

Couperin - Messe a l'usage ordinaire des Paroisses (1986)

Written by bluesever

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1. Kyrie 2. Gloria 3. Offertoire 4. Sanctus 5. Benedictus [play](#) 6. Agnus Dei 7. Envoi
Ensemble Organum Jean-Charles Ablitzer (organ) Marcel Peres - conductor

François Couperin inherited the post of organist at St. Gervais à Paris at the age of 11, following his father's death. He would not take full possession of this important post until he reached the age of 18 and, in the meantime, would share it with the slightly older, more experienced organist Michel-Richard de Lalande. In 1693, he was named principal organist and court musician to King Louis XIV at the Palace of Versailles, a position Couperin would retain until his retirement in 1730. Couperin performed double duties between Versailles and St. Gervais until 1723, when his son Nicolas assumed many of Couperin's services at St. Gervais. François Couperin continued to play the organ at St. Gervais on a semi-retired basis until his death in 1733.

Only two extant works bear witness to Couperin's 55 years in the organ loft, the Messe à l'usage des paroisses (Mass for the Parishes) and the Messe à l'usage des Couvents (Mass for the Convents). Both works were published as Couperin's Livre d'Orgue in 1690 and constitute his earliest known music. Couperin's two organ masses are so assured stylistically that, until 1930, they were believed to be the work of his father, but closer examination of external evidence revealed the two masses were the product of the son.

An edict handed down by the Archbishop of Paris in 1662, the Cérémonial des églises de Paris, strictly regulated the use of the organ in Parisian churches. As a result, all of the organ masses dating from around Couperin's time up to about 1715 are similar in form and focus. The Mass for the Parishes is the larger of his two masses and is intended for a great cathedral organ, such as that in the St. Gervais of his day. While Couperin's organ is still present at St. Gervais, it has been altered to such a degree that it now only comes equipped with 30 pedals,

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inadequate for the double-stopping in the pedal parts required in Couperin's mass. The work is laid out mostly in short versets or couplets that follow chanted sections of the Latin mass Cunctipotens genitor Deus. Five versets are intended for the Kyrie, nine for the Gloria, two each for the Sanctus and Agnus Dei, and a single verset proves sufficient for the Benedictus. One aspect of the mass that was not so closely proscribed by the Archbishop was the offertory, and here Couperin gives free rein to his imagination; it is in three parts and is distinguished by its highly chromatic counterpoint and loose handling of voice exchanges. Throughout the whole work, Couperin is quite specific about registrations used and even includes unusual markings, such as the instruction "pédalles les deux mains et les deux pieds ensemble" (pedals the two hands and two feet together.) A short Deo Gratias, less than a minute in length, brings the work to a triumphant and ceremonial close. ~ Uncle Dave Lewis , Rovi

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