also improvised on a given theme in classical first-movement sonata form; the first and third sections were somewhat andante and the development section more lively.²⁶

Durufle's comments about repertoire are intriguing considering the number of journal reports from 1885 to 1911 that praise Gigout's students for performing a wide body of literature on their recitals.

Gigout never ventured into the realm of a 20th-century improvisational style, but Henderson lauded the value of the older, more traditional methods that Gigout used in later years when teaching improvisational skills to his students at the Conservatory:

The class-training in improvising, however, was original, and, being carefully graded, proved encouraging, even to the youngest students. It was conceived much more on contrapuntal than on harmonic lines. In the early stages it consisted in adding a single part, note against note, to a simple diatonic melody. This being added in the bass, the melody would then be given to a lower voice, the counterpoint being added above. When two-part counterpoint could be improvised easily, three- and four-part work was then considered. When note-against-note harmony had been mastered, the student passed on to free counterpoint. Later, examples were given for canonic treatment; and lastly, the exposition of a fugue was demanded. It was a rigorous but stimulating course.²⁷

There is no doubt that Gigout remained firmly rooted in the stylistic trends of the 19th century. An amusing story by Germaine Tailleferre, one of "Les Six," who studied organ and improvisation with him at the Conservatory, relates that Gigout did not appreciate the influence that the avant-garde stylistic developments in France after 1910 had upon some of his students:

I was excited by the four-hand reading of *Pétrouchka* and *Le sacre du printemps* with Darius Milhaud. This merited my discharge from the organ class, since my improvisations (strongly influenced by Stravinsky) provoked shrieks of horror from my professor Eugène Gigout.²⁸

Having studied with the more progressive organists Vierne, Tournemire, and Dupré, André Fleury described Gigout's teaching as being "rather pedantic and old-fashioned."²⁹ On the other hand, Jean Huré believed that Gigout's teaching at the Conservatory had made significant contributions to the development of the modern French organ school. Writing about Gigout's students, Huré said that

... their touch, their manner of playing has grown supple and varied, capable of firmness, even of rigidity; when needs be, of violence or tenderness. Their rhythmic exposition has grown more flexible; they have gained much in intelligence and variety of phrasing.³⁰

These writers provide insight into the meticulous, though arguably old-fashioned approach of Gigout. Though it is not the intention of this article to evaluate Gigout's years as a professor at the Conservatory, these remembrances are included to shed light on the nature of Gigout's teaching in his private organ course.

The Final Years of the School

In 1900, Gigout changed residence from the rue Jouffroy to 113, avenue de Villiers; the hôtel on the rue Jouffroy thus ceased to house his musical activities. Regular presentations of his students in recital began in March of that year in the studio of the sculptor Edmond de Laheudrie, 139, boulevard du Montparnasse, facilities that Gigout would use for the next eleven years to educate his students. Once again, the music journals attest to the effectiveness of his efforts:

This beautiful recital was a complete success An extensive program of early and modern works (Bach, Mendelssohn, Saint-Saëns, Boëllmann, Franck, Gigout, Périhou, etc.) has given us the opportunity to admire proudly the teaching of this master.³¹

The full and varied program . . . inspired an affluent and select audience as much through the musical interest of the chosen works as through the appeal of a faithful, intelligent, and warm interpretation. . . . The conscientious and superb teaching of M. Gigout triumphs once again with his remarkable disciples.³²

M. Gigout presented the most outstanding students of his organ school in a very brilliant musical matinée which took place on July 10 in the artistic studio of the sculptor de Laheudrie. Works of J.S. Bach, Mendelssohn, Niedermeyer, Saint-Saëns, Boëllmann, Gigout, and Guy Ropartz were interpreted with intelligence, confidence, and style by the young artists.³³

The benefits that his students received from their recital experiences were shown not only through the variety and quality of the repertoire they played, but also through their interpretations of works "with intelligence, confidence, and style." Gigout's loyalty to high standards produced well-prepared musicians who were trained to fill various organ positions in France. Émile Jean-Baptist Ripert, a contributor to Avignon's *Courrier du Midi*, wrote that Gigout's students were not only fortunate to have a teacher who provided a lasting example of talent and character, but one who could help his students unlock the "secrets of the profession."³⁴ In describing her experiences with Gigout, Adine Jemain portrayed him as a balanced individual who displayed patience and professionalism toward his students:

He was benevolent and indulgent, but he never missed the opportunity to make a joke and occasionally laughed at us. He was always in a good mood, kind, and of an even temperament. I never heard him say a bad word about anyone.³⁵

The school ceased to exist in 1911 when Gigout succeeded Guilmant as professor at the Conservatory. Despite its importance, the influence of Gigout and his organ institute was overshadowed after his death in 1925 by the more well-known training schools. During his lifetime, however, his efforts had been widely acknowledged. A reporter in *Le Ménestrel* observed that "we are pleased to see that the administration of the Beaux-Arts supports an institution as serious and eminently artistic as that which has been founded and directed with the competence that comes from the well-trained and capable organist of Saint-Augustin."³⁶ For the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of Gigout's tenure at Saint-Augustin in 1923, a number of former students participated in a celebration. This led one reporter to comment:

"Student of M. Gigout"—Is this not the most touching phrase that reappears untiringly? There are great numbers of "students of Gigout," so numerous . . . that they are scattered throughout the parishes of Paris, its environs, and unto the farthest provinces.³⁷

Even though many of his accomplishments as a performer and teacher are either largely unknown or forgotten outside of France, between 1885 and 1911, Eugène Gigout, almost single-handedly, educated countless numbers of students through his "course of organ, improvisation, and plainchant."

NOTES

1. *Le Ménestrel* 51 (July 19, 1885):264. Gigout had organized and performed frequently in concerts given in previous years at the Salle Albert-le-Grand, 222, rue Faubourg Saint-Honoré. The hall contained an organ built by Merklin.
2. *Le Ménestrel* 51 (Oct. 11, 1885):360. Furthermore, Gigout revised and expanded Niedermeyer's well-known treatise on plainchant accompaniment, a standard 19th-century reference manual on the subject. An English translation became available: Louis Niedermeyer and Joseph d'Ortigue, *Gregorian Accompaniment: A Theoretical and Practical Treatise upon the Accompaniment of Plainsong* (1856), rev. Eugène Gigout (1878) and trans. Wallace Goodrich (New York: Novello, Ewer, and Co., 1905).
3. *Le Ménestrel* 51 (Oct. 11, 1885):360.
4. *Le Ménestrel* 52 (July 25, 1886):276.
5. *Le Ménestrel* 54 (July 29, 1888):248.
6. Paul Locard, *Biographies alsaciennes: Léon Boëllmann* (Strasbourg: J. Noirié, 1901), p. 2.
7. *Le Ménestrel* 57 (March 8, 1891):79.
8. Gabriel Fauré, *Hommage à Eugène Gigout* (Paris: André Floury, 1923), p. 27.
9. Paul Locard, *Les maîtres contemporains de l'orgue* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1901), p. 22.
10. Clarence Eddy, "Clarence Eddy on French Organists," *Music* 13 (March 1898):593.
11. Clarence Eddy, "Leading Organists of France and Italy," *Music* 11 (Dec. 1896):166.
12. Following Boëllmann's untimely death (at age 35) in 1897, Gigout faithfully continued to promote his works on countless recitals, including one concert on May 19, 1901, which featured the young Pablo Casals performing the *Variations symphoniques* (Locard, *Biographies*, p. 11).
13. *Le Ménestrel* 62 (June 21, 1896):199.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Jean Huré, "Eugène Gigout," *L'orgue et les organistes*, No. 21 (Dec. 15, 1925):15.
16. Eugène Gigout, "Lettres d'Eugène Gigout à Roussel," *Cahiers Albert Roussel* 1 (1978):38.

17. François Lesure, *Catalogue de l'oeuvre d'Albert Roussel* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1947), p. 9.
18. Ladislav Rohozinsky, *Cinquante ans de musique française de 1874 à 1925*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie de France, 1925), p. 400.
19. Albert Roussel, *Lettres et écrits*, présentés et annotés par Nicole Labelle (Paris: Flammarion, 1986), p. 208.
20. Huré, p. 35.
21. Archibald Henderson, "Memories of Some Distinguished French Organists," *The Musical Times* 78 (July 1937):632.
22. Jacques Lemmens, *École d'orgue* (Paris: Schott & Söhne, 1862), rev. Eugène Gigout (Paris: A. Durand & Fils, 1920), preface.
23. *Le monde musical* 21 (March 30, 1909):87.
24. William C. Carl, "Gigout: A Past-Master at Improvisation," *The Musician* 31 (August 1926):32.
25. Henderson, p. 632.
26. Maurice Durufié, "Tournemire and Vierne," trans. Ralph Kneeream. *The American Organist* 14 (Nov. 1980):56.
27. Henderson, p. 632.
28. Germaine Tailleferre, "Mémoires à l'emporte-pièce," ed. Frédéric Robert, *Revue internationale de musique française*, No. 19 (Feb. 1986):22.
29. Rulon Christiansen, "Hommage à Louis Vierne: A Conversation with André Fleury," *The American Organist* 21 (Dec. 1987):60.
30. Jean Huré, "The French School of Organ Playing in Its Own Land," trans. Frederick H. Martens, *The Musical Quarterly* 6 (April 1920):274-75.
31. *Le Ménestrel* 71 (May 28, 1905):175.
32. *Le courrier musical* 10 (July 1, 1907):428.
33. *Le Ménestrel* 68 (July 20, 1902):232.
34. Émile Jean-Baptist Ripert [Eusebius, pseud.], *M. Eugène Gigout: Professeur d'orgue au Conservatoire de Paris* (Avignon: François Seguin, 1911), p. 4.
35. Adine Jemain, "Quelques souvenirs de la classe d'orgue d'Eugène Gigout," *L'orgue*, No. 155 (July-Sept. 1975):74.
36. *Le Ménestrel* 54 (July 29, 1888):248.
37. *Le Ménestrel* 85 (Nov. 16, 1923):481.