

Sun., Sep 20, 2020 3:00pm

# The Vierne Project

Eric Pultz, organ



Symphonie No.1, Op.14

Louis Vierne (1870-1937)

- I. Prélude
- II. Fugue
- III. Pastorale
- IV. Allegro vivace
- V. Andante
- VI. Final

Symphonie No. 4, Op. 32

Vierne

- I. Prélude
- II. Allegro
- III. Menuet
- IV. Romance
- V. Final

## Vierne's Life

From the beginning, Louis Vierne's life seemed to be marked by misfortune. He began study with a beloved uncle, who died when Vierne was just eleven years old. Then, at fifteen, his father showed signs of declining health, and within the year, he also died. Vierne had begun private study with César Franck, whom he revered, before being accepted into his studio at the Paris Conservatoire in 1890. Once there, however, he enjoyed just a few classes with him before Franck died. Deeply shaken once again, Vierne persevered and studied with Charles Marie Widor, who replaced Franck as Organ Professor. Despite his near-total blindness Vierne often navigated Paris unassisted. One night in 1906, he stepped into a hole in the street that had become filled with water, severely injuring his leg, which, in turn, required him to relearn how to play the pedals of the organ. The heartbreaking discovery of his wife's adultery with a supposed friend (Charles Mutin, the dedicatee of his *Deuxième Symphonie*) led to a divorce in 1909, the same year his youngest son contracted tuberculosis (from which he died four years later at the age of ten). In 1911, both his mother and his colleague Alexandre Guilmant succumbed to kidney failure and during the early years of World War I, he lost both his brother René and his seventeen year-old son Jacques in combat. Vierne had reluctantly allowed Jacques to enlist and therefore his grief was even deeper, as he felt responsible for his son's death.

His professional life was one of triumphs, mostly, rather than tragedies: Widor chose Vierne as his assistant at both St. Sulpice (1892-1900) and at the Conservatoire. In 1900 Widor recommended him to fill in for the ailing organist at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris. Soon after Vierne's first Sunday there, Eugène Michel Sergent (1829-1900) died after serving the Cathedral for 53 years. There were ninety-eight applicants for the position, and it was awarded to Vierne. During his tenure there Vierne took a four-year leave of absence to save what little sight remained by traveling to a specialist in Switzerland, during which time his student Marcel Dupré subbed for him. Upon his return, their relationship was shattered as Vierne objected to Dupré having used what he regarded as his exclusive title: L'Organiste du Notre-Dame: "The Organist of Notre-Dame" rather than L'Organist à Notre-Dame: "The Organist at Notre-Dame."

The last great late Romantic French organ composer, Vierne died while giving a recital at Notre-Dame Cathedral, on Wednesday, June 2, 1937. He performed his Triptyque, Op. 58, and an improvisation was to follow. Vierne pressed a pedal key, suffered a heart attack, lost consciousness, and died a short time later in spite of efforts to revive him. At his funeral (held three days later at the Cathedral) the grand organ that he had played for 37 years remained silent.

## Meet the Artist



Eric Plutz is University Organist at Princeton University, where his responsibilities include playing for weekly services at the Chapel, Academic Ceremonies, and solo concerts, as well as accompanying the Chapel Choir in services and concerts. He coordinates the weekly After Noon Concert Series at the University Chapel, is Lecturer in Music and Instructor of Organ at Princeton University, and maintains a private studio. Also in Princeton, Mr. Plutz is rehearsal accompanist for Princeton Pro Musica. In 2016 Mr. Plutz received the Alumni Merit Award from Westminster Choir College of Rider University. More information is available at [www.ericplutz.com](http://www.ericplutz.com).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, performances of The Vierne Project (the complete organ symphonies of Louis Vierne, honoring the composer's Sesquicentennial) will be extended throughout 2021. One of a handful of organists to embark on such a venture, Mr. Plutz has secured performances at multiple venues, and in a variety of formats.

As an organ concert soloist, Mr. Plutz, who "performs with gusto, flair, clarity, and strong yet pliant rhythmic control (James Hildreth for TAO)," has accepted engagements in distinguished locations across the United States and abroad including Germany, Austria, Philadelphia (Verizon Hall, the Wanamaker Organ, Longwood Gardens), New York City (Church of St.

Ignatius Loyola, Cathedral of St. John the Divine), Washington, DC (Washington National Cathedral), Durham (Duke University Chapel) and San Francisco (Grace Cathedral). He has been a featured artist at three Regional Conventions of the American Guild of Organists (2007, 2011, and 2019), the Annual Convention of the Organ Historical Society (2016), and at the 2010 National AGO Convention in Washington, DC, Mr. Plutz performed twice, in collaboration with two local groups. His playing has been broadcast on "With Heart and Voice," "Pipedreams," and "the Wanamaker Organ Hour."

Eric has made four solo recordings on the Pro Organo label, [www.proorgano.com](http://www.proorgano.com). French Trilogy (on the Æolian-Skinner Organ at Byrnes Auditorium, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC), about which James Reed (The Diapason) wrote, "Plutz is a master craftsman... his performances are sensitive, emotional, stunningly accurate, and spectacularly musical... truly a world-class performance by a world-class musician," and Denver Jubilee (restored 1938 Kimball Organ of St. John's Episcopal Cathedral, Denver, CO), about which David Schwartz (American Record Guide) wrote, "...he understands, as would a great orchestrator, how to register the more orchestral side of the instrument..."

Two previous recordings are of the Princeton University Chapel Organ: *Musique Héroïque* and *Carnival*, about which Mr. Hildreth (The American Organist) writes, "Plutz's extraordinary musicianship and dexterous command allow him to perform the most challenging passages (of which there are many!) with apparent ease. He performs the quiet pieces with poetry and grace."

As an accompanist, Mr. Plutz has worked with many organizations, including a 15-year period as rehearsal accompanist for the Westminster Symphonic Choir at Westminster Choir College, the Bach Choir of Bethlehem, National Symphony Orchestra, Choral Arts Society of Washington, and the Cathedral Choral Society (DC). As a teacher, he held to position of Adjunct Assistant Professor of Organ at Westminster Choir College two separate times.

Originally from Rock Island, Illinois, Mr. Plutz earned a Bachelor of Music degree, magna cum laude, from Westminster Choir College of Rider University and a Master of Music degree from the Eastman School of Music. Additional study consists of two visits to Europe: in 2005, he studied the complete organ works of César Franck with Marie-Louise Langlais in Paris, and in 2019 he studied the complete organ symphonies of Louis Vierne with Ben van Oosten in The Hague, Netherlands.

Eric Plutz is represented by Seven Eight Artists.