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# Organ Performance as a Trade Commodity of France: The Shaping of Concert Organist Jeanne Demessieux \*

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On a summer Sunday in 1945, a twenty-four-year-old laureate of the Paris Conservatory had just finished playing the morning services on the celebrated organ of St-Sulpice. The awe-inspiring effects of both the music she spontaneously composed, and her interpretations from the repertoire, were such that, though she was merely a supply organist to this position, a group of admiring visitors in the organ gallery remained to listen and observe to the end. Among those present was an off-duty American officer who made a point of asking for her name and for the title of one of the organ pieces heard that morning. Her name, he learned, was Jeanne Demessieux, and the music was from the sonically unusual and technically unprecedented Suite, op. 39, of Marcel Dupré, 'You should come to America,' the officer enthused.<sup>1</sup> Little did he know, for the past four years Demessieux had devoted practically every waking hour of her life in war-time Paris to that very aim: in the foreseeable future, a tour of the United States, the imagined first of many professional contracts to perform in concert venues on the huge continent where a constellation of living and legendary European soloists had already earned fame and fortune. Her teacher and mentor Marcel Dupré knew exactly how to get her there.

This article examines circumstances surrounding the international performing career of Jeanne Demessieux (1921–1968) as a case study of solo concert artist as national commodity.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanne Demessieux, personal Journal no. 6 (5 August 1945): 462, Archive of the City of Montpellier 4S7. Hereafter, citations from Demessieux's personal journal of December 1940 through December 1946 will be referred to by Demessieux's Journal number followed by date of the entry and page number. The author is grateful to M. Daniel Picotin of Bordeaux, France, husband of the late Christiane Colleney, for showing her Jeanne Demessieux's diaries and for making copies available to her. In 2004, the Demessieux diaries, papers and memorabilia that had been in M. Picotin's care were transferred to the Municipal Archive of the city of Montpellier, Jeanne Demessieux's birthplace, where they form the 4S series of documents, with the above-mentioned diaries being 4S2 through 4S9. The author's 2003 survey of primary sources for research on Jeanne Demessieux is forthcoming in *Women of Note Quarterly*.

It will consider a suspicion, aired in the 1977 biography of Demessieux by Christiane Trieu-Colleney, and derived from Demessieux's close friend Jean Berveiller, that Marcel Dupré aimed to 'Americanize' (in the worst sense of the word) Jeanne Demessieux: that, in effect, he intended to show her off in the manner of a Hollywood starlet.<sup>2</sup> In evaluation of this notion, the present essay attempts to do the following: situate Demessieux's international concert career within the history of globalised French organ playing specifically and theories concerning the commodification of musical performance generally; describe the exceptional way in which Marcel Dupré nurtured and launched Demessieux's career; and detail, with emphasis on her North American concert tours, the short and long term success of Demessieux's 1946 to 1968 concert career. Sources to be tapped will include Marcel Dupré's 1933 essay 'Impressions Upon Returning from America';<sup>3</sup> Demessieux's diary of 1941–1946 (her personal record of her career formation under Dupré); her financial log for her 1953 North American tour;<sup>4</sup> and the journal she kept during her 1955 and 1958 North American tours.<sup>5</sup> Where applicable, observations on the French national character explained by cultural historians and observers Jean-Benoit Nadeau and Julie Barlow (in their popular guide for North American, British and Australian visitors to France) will be used to examine crucial statements and behaviors of individuals and the French government.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Virtuoso Soloist as Commodity: Historical and Theoretical Contexts**

Many historians have documented the processes by which, prior to the invention of the phonograph, celebrated European virtuosos were heard in North America. In his book *From Paris to Peoria*, R. Allen Lott details the motives and means by which five nineteenth-century European pianists became famous—and often wealthy—by performing grueling seasons of concerts and solo recitals in city after city in the United States.<sup>7</sup> He makes it clear that the twin lures to America were greater fame and the potential for exceptional financial gains. The pianist typically arrived on the eastern seaboard with one engagement pre-booked and built upon the public success of this recital to collect more concerts, in successive cities, over a period of several months. As Lott also demonstrates, the tactics of an American-born artist's manager were essential to procuring engagements and building audience size for US tours of European

<sup>2</sup> Christiane Trieu-Colleney, *Jeanne Demessieux: Une vie de luttes et de gloire* (Avignon: Les Presses Universelles, 1977) 30. In airing this suspicion, Trieu-Colleney was grasping for possible explanations for the dramatic 'rupture' that occurred between erstwhile colleagues Dupré and Demessieux at the end of 1946. Although she does not acknowledge her source, Trieu-Colleney evidently derived the suspicion that some of Dupré's plans for presenting Demessieux in America would have demeaned her from a 8 June 1949 letter by Jean Berveiller—mutual friend of Dupré and Demessieux—to Jeanne's sister Yolande that was in her possession (Montpellier Archives 4S19). In this letter, Berveiller went so far as to use the phrase 'platinum blond' to describe the image he thought Dupré was aiming at, an image he said the naïve but genuine-spirited Demessieux would naturally rebel at.

<sup>3</sup> Marcel Dupré, 'Impressions de retour d'Amérique' (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département de Musique, 4° Vm Pièce 951).

<sup>4</sup> Municipal Archive of the city of Montpellier (hereafter, Montpellier) 4S10.

<sup>5</sup> Montpellier 4S11.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Benoit Nadeau and Julie Barlow, *Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't be Wrong: What Makes the French so French* (London: Robson, 2004). Page references are to the 2005 printing.

<sup>7</sup> R. Allen Lott, *From Paris to Peoria: How European Piano Virtuosos Brought Classical Music to the American Heartland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) focuses on the American tours of pianists Leopold de Meyer, Henri Herz, Sigismund Thalberg, Arthur Rubinstein and Hans von Bülow.

pianists, whilst the pianist's tough, prior negotiations with that manager regarding contract terms were equally crucial to making the trip worthwhile.<sup>8</sup>

French organists began to perform concerts in North America around the turn of the twentieth century. Alexandre Guilmant (1837–1911) is credited with being the first to cultivate, in America, popular interest in the organ as a concert instrument.<sup>9</sup> How did Guilmant, Parisian church musician and professor of organ at one or more Paris institutions, come to travel so far? Organists, Guilmant among them, were frequently engaged by organ builders in nineteenth-century Europe to display their firms' latest innovations at industrial fairs and world expositions.<sup>10</sup> The next step for Guilmant came when he was invited to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago to play four recitals for the benefit of the Ferrand & Votey organ company's Opus 700, installed in Festival Hall in Chicago. Having made the long trip across the ocean for this initial purpose, he remained in the US to play further recitals on tour.<sup>11</sup> This led to a return visit to the US in 1897–98, during which Guilmant played a series of seventy-five recitals on the eastern seaboard. In 1904, on the last of three visits to the North American continent, he played close to forty distinct programmes at the St. Louis World's Fair, followed by a tour of twenty-four recitals that ended at Symphony Hall, Boston.<sup>12</sup> In Guilmant's case, invitation to perform at a world's fair in North America prepared the way for recital tours there—to the further benefit of his acclaim at home in France.

The celebrated Camille Saint-Saëns visited South America in 1904 and North America in 1906—primarily as a pianist and composer; during his 1906 visit to the United States, though, he also had occasion to play the organ.<sup>13</sup> Also around the turn of the century, a near-countryman, the Belgian-born and trained organist Charles Courboin (1886–1973) capitalised on the wealth of opportunity in North America by more aggressive means: soon after winning an international organ prize, he made a base for himself in the eastern United States by immigrating there in 1904 (the same year as Guilmant made his last visit).<sup>14</sup>

Particularly as a result of the successes reported by Guilmant, the exportation of French organ playing soon garnered aid from the French government. This is not surprising. As Nadeau and Barlow have described, historically, the French state has purposefully cultivated monumental artistic achievement, and employed it not only as a symbol of French cultural supremacy but as an emblem of the grandeur and power of France. Never a simple matter of art for art's sake, '[c]ulture in France has always been closely associated with the country's national and international ambitions.' The glorification of French musicians in the United States had become so apparent at home that, in response to blows suffered by France's international reputation during World War I, in 1915 its government sent Saint-Saëns to a cultural affair

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<sup>8</sup> Lott, 116–19, 172–3, 205 *et passim*.

<sup>9</sup> Wayne Leupold, Preface to *Eighteen New Pieces*, The Organ Music of Alexandre Guilmant, vol. 4 (Melville, NY: Belwin-Mills, 1984) xv.

<sup>10</sup> Orpha Ochse, *Organists and Organ Playing in Nineteenth-Century France and Belgium* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1994) 22, 28, 33–4, 37, 38, 41, 52, 75, 79, 94–6, 103–4.

<sup>11</sup> Leupold, Preface, xiv.

<sup>12</sup> Ochse, *Organists and Organ Playing* 112; Leupold, Preface, xv; Rollin Smith, 'Alexandre Guilmant: Commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of His Birth,' *The American Organist* 21.3 (March 1987): 53, 56.

<sup>13</sup> Rollin Smith, *Saint-Saëns and the Organ* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1992) 161–3.

<sup>14</sup> Raymond A. Biswanger, 'The Story of the Wanamaker Organs, Part One: A Merchant Prince and His Regal Concert Series,' *The American Organist* 22.9 (September 1988): 61.

in the United States, celebrating the opening of the Panama Canal, with a title indicating his role on behalf of political, economic, literary and artistic relations between France and the US.<sup>15</sup> Then, in 1917 the French government sent Guilmant student and Paris Conservatory laureate Joseph Bonnet (1884–1944) to make the first of a string of annual organ concert tours of the United States—doing so for the express purpose of rehabilitating France’s prestige in that country.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, in the immediate post-World-War-I era, another of Guilmant’s prize-winning Paris Conservatory students, Marcel Dupré (1886–1971), was methodically building his European concert experience in preparation for equaling, if not trumping, the success in America of his predecessors. Appearing to take the same financial risk as his nineteenth-century pianist counterparts,<sup>17</sup> Dupré arrived in New York for the first time in 1921 with just one guaranteed recital—on the organ of New York’s Wanamaker Store—and proceeded from there to collect seventeen more concert engagements in New York and Philadelphia.<sup>18</sup> His 1921 critical success in America laid the groundwork for Dupré’s future, even more ambitious, visits to the continent, seven more prior to World War II alone.

As a young man, Dupré had two short-term personal goals: critical and financial success in North America, and the position of organ professor at the Paris Conservatory. Professors at France’s music conservatories were paid modest stipends set by the French government. To be tied to a teaching schedule at the Paris Conservatory was rich in prestige but, compared to concertising, poor in financial recompense. Nadeau and Barlow have noted a general reluctance on the part of French people to speak openly in social discourse about business and money.<sup>19</sup> This observation casts into relief advice that Dupré’s mentor Charles-Marie Widor is reported to have given him the day before he departed for New York to begin his first transcontinental tour of North America (1922): ‘Try to make enough money there so you will be free [financially independent enough] to take Gigout’s place [at the head of the Paris Conservatory organ class].’<sup>20</sup> According to biographer Michael Murray, from his three North American tours of 1922 to 1925 alone, Dupré may have earned an estimated US \$30,000—this at a time when, at home in Paris, the equivalent of thirty cents could buy a three-course restaurant meal, wine included.<sup>21</sup>

In keeping with his success in North America, Dupré had strong words of praise for the North American music scene in the next decade. He admired organ-building trends in the United States (still untouched by the organ-reform movement that got underway in Europe

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *Saint-Saëns*, 168–9.

<sup>16</sup> Agnes Armstrong, ‘Joseph Bonnet Fifty Years after his Death,’ *L’Orgue francophone* [1994], special issue entitled *Joseph Bonnet (1884–1944)*, French–English edition, 21–24.

<sup>17</sup> It is possible, though, that Dupré’s initial visit to North America was sponsored by the French-American Association upon recommendation by the French government. As early as 1919, the French Minister of Education and Fine Arts wrote to the Director of the French-American Association recommending Dupré as a performing artist likely to acquire rapid favour abroad. A carbon copy of the letter is in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France Département of Musique, in a box labeled ‘Fonds Montpensier, France—Virtuoses—Dupré’ in the dossier ‘Tournées Etats-Unis [&] Canada’ in the file labelled ‘Etats-Unis.’

<sup>18</sup> Marcel Dupré, *Recollections*, trans. and ed. Ralph Kneeream (Belwin-Mills, NY: 1975) 79–82, 136.

<sup>19</sup> Nadeau and Barlow, *Sixty Million Frenchmen*, 37–8.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Marcel Dupré par lui-même’ (Phonodisk). Quoted in Michael Murray, *Marcel Dupré: The Work of a Master Organist* (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1985) 89, 115.

<sup>21</sup> Murray, *Marcel Dupré*, 115.

in the 1920s), particularly the tendencies toward gigantism, electrification with its advantages of evenness of touch and facile changes of registration, and visible consoles. In 1933 he put together a glowing account (a typescript that may have been intended for reading in a French radio broadcast) extolling the wealth of musical activity and strength of the audience base in the US, compared to the take-it-for-granted attitude that French audiences had developed for organ concerts in recent decades. In answer to the question, 'What do Americans think of French musical art?' he replied, 'That's very simple: there the virtuoso and French artist are idolised by the population.'<sup>22</sup> Anything Dupré may have experienced when performing for North American audiences that might be construed as negative was ignored for the purposes of this essay in cross-Atlantic relations.

Some obvious points of comparison between Europe and the US that Dupré did not mention in his essay were the high-powered promotional methods used by performing artists' agents in America, and their tendency to attempt to rake back a high percentage of the box office receipts. By World War II, European musicians, cynical about artistic standards in the New World, were convinced that the success of North American artist managers was due to their being ruthlessly business-like: they made money for and from the performers' tours that they organised by employing publicity tactics that, in Europe, were considered to be in bad taste, and by requiring their clients to emphasise the bravura element of performance over artistry and nuance.<sup>23</sup> By the 1990s, though, a French commentator on organ-playing came to express it more positively: overseas concert tours for organists are now understood as a business, styled after the North American model, in which efficiency is foremost; the tours are organised by professional agents and are strongly dependent upon the advertising media; they have as their principal aim attracting maximum audiences, during a limited number of recitals, that take place in the shortest possible timeframe.<sup>24</sup> But what of the view from within North America?

Nicolas Tawa, in a survey of the state of art music in the US, has chronicled and dissected its ups and downs for survival among the general public in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> A thread running through his narrative is the philosophical debate between those impresarios and musicians who have urged that art music risks extinction if it is not packaged and advertised in a manner that appeals to the tastes of the general public, and others who have decried extravagant packaging and publicity as the very reason for the precarious economic state of art music in North America. Theodore Adorno, for instance, did not have the admiration for audiences in the New World that Dupré expressed in the 1930s. While in exile in the United States in 1945, Adorno wrote:

We live in a society of commodities—that is, a society in which production of goods is taking place, not primarily to satisfy human wants and needs, but for profit. Human needs are satisfied only incidentally as it were. This basic condition of production affects the form of the product as well as the human interrelationships ... How did

<sup>22</sup> Marcel Dupré, 'Impressions de retour d'Amérique,' 7.

<sup>23</sup> Lott, *From Paris to Peoria*, 105–8.

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Michel Louchart, 'Mobilité,' in *Les Orgues de Paris*, comp. by Michel le Moël (Paris: Délégation à l'Action Artistique de la Ville de Paris, 1st ed., n.d.) 190.

<sup>25</sup> Nicolas E. Tawa, *Art Music in the American Society: The Condition of Art Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987).

music become, as our first axiom asserts it to be, a commodity? After music lost its feudal protectors during the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century it had to go to the market. The market left its imprint on it either because it was manufactured with a view to its selling chances, or because it was produced in conscious and violent reaction against the market requirements.<sup>26</sup>

According to Tawa, an overriding influence that accounts for the precarious state in which art music found itself in the twentieth-century North American market economy is the suffocating effect of a particular marketing technique on which music as commodity is dependent—the exploitation of musicians' personalities. As he observes, when, as a result of news-media popularity, select musicians are treated by the general public as 'stars'—as being 'important enough' to go and hear—it is the desire to identify with these celebrities, as opposed to aesthetic experience or any genuine sense of having one's imagination entertained, that becomes the principal reason musical performances have appeal.<sup>27</sup> Demessieux's friend Jean Berveiller thought he saw signs that Dupré intended to exploit the person Jeanne Demessieux in order to make Americans attend her recitals.

### **Marcel Dupré's Strategies for Nurturing and Launching Demessieux's Career**

First, how did Dupré come to manage Demessieux's career formation during the 1940s? Three factors came into play: an unusual degree of mutual respect for each other's musicianship, the perceived class inferiority of the Demessieux family compared to the Dupré family, and, hovering over the first two, the traditional penchant of the French people as a society to grant power and privilege to their leaders, including their intellectual elite.<sup>28</sup>

Both as a child prodigy and as a mature musician, Jeanne Demessieux was not ordinarily someone who bowed to arbitrary demands by others. The self-view projected in her 1941–1946 diaries, and in her self-writings throughout her life, is of a strong, free-thinking individual. As a Paris Conservatory student between the ages of twelve and twenty, although admired by, and admiring of, many of her Conservatory teachers, she clashed temperamentally and artistically with one of her piano teachers (Simon Riera), with the teacher of her composition class (Henri Büsser) and, in 1941, with an entire composition jury.<sup>29</sup> This last imbroglio caused her to doubt that she would ever realise her ambition of being recognised as a composer.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, her relationship with the musician who had been her teacher of organ and improvisation since the age of fifteen was at the opposite extreme of the spectrum: not only did Dupré wield the authority of worldwide acclaim, he and Demessieux were unusually like-thinking in their overall approaches to music-making. From this gradually developed a close bond of mutual

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<sup>26</sup> Theodore W. Adorno, 'A Social Critique of Radio Music,' in *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Robert P. Morgan (New York: Norton, 1998) 196; originally published in *The Kenyon Review* 7 (Spring 1945): 208–15. Historians have subsequently placed the beginnings of the shift of music from church and noble patronage to the market place in the seventeenth, rather than eighteenth, century. See Lorenzo Bianconi, *Music in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. David Bryant (Cambridge: CUP, 1987, reprinted 1989) 65–73; Richard A. Carlton, 'The Public Marketing of Music,' *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 26.1 (June 1995): 123–32.

<sup>27</sup> Tawa, *Art Music in the American Society*, vi, 31–2.

<sup>28</sup> Nadeau and Barlow, *Sixty Million Frenchmen*, 52, 282.

<sup>29</sup> Trieu-Colleney, *Jeanne Demessieux*, 20-1, 23–4.

<sup>30</sup> Demessieux, *Journal* 1 (30 January–19 March 1941) 11–39.

artistic respect, which, in turn, drew Demessieux into the bosom of the Dupré family and the entire Dupré and Demessieux families together.<sup>31</sup>

When, during this period, she compared herself with the Duprés, Demessieux's self-view was tinged with humility resulting from her consciousness of having been born into a family that was working-class and had its origins, not in the Paris region but, in the extreme south of France (Dupré was born in Rouen, located at the mouth of the Seine, north of Paris). Moreover, unlike the musically rich ancestry of Marcel Dupré, neither Jeanne's father's nor her mother's line contained professional musicians. Indeed, her father was an employee of the French national railways, albeit in a managerial position.<sup>32</sup> Now living and working in Paris for the sake of their daughter's career, the Demessieux parents, like their daughter, felt privileged to be accepted into the Dupré family's social life; in this milieu they gained complete trust in the judgement and abilities of a man they regarded as one of France's intellectual elite.<sup>33</sup> When, in 1941, Dupré brought to Jeanne and her parents his plan of a long-term project that would erase Jeanne's vocational uncertainty and virtually guarantee her a distinguished career as a concert organist (moreover, promising to work with her for no payment other than her collegiality and her assistance in some of his other projects), they felt privileged to accept, and confident in pledging their complete cooperation in regard to all the time and effort that would be asked of Jeanne.

Dupré is known for having acted out the reputation of the French elite for authoritarianism in his relationships to all his students.<sup>34</sup> In his relationship to Jeanne, however, this type of teacher-student attitude bore its best fruits by means of gradual transformation and transference. Their relationship was transformed as the two experienced artistic give-and-take and came to sense that they were collaborators in a magnificent, worthy project. Transference took place when, in conversations with Demessieux, Dupré worked to convince her that she was earning, in her own right, the authority he and his teachers had wielded as cultural ambassadors for France.

To form his successor, Dupré was leaving nothing to chance. He executed two sets of plans—one built of artistic strategies and, the other, marketing strategies.

*Artistic strategies.* A prize in organ and improvisation from the Paris Conservatory, such as the unanimous first prize Demessieux earned in 1941, then as now, qualified the prize-holder to be invited to give public recitals and, theoretically, put him or her in the running for any church organ post or conservatory position teaching organ and improvisation. Even so, many twentieth-century French organists chose to augment the skills honed in achievement of their Paris Conservatory prize by means of further studies in organ and improvisation with a private teacher. Frequently, they wanted tutoring in additional styles of improvisation (for example, in the manner of Charles Tournemire), they sought to learn the Gigout-Tournemire tradition of performing Franck's music (as an alternative to the Guilmant-Dupré tradition), and they

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<sup>31</sup> Demessieux, Journals 1–6 (25 June 1941–26 May 1946): 50–553.

<sup>32</sup> Trieu-Colleney, *Jeanne Demessieux*, 12; Demessieux, Journal 3 (22 August 1943): 235.

<sup>33</sup> Nadeau and Barlow observe, 'The French have always considered artists and performers as quasi-intellectuals' (*Sixty Million Frenchmen* 297).

<sup>34</sup> Dupré's reputation among his Paris Conservatory students as an authoritarian is most famously constructed by anecdotes recounted by Jean Langlais (1907–1991). See Ann Labounsky, *Jean Langlais: The Man and His Music* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 2000) 53–5.

wanted to capitalise on new trends in performance and interpretation of early music, including speculative approaches to articulation in Bach and pre-Bach keyboard music (for example, with André Marchal).<sup>35</sup> Rarely had it occurred to any of the students who passed through Dupré's Conservatory class that he had yet more to offer them in the way of techniques for surpassing their present standard of virtuoso playing and composing modern organ music.<sup>36</sup> Demessieux, for reasons explained above, felt privileged to take advantage of the further insights Dupré had to offer.

Together, Dupré and Demessieux envisioned an 'organist of the future' who displayed advancements in manual and pedal technique, unsurpassed ability to compose spontaneously in recognizable forms at the organ, mastery of the entire standard repertoire, and a body of self-composed organ composition in innovative idioms. In pursuit of the technical goal, over the period July 1941 to May 1942 Dupré asked for, and received from Demessieux, perfection of each of the twelve pedal studies of Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813–1888).<sup>37</sup> This is a set of fiendishly difficult pieces for feet alone that were published circa 1865 for an obsolete instrument, the pedal piano; it is not clear that any organists of the first decades of the twentieth century, other than Dupré, learned these.<sup>38</sup> The opening of *Étude* no. 3 is typical of their level of difficulty (see Figure 1). The piece is a three-part fugato whose subject contains a trill. In passages of three-part texture, most notably the one here marked with an asterisk, parallel thirds are to be played by one foot. An ability to play all twelve études remains exceptional today, even among concert organists.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, over the period November 1941 to September 1943, Dupré composed, and Demessieux conquered, a set of twelve organ études of unprecedented technical difficulty; they were intended to advance the art of the organ composition technically and ended by also advancing it texturally and sonically.<sup>40</sup> Next, Dupré suggested, and encouraged Demessieux

<sup>35</sup> Jean Langlais's reasons for beginning organ study with Charles Tournemire, albeit during three post-graduate years of further study with Dupré, are outlined in Labounsky, *Jean Langlais*, 61–2. Regarding different approaches to playing Franck, see Marie-Louise Jacquet-Langlais, 'The Organ Works of Franck: A Survey of Editorial and Performance Problems' in *French Organ Music from the Revolution to Franck and Widor*, ed. L. Archbold and W. Peterson (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1995) 143–88 and Daniel Roth, 'Interpretation of the Organ Works of Franck' in Archbold and Peterson, *French Organ Music*, 189–98. According to Demessieux, the reason Dupré had no confidence in the current Durand text of Franck's *Trois Chorals* was because, as Dupré had seen with his own eyes, it had been printed from a manuscript prepared by Eugène Gigout. See Demessieux, *Journal* 2 (22 June 1942): 121.

<sup>36</sup> According to Demessieux, Dupré confided in her that, in the search for his successor, he had had brief hopes concerning two of his former students: Marcel Lanquetuit (1894–1985), though, renounced his plans of becoming a concert organist and Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) simply refused Dupré's offer of help in gaining concert engagements. Demessieux, *Journal* 1 (22 June 1941): 49–50.

<sup>37</sup> Demessieux, 'Travail 1941 à 1946/Minutage' (personal notebook preserved in the Van Tuijl collection) 3–8. In this present article, 'Van Tuijl collection' refers to a set of Demessieux's personal belongings that, in the 1980s, were given to her former student Goosen Van Tuijl (1923–2005) by Yolande Demessieux, and are now in the possession of the author.

<sup>38</sup> Demessieux recorded Dupré as having said to her that he had worked on the Alkan pedal études a lot. Demessieux, *Journal* 1 (23 July 1941): 57. The approximate original date of publication of the études is from John Henderson, *A Dictionary of Composers for Organ* (Swindon, Wiltshire: John Henderson, 1999) 10.

<sup>39</sup> Kevin Bowyer notes in the introduction to his edition of Alkan's *12 Études d'Orgue* that he recorded these for the BBC in 1989.

<sup>40</sup> The études composed for Demessieux survive in the form of Dupré's op. 39 through to op. 41, and an unpublished *Esquisse*. See Graham Steed, *The Organ Works of Marcel Dupré* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 1999) 110–18. For another approach to analysis of the published pieces, see Domitila Ballesteros, *Jeanne Demessieux's Six Études and the Piano Technique* (Rio de Janeiro, 2004) 74–82.



Figure 1. C.V. Alkan, opening of no. 3 of 12 *Études de Piano à Pédales pour les pieds*

FUGHETTA  
Moderato

The musical score is written in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piece is marked 'FUGHETTA' and 'Moderato'. The score consists of eight staves of music. The first staff ends with a fermata. The second staff begins with a forte (f) dynamic and contains a trill (tr). The third staff has a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. The fourth staff continues with mf. The fifth staff begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The sixth staff has a crescendo (cresc.) marking. The seventh staff continues with the piano dynamic. The eighth staff begins with a forte (f) dynamic and ends with a fermata marked with an asterisk (\*).

in, the composition of a futuristic set of organ études in her own style. In an analysis of these, Brazilian pianist and organist Domitila Ballesteros has demonstrated that Demessieux's études both drew from and surpassed Dupré's in technical and sonorous innovation for the organ.<sup>41</sup>

Dupré also had goals for Demessieux's abilities as an improviser of organ music. French organists had developed two separate uses for spontaneous composition at the instrument. One was creation of music during periods of church services for which it would be difficult to

<sup>41</sup> Ballesteros, *Jeanne Demessieux's Six Études and the Piano Technique*. See also Lynn Cavanagh, Review of Domitila Ballesteros, *Jeanne Demessieux's Six Études and the Piano Technique*, in *Diapason* 1160 (July 2006): 16–17.

match both liturgical theme and the required length of piece to a pre-existing composition.<sup>42</sup> The other was the practice of including a lengthy improvisation in every private or public recital, a hold-over from the origins of the French organ recital, which grew out of the practice of private and public demonstrations of new instruments: in these demonstrations, the best introduction to a new organ, for which no written works yet existed, was a composition inspired by the timbral resources of the particular instrument.<sup>43</sup>

In the art of improvisation, Paris Conservatory graduates of the organ class met the minimum requirements for church organists: in preparation for exams and competitions they practiced, using manuals and pedal, applying the basics of fugal procedure to a given subject and spontaneously composing a short non-fugal piece on a given theme. Improvisation of structurally lucid, large-scale works, for which Dupré was famous, was not something he could expect many of his students to accomplish. According to words Demessieux recorded in her diary after a private conversation with Dupré, he considered her exceptional among her classmates in her potential to perfect this ability.<sup>44</sup> After graduation from the class, she fulfilled this potential in forms such as a set of variations on a theme, a large-scale prelude (or passacaglia) and fugue on a pair of themes, and a four-movement symphonic cycle for organ. Dupré wanted Demessieux's audiences to be, like his own, astonished at her endless invention while also being able to hear where she was in the standard musical form. An improvisation in a free form, however, was equally within her capabilities.<sup>45</sup>

Repertoire and programme development for Dupré and Demessieux involved embracement of the characteristic French love of opulence and grandeur. Demessieux undertook Dupré's three-year plan for memorization and perfection of what they regarded as the entire modern canon for the organ and completed the plan in two and a half years. To this repertoire they added a selection of pre-Bach organ pieces, all of Dupré's major organ works composed to date, selections from other contemporary French organists' compositions, and major organ works of Demessieux's own composing. Pre-Bach organ music, in Dupré and Demessieux's thinking, has its gems, but they considered it rarely appropriate to programme a French classical organ mass or suite in its entirety on a recital. Dupré also taught her that one should revel in the playing of these select miniatures by interpreting them with spirit and humor—not with science, as they perceived some of their colleagues, particularly Marchal and his students, were doing. Although a distinguished line of blind French organists, of which Marchal was one, naturally performed only from memory, Dupré believed none had as extensive a repertoire of romantic and modern works as Demessieux.

In the middle of the twentieth century, as in all previous eras of the organ, the roles of organist and composer were still closely linked. Particularly for Dupré, nurtured in the tradition

<sup>42</sup> Ochse, *Organists and Organ Playing*, 127–35, 136, 57–8.

<sup>43</sup> Ochse, *Organists and Organ Playing*, 37, 43, 52–3, 55–6.

<sup>44</sup> Demessieux, *Journal* 4 (12 May 1944): 322.

<sup>45</sup> A type of improvisation that Demessieux occasionally undertook in public was spontaneous creation of a large-scale musical paraphrase of a literary text. For instance, the Van Tuijl collection contains a tape recording of Demessieux improvisations performed at the Royal Conservatory of Liège in 1957, one of which is a twenty-minute long paraphrase based on a biblical text (read aloud to the audience prior to the improvisation): the story of Jesus calming the waves for his disciples and walking on water (Matthew 14: 22–34).

of Guilmant and Widor, a concert organist was someone who composed organ music for his or her use in recitals and services and, ideally, published these works. During the period 1941–1946 Dupré inspired and took a keen interest in Demessieux's compositions for organ. As well as the *Six Études*, these included four movements of the eventual *Sept Méditations sur le Saint-Esprit*. Presentation to the public of her own compositions was meant to invoke favourable comparison of Demessieux with her older contemporaries among organist-composers, Duruflé, Fleury, Langlais, Litaize, Messiaen, Alain and Grunenwald, as well as himself.

All told, Dupré's artistic plan for Demessieux was that, in terms of technical capacity, size of repertoire, interpretive powers, and creative powers at the organ, she would appear before the general public and her colleagues as not only a mature and perfectly formed musician, but, in many respects, already surpassing the majority of her colleagues. For the *marketing* of Demessieux's musicianship during the years leading up to 1946, Dupré executed elaborate plans for her professional debut at home, and laid foundations for her appearances elsewhere on the European continent, in Britain and in the United States. In these preparations, Dupré had the help of his wife Jeannette—just as she assisted him in the management of his own career. Their strategy in the Demessieux project was a combination of suspense, timing, packaging, local publicity and international representation. In her recollection of a three-way conversation concerning her forthcoming debut, Demessieux quotes Dupré as having remarked to his wife, 'Paris—that's just for publicity.'<sup>46</sup>

During a period of four and a half years leading up to February 1946, the Duprés worked to ensure that Demessieux's professional debut in Paris would have the greatest possible impact. First, they created suspense in the Paris organ world of the early 1940s by contriving an information black-out regarding Demessieux's abilities, within which they allowed leaks of information. Whereas other Paris organists who won their Conservatory first prize in organ during the war made official concert debuts a year or so later, Demessieux adopted Dupré's advice that she refuse all invitations to perform in a concert or broadcast prior to the debut he was planning for her. Meanwhile, beginning in 1941, Dupré made Demessieux his chief deputy at the *grande orgue* of the church of St-Sulpice. There, although she could not exhibit the full extent of her virtuosity, music aficionados heard Demessieux's growing skills as an improviser and as an interpreter of Bach, Handel, Liszt and Dupré. When she played at Mass at St-Sulpice—occasions when Dupré was out of town for concert engagements—Jeannette Dupré would be present in the organ tribune so that she could report back to her husband how their protégée had performed and what reaction she had created among other musicians present.

To further capitalise on the power of word-of-mouth, in conversation with select persons of influence Dupré dropped broad hints concerning Demessieux's abilities, declaring that she was destined to become known as France's, indeed, the world's, greatest organist.<sup>47</sup> According to Demessieux, he used the same technique to prepare the publisher Bornemann to agree, when asked a couple of years later, to publish Demessieux's organ études.<sup>48</sup> Also with Bornemann, Dupré strategised a way that the set of pieces he had originally composed

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<sup>46</sup> Demessieux, *Journal* 3 (17 June 1943): 207. In this present article, all translations from the French are by the author.

<sup>47</sup> Demessieux claims to have been present on two such occasions that she recorded in her diary: *Journal* 4 (20 October 1943): 269–70; *Journal* 5 (11 August 1944): 351.

<sup>48</sup> Demessieux, *Journal* 2 (18 February 1942): 35; *Journal* 4 (25 February 1944): 293.

as études for Demessieux, and her own six études, could both be published without being in any obvious competition with each other, and without revealing their technical secrets too early in the course of the project.<sup>49</sup>

Timing was crucial in the project as a whole, according to Demessieux's diary, with everything hinging on the strategy that the date of her debut had to take into account international events. Although her technique and repertoire were in place by June of 1944 (incidentally coinciding with the month of the Allied forces' invasion of Normandy), Dupré held fast that they must delay her Paris debut until all European borders were open again:<sup>50</sup> the calculated sensation of her first concert performances in Paris was to be a springboard for immediate invitations to perform elsewhere: on the continent, in Britain and, soon afterward, in North America.<sup>51</sup> She also noted in her journal that Dupré kept a file of papers detailing his plans for launching her career, a method he said was modelled after the advanced planning techniques of American industrialists.<sup>52</sup>

Also understanding the role played by packaging in selling musical performances, Dupré went to great lengths to create the ideal venue for Demessieux's debut, lengths that included some underhanded plotting.<sup>53</sup> Without revealing his ulterior purpose, he convinced the board of the Salle Pleyel to undertake the expense of renovating its Cavallé-Coll organ in accordance with his recommendations. These included conversion of the console to one that was moveable (and, hence, visible) and painstaking regulation of the electric action that would accommodate performance of Demessieux's études.<sup>54</sup> Visibility of the console made apparent what had to be seen to be believed: for instance, that she played *prestissimo* passages of double notes on the pedalboard, and that she performed programme after programme from memory.<sup>55</sup>

According to Demessieux, by December of 1944, Dupré had engaged not only the interest of his Paris agent Charles Kiesegn, but also of Bernard Gavoty (a former and loyal Dupré student who was both an organist and a music critic for *Le Figaro*) in his intentions for the Salle Pleyel organ.<sup>56</sup> Some months before the projected debut, he invited Gavoty to hear Demessieux play an organ recital at his Meudon home and, in the final days before the debut, to hear one of her rehearsals at the Salle Pleyel.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Demessieux, Journal 4 (25 February 1944): 293–6.

<sup>50</sup> Demessieux, Journal 4 (1 June 1944): 325; (17 June 1944): 331.

<sup>51</sup> Demessieux, Journal 3 (4 May 1943): 194.

<sup>52</sup> 'The Master opened my file: "I fully believe in statistics, which, like so much else, comes from industrial practice. The methods of industry, adapted for artists, yield the best results"' (Journal 3 [5 August 1943]: 226); 'Dupré pulled from my file the statistics for my ten programmes, which he read proudly' (Journal 3 [18 August 1943]: 231).

<sup>53</sup> Aspects of this intrigue are described in two documents: Demessieux's Journal 5 (8–15 December 1944): 378–83; and a letter to her sister (transcription of a fragment of a letter from Jeanne to Yolande Demessieux, 18 February 1945, among the working papers of Christiane Trieu-Collene for preparation of *Une vie de lutttes et de gloire*, where the transcription is titled 'Dufourcq—Dupré' [Montpellier 4540]).

<sup>54</sup> Demessieux, Journal 2 (18 February 1942): 95. Describing the occasion of her first visit to the Salle Pleyel, in the company of Dupré and the impresario Kiesgen, she noted among other doings, 'a big discussion concerning the placement of the organ' (Journal 4 [19 October 1943]: 267).

<sup>55</sup> In regard to the potential cost to 'Les Amis de l'Orgue de la Salle Pleyel' for renovating its Cavallé-Coll organ, Demessieux reports Dupré as having said, 'Better to spend 6000 francs there than on posters.' Journal 2 (19 May 1942): 115.

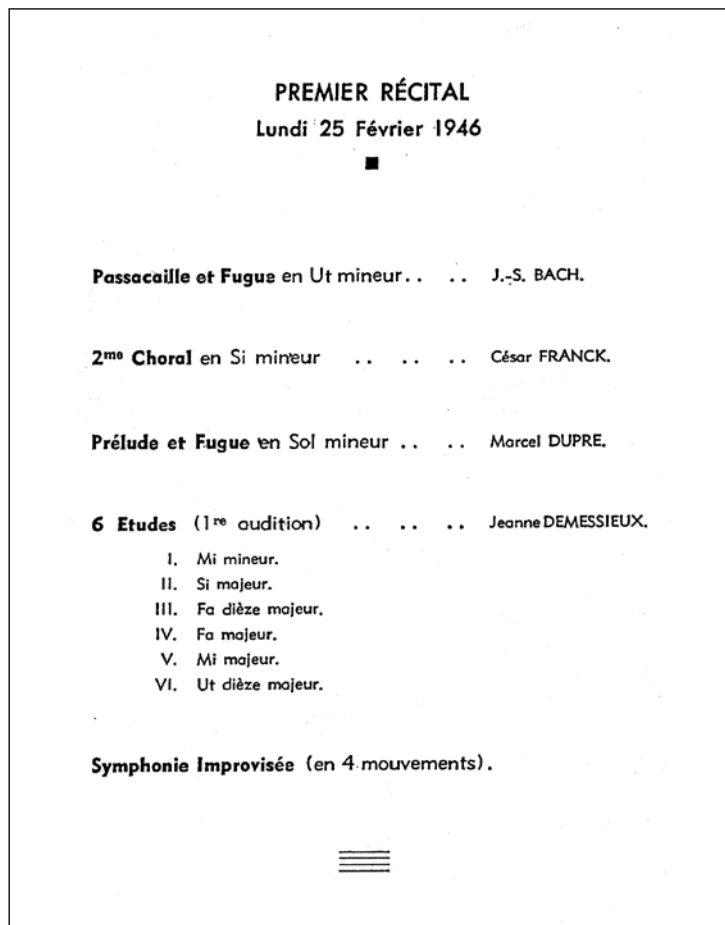
<sup>56</sup> Demessieux, Journal 5 (8 December 1944): 379.

<sup>57</sup> Demessieux, Journal 5 (8 March 1945): 398–401, 404.

In contrast to her peers' modest debuts in the 1940s, Demessieux's debut was planned as a series of not one but six historical recitals, that eventually took place in early 1946.<sup>58</sup> To convey her instant professional status, these six were advertised in advance as interspersed with recitals by other, established organists, including Dupré and the distinguished organist-composer Maurice Duruflé (1902–1986). Demessieux was given to believe that this 1946 series, sponsored by Les Amis de l'Orgue de la Salle Pleyel, was the first Paris organ recital series to be sold by subscription, that is, as a package.<sup>59</sup>

For her own first recital, the programme consisted of major works by Bach, Franck, Dupré and herself: a bold statement of succession in the history of organ music (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Programme of Demessieux's debut recital. Souvenir booklet, courtesy of the Association 'Les Amis de Jeanne Demessieux'**



<sup>58</sup> Demessieux's initial series of six recitals would also have compared favorably with André Marchal's debut series in 1923, which had consisted of four recitals, played at regular, weekly intervals, moving chronologically from early music to works by his colleagues. Hays, 'Homage,' *L'Orgue* (1981):42.

<sup>59</sup> Demessieux detailed plans for the series in a letter to her sister Yolande, 28 October 1945, Montpellier 4S15.

Figure 3 shows the handbill for the mid-March to end of April portion of the series, which includes an announcement for Demessieux's three recitals in April (her recitals numbers two to four)—one devoted to Bach and the others to the complete major organ works of Mendelssohn and Liszt respectively. Stamped INVITATION POUR UNE PERSONNE and autographed by Dupré, this copy of the handbill served as a free pass for the holder to all five remaining Jeanne Demessieux recitals in the series, a pass which Dupré provided to his current students. As a calculated sign of respect for their peers among French organist-composers, Dupré designed the series so that the last of Demessieux's six programmes consisted entirely of contemporary organ works, by nine Paris composers, ranging chronologically from Duruflé to Rolande Falcinelli (1920–2006), and concluding with her own latest composition.

Figure 3. Handbill announcing the March to April organ recitals in the 1946 Salle Pleyel series, courtesy of the Association 'Les Amis de Jeanne Demessieux'

## AMIS DE L'ORGUE DE LA SALLE PLEYEL

*Programme des prochaines réunions privées  
réservées gratuitement aux adhérents*

\*

**LUNDI 18 MARS - 18 h. 15**

Evocation d'Artistes Français :

Jean PERGOLA, organiste-Compositeur

\*

**LUNDI 1<sup>er</sup> AVRIL - 18 h. 15**

2<sup>me</sup> récital historique de concert :

Jeanne DEMESSIEUX, Œuvres de BACH

\*

**LUNDI 8 AVRIL - 18 h. 15**

Evocation romantique, poétique et musicale

"Le logis de George Sand" (Liszt - Chopin)

présentation de

Paul BARTHET

GUY LAMBERT, organiste

Henri DAGUIER, ténor

\*

**LUNDI 15 AVRIL - 18 h. 15**

3<sup>me</sup> récital historique de concert :

Jeanne DEMESSIEUX, Œuvres de MENDELSSOHN

\*

**LUNDI 29 AVRIL - 18 h. 15**

4<sup>me</sup> récital historique de concert

Jeanne DEMESSIEUX, Œuvres de F. LISZT

ADHÉSIONS ET RENSEIGNEMENTS :

Bureau de location Pleyel, chaque jour de 11 h. à 17 h.  
et à l'entrée des concerts

INVITATION POUR  
Une des 5 Recitals de  
Jeanne Demessieux

**Figure 4. Jeanne Demessieux at the Salle Pleyel organ (Paris: Rosardy, probably 1946), Municipal Archive of Montpellier, 4S20**



In advance of the series, Dupré made sure that the press had the information and photos needed for editorial content. As well as Gavoty, photographers were invited to one of her rehearsals at the Salle Pleyel in advance of concert number one (see Figure 4).<sup>60</sup> The day after her debut, *Le Figaro* allowed room for only a paragraph, which Gavoty used to pronounce in general terms upon the absolute perfection of Demessieux's first public recital.<sup>61</sup> Two days later, though, the weekly *Images Musicales* published a lengthy review of this recital by Gavoty that included the many details of Demessieux's musicianship he had had opportunity to amass and reflect upon. Concerning Demessieux's spontaneous creation of a four-movement symphony on themes submitted at that point in the recital, Gavoty wrote:

This abundance of thought, this perfect aptitude for realizing what the brain has conceived, this fidelity to the architectural plan, the sudden moments of repose within the fury—flowering oases of emotion—so many undeniable signs of absolute mastery. Not even Dupré himself, at the moment I write, is capable of such extravagance of talent.<sup>62</sup>

Accompanied by two photos of Demessieux seated at the Salle Pleyel organ, Gavoty's article for *Images Musicales* also had much to say about her feminine appearance and unassuming demeanour. Although Dupré allowed Gavoty and photographers to play up Demessieux's

<sup>60</sup> Demessieux, *Journal* 6 (20 February 1946): 513–14. While the recital series was in progress, the Duprés arranged another photo session for Demessieux that was to take place at St-Sulpice (*Journal* 7 [16 April 1946]: 540).

<sup>61</sup> Clarendon [Bernard Gavoty], *Le Figaro* (27 February 1946): 2.

<sup>62</sup> Gavoty, 'Jeanne Demessieux,' *Images Musicales* 19 (1 March 1946): 16.

physical beauty and delicacy of appearance, it is unlikely that this was, in any way, injurious to her own or her colleagues' impression of her artistic integrity: first, Gavoty commented on her appearance in a gracious way; secondly, according to Nadeau and Barlow, French women do not regard compliments upon their appearance as inappropriate in professional contexts.<sup>63</sup> Also in the review for *Images Musicales*, Gavoty brought to his readers' attention Demessieux's silver-toned, 'Cinderella-style' high heels (visible, too, in one of the photos), but made no mention of her reason for playing in high heels. Given that he was in Demessieux's and Dupré's confidence, it is difficult to imagine that he had not already asked them about this; perhaps Gavoty was complying with a desire on the part of Dupré and Demessieux to preserve the reason as her secret.<sup>64</sup>

International publicity was in progress before and during Demessieux's 1946 debut series. Even prior to the debut at home, Dupré had spoken of her to his British and Swiss agents and contacts.<sup>65</sup> This was the network of personal contacts cultivated for his own career: impresarios in Paris and London, a patron in Switzerland, and Roman Catholic clergy in France and Britain. Diligently noting all of Dupré's advice to her, she recorded him as having said, 'When you sign a contract with an impresario you must watch that he doesn't take 15% as they do on concerts in America.'<sup>66</sup> In what were probably Dupré's last efforts on her behalf, during his Summer/Autumn 1946 North American tour, every one of his programmes included a paragraph concerning Jeanne Demessieux and her *Six Études*, and a performance of no. 5, 'Notes Répétées.'<sup>67</sup> This, in turn, prompted Dupré's spoken assurances to audience members that the composer herself would soon play in America, and a request from some organists there that she compose an easy organ work for publication in the United States.<sup>68</sup>

In summary, Dupré's goals for Demessieux's artistry surpassed those he had set for any student thus far. For the marketing of her artistry, his strategies were probably a compilation of tactics that he, his wife and his agents had employed in the 1920s and 1930, adapted to Paris in the 1940s. In none of her diary entries does Demessieux express misgivings concerning Dupré's methods. The questions to be answered next are: were these methods successful and, more importantly, did she live up to her advance billing in Paris, in Europe and in North America?

<sup>63</sup> Nadeau and Barlow, *Sixty Million Frenchmen*, 59.

<sup>64</sup> Demessieux never publicly explained why she chose to play the pedalboard with high heels; there is only one direct reference to this in her diary, in a description of the first occasion on which she used Louis XV heels for a lesson with Dupré, and played for him all the major and minor scales and the Fugue in D (by Bach). The diary entry goes on to say 'I had never played his organ so well. After a fortnight of trial and error, I sensed that my technique had taken off' (Demessieux, Journal 1 [23 July 1941]: 57). I believe that reviewers of her recitals who assumed that the shoes were motivated by sartorial fashion were mistaken—that Demessieux discovered an ergonomic advantage to playing certain types of pedal passages with high heels that outweighed for her the general disadvantages.

<sup>65</sup> Upon returning from a trip to England, Dupré told Demessieux, or so she noted, that on her behalf he had spoken with, and received promises of support from, [Claude] Johnson (his wealthy British patron) and [Henry] Willis (the organ builder), to name two (Journal 6 [28 July 1945]: 459). Dupré's patron in Switzerland, Paul Hoehn, had also begun to take an interest in promoting Demessieux's career. See Journal 6 (11 November 1945): 486–7; Journal 7 (9 May 1946): 544–5.

<sup>66</sup> Demessieux, Journal 6 (9 January 1946): 507.

<sup>67</sup> Dupré's thousands of concert programmes are preserved in chronological order in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département de Musique.

<sup>68</sup> Trieu-Colleney, *Jeanne Demessieux*, 90. For an analysis of this work, see Lynn Cavanagh, 'Introducing the French Post-Romantic Style of Organ Music to Students: Demessieux's *Twelve Choral Preludes on Gregorian Chant Themes*,' *College Music Symposium* 42 (2002): 37–59.



## Outcomes

According to Demessieux's diary, preparations for her Paris debut paid off gloriously on 25 February 1946. If we have in mind that even subsequent interviewers and concert reviewers found her personality to be modest and unassuming, it is difficult to imagine that she invented, consciously or unconsciously, any of the details she recorded in her diary regarding her debut recital.<sup>69</sup> Her entry for 26 February notes that the concert hall, the evening before, was filled to three-quarters its capacity, in the opinion of the director of the Salle Pleyel, she said, an unprecedented attendance for a debut recital.<sup>70</sup> More importantly, all the most notable of Paris organists, as well as many of her former classmates and 'several Americans,' were present.<sup>71</sup> Among the accolades that came to her ears was one attributed to Maurice Duruflé: 'Compared to Jeanne Demessieux, we all play the pedalboard like elephants.'<sup>72</sup>

The music critic for the Paris edition of the *New York Herald Tribune* was present to document Demessieux's debut recital for Americans in Paris.<sup>73</sup> The reviewer for *Opéra* began his report with this accolade: 'The glorious phalanx of our organists, who comprise the premier school in the world, has been augmented by a new member, distinct from her elder illustrious figures, in the person of Jeanne Demessieux.'<sup>74</sup> As Nadeau and Barlow have observed, 'French journalists have a peculiar reflex of attributing superior qualities to [French] cultural figures and making them the incarnation of their discipline.'<sup>75</sup>

For the next ten months, the newly launched concert organist continued to track her career progress in her diary. By the spring of 1946, Dupré's British agent Wilfrid van Wyck, as well as his agent in France, Kiesgen, were representing her. In the course of her first Paris series, the BBC offered her a future engagement and, through Kiesgen, a recording contract had been proposed.<sup>76</sup> In the autumn of 1946, Dupré's Swiss patron Paul Hoehn, and his wife, hosted Demessieux for the purpose of introducing her, through informal organ recitals, to lovers of organ music in Zurich, Berne and Fribourg and St. Gall.<sup>77</sup> In Britain, one anecdote had it that Dupré personally appealed to the clergy of Westminster Cathedral in London to allow her to perform a recital there, something no woman had ever been permitted to do.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Just one example: an interview in *Réforme* (27 February 1953), signed by Ph. M., begins by describing her as modest to the point of almost being timid.

<sup>70</sup> Demessieux, Journal 6 (26 February 1946): 515. If the seating capacity of the Salle Pleyel was then, as reportedly now, 2,300, the attendance at Demessieux debut was approximately 1,725 persons.

<sup>71</sup> Among organists present that she noted: Bornemann, Rolande Falcinelli, [Gaston] Litaize, [Jean] Langlais, [Jean-Jacques] Grunenwald and Maurice Duruflé (Demessieux, Journal 6 [26 February 1946]: 522–4). The wife of her classmate killed in the war, Jehan Alain (1911–1940), extended congratulations to her 'as my husband would have' (523).

<sup>72</sup> Demessieux, Journal 6 (26 February 1946): 523.

<sup>73</sup> Edmund J. Pendleton, 'Music in Paris,' *New York Herald Tribune*, European ed., Paris (6 April 1946): 2.

<sup>74</sup> R. I., 'Recitals and Concerts: Jeanne Demessieux,' *Opéra* (6 March 1946): 4.

<sup>75</sup> Nadeau and Barlow, *Sixty Million Frenchmen*, 49.

<sup>76</sup> Demessieux wrote, 'Dupré told me that Gramophone had proposed a contract for me with Kiesgen as intermediary' (Journal 7 [12 May 1946]: 545–6). And, nine days later, 'Mammy [Madame Dupré] has a letter concerning an engagement with the BBC to show me' (Journal 7 [21 May 1946]: 549).

<sup>77</sup> Demessieux, Journal 8 (19 September–2 October 1946): 569–76.

<sup>78</sup> Ian Wells, 'Jeanne Demessieux 1921–1968,' *Organists' Review* 82.3 (August 1996): 179. This notion is in keeping with Dupré's several discussions with Paris clergy, reported second-hand in Demessieux's diary, arguing that the church of St-Sulpice should eventually lift its ban on accepting a woman as its *organiste titulaire* (for example, Demessieux, Journal 3 [26 March 1943]: 179–82).

In November of 1946, while the Duprés were overseas, a snag appeared in their plans for London: Van Wyck notified Demessieux that the British organist George Thalben-Ball, on behalf of his colleagues, asked that she present herself before them in London so they could vet her playing prior to her giving a public recital there. She noted in her diary that this request was an affront to an established artist, and that she had stubbornly refused to comply. In the same context, she noted that she had by this time received permission from Cardinal Griffin of Westminster Cathedral to perform there.<sup>79</sup>

We will never know for certain why, upon their return from America at the end of 1946, the Duprés irrevocably broke off their relationship with Demessieux.<sup>80</sup> Their plans continued to unfold in 1947 without their participation. Demessieux's London debut took place at Westminster Cathedral at the end of February, followed, in March, by further recitals in the UK (including one at London's Royal Albert Hall) and recording sessions with Decca London. These, her very first recording sessions, led to the issue of four 78-rpm records, of which the one containing a famous trumpet tune with air attributed to Purcell won the *Grand Prix du disque* of the Académie Charles-Cros in 1950.<sup>81</sup> In Paris, the Salle Pleyel welcomed her back for six more historical recitals in October 1947 through January 1948 so as to complete the survey of organ repertoire begun there in 1946 (see Figure 5). She debuted in Holland in January 1948. For the next twenty years, with Paris as her base, she undertook back-to-back recital tours of the UK, Ireland and Holland, alternating with periodic engagements in all corners of France and her duties as professor of organ and improvisation at the Royal Conservatory of Liège in Belgium (from 1952), where, too, she frequently performed. Her *Twelve Choral Preludes on Gregorian Chant Themes* were published in Boston in 1950 and she gave concerts coast-to-coast in North America in each of 1953, 1955 and 1958.<sup>82</sup>

How were her performances received? In an era when general interest in the organ as a recital instrument in Europe continued its downward spiral, Jeanne Demessieux was among those invited back to perform again and again. Reviews such as the following were typical:

Her playing of Handel's G minor Concerto, Set 1, No. 3, was particularly interesting. Its colouring was so piquant. Its contrasts, too, were very subtle, with a notable touch of humour in the middle section of the Allegro. The beauties of its melodic lines, particularly in the Larghetto, were very expressive in their effect. The second choral of César Franck was another outstanding performance and the Allegro from Widor's Sixth Symphony was powerful as well as brilliant.<sup>83</sup>

Also according to reviewers, audiences flocked to her concerts. She toured with programme modules that concentrated on the classics of the organ repertoire she assumed people needed most to hear: Bach, Handel, Liszt, and Franck, with occasional inclusion of a short French

<sup>79</sup> Demessieux, *Journal* 8 (23 November 1946): 579–80.

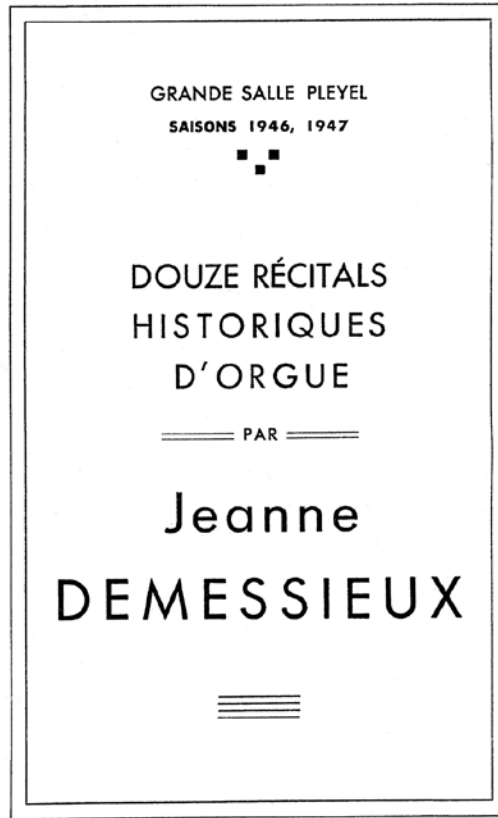
<sup>80</sup> A likely explanation of why Dupré turned his back on Demessieux, predicated on the impact of the 1940s Parisian organ scene had on his personal aims and motivations, is presented in Lynn Cavanagh, 'The Rise and Fall of a Famous Collaboration: Marcel Dupré and Jeanne Demessieux,' *Diapason* 1148 (July 2005): 18–22.

<sup>81</sup> Trieu-Colleney, *Jeanne Demessieux*, 69.

<sup>82</sup> For a selection of programmes and reviews from these concert tours, see Laura Ellis, 'The American Recital Tours of Jeanne Demessieux: A Documentation of Her Performances' (DMA document, University of Kansas, 1991). A shorter version of the same is in *Diapason* 86 (October 1995): 14–18.

<sup>83</sup> Rathcol, 'Organ Recital in Cathedral: Jeanne Demessieux,' *Belfast Telegraph* (18 April 1950): 4.

Figure 5. Cover of souvenir booklet of Demessieux's 1946–47 Salle Pleyel recital programmes, courtesy of the Association 'Les Amis de Jeanne Demessieux'



classic piece, or a movement from modern French organ work, and excerpts from her own œuvre. Her motivation was not to satisfy market requirements but to fulfil what for her were basic human needs. Her only concessions to virtuosity for its own sake or to popular music idioms was inclusion in her programmes of some of the bravura, jazz-influenced pieces by her loyal friend Jean Berveiller (1904–1976).<sup>84</sup>

Jeanne Demessieux's general acclaim had one obvious exception: in reviews by London critics who were themselves organists, from 1947 to the end of her life, the tone alternated between condescension and condemnation. In the April 1947 issue of the *Musical Times*, Archibald Farmer, president of London's Organ Recital Society, began a lengthy diatribe as follows:

News reached us some years ago of the phenomenal technique of Jeanne Demessieux, a young pupil of Dupré's, and her first recital in England, at Westminster Cathedral, on February 26, showed it to be indeed unbelievably facile, clear and safe. This was a popular affair, however, with a mixed programme that was perhaps unfavourable. Beginning with a *staccatissimo* trumpet tune that was neither Purcell nor organ style and

<sup>84</sup> In Demessieux's repertoire were Berveiller's *Intermezzo* (from the *Suite*, 1947) and three unpublished works, *Épithaphe*, *Cadence (Étude de Concert)* and *Mouvement*, all composed for her in 1953. Dates are from Henderson, *A Dictionary of Composers for Organ*, 54.

an F major toccata that gave no sign of constructive thought, it passed on to a Handel concerto and some Clérambault in exactly the same manner; Liszt's fantasia on 'Ad nos' (complete) was practically all *allegro*, and Mlle. Demessieux found her style only in the works by Dupré and herself that followed. Had we heard only this recital we should have concluded that her playing ended with mechanics.<sup>85</sup>

Indicative of Demessieux's reputation among London organists, newspaper reviews of her many performances there during the late 1940s, '50s and '60s, and reviews in the *Musical Times*, all adopted the hostile tone of Farmer's first review. For the remainder of her life, these critics never permitted themselves to speak of Demessieux as other than what amounts to the recital circuit's equivalent of a trained seal: capable of performing a number of unnatural tricks but hardly a true musician.<sup>86</sup>

In contrast, general London music critics, as well as critics elsewhere in the UK, were unstintingly complimentary. In final tribute, an unattributed obituary in the *Times* of London opened with the following words:

Jeanne Demessieux, the distinguished French organist, has died at the age of 47. For many years she was a brilliant virtuoso, a thoughtful, intelligent musician; and she was certainly the first woman ever to attain such eminence among the French organists who have dominated the world of organ playing since the time of César Franck.<sup>87</sup>

Her reception in North America was as Dupré had expected. Virgil Thomson (1896–1989), the distinguished composer and organist, and critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, placed her within the ranks of Widor, Bonnet, Dupré, Vierne and Messiaen. Like others in the US, he commented on her striking rhythm and articulation:

Notable throughout the evening were the soloist's elaborate and subtle treatment of registration and her powerful rhythm. No less subtle and no less powerful were her phraseology and her acoustical articulation...This device kept the brilliance clean; and its contrast with the more sustained utterance of broader themes gave a welcome variety, a contrapuntal dimension.<sup>88</sup>

What scant disapproval of her performances existed among North American reviewers came from two directions: from specialists in the early music movement and from those who had tired of the French habit of ending every organ recital with an improvisation on a submitted theme. The distinguished musicologist and organist Barbara Owen wrote grudgingly of a 1958 performance at Woolsey Hall, Yale University:

<sup>85</sup> A[rchibald] F[armer], 'Organ Recital Notes,' *Musical Times* (April 1947): 134.

<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Jonathan Rennett quotes facetious remarks concerning Demessieux by Herbert Howells and George Thalben-Ball in *George Thalben-Ball* (Newton Abbot, Devon: David & Charles, 1979) 124. After her death, British commentators found a way of showing respect while maintaining their former opinions. In his article on Demessieux for the *New Grove Dictionary* (1980), Felix Aprahamian allowed that Demessieux had died just as a new maturity was coming into her playing (see 'Demessieux, Jeanne' in *Grove Online* for virtually the same essay); Ian Wells, in his 1996 commemorative article for *Organists' Review*, refers to her 1967 performance in a series of recitals that inaugurated the new organ of Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral as her 'swansong' (Wells, 'Jeanne Demessieux 1921–1968,' 180). True to form, though, while she was still alive Anthony Cross judged these same performance at Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral 'a little disappointing' in comparison to the other organ recitals in the series (*Musical Times* 108 [1967]: 729).

<sup>87</sup> 'Jeanne Demessieux: A Brilliant Musician,' [London] *Times* (12 November 1968): 10.

<sup>88</sup> Virgil Thomson, *New York Herald Tribune* (23 March 1953). Reprinted in Virgil Thomson, *Music Reviewed: 1940–1954* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967) 363–64.

The [Bach] D-major Prelude, perhaps because of its grand character, left little to be desired. The Fugue, on the other hand, was a bit too heavily registered and speedily played to be really satisfying, though I confess that its execution left me somewhat in awe of this woman's fantastically clean and accurate technique and excellent rhythmic sense. The De Profundis was interestingly registered but cold ... With the Vivaldi Concerto, however, she was back on solid ground and though her interpretation was again not the Baroque one it was nonetheless exciting ... The improvisation was, as it often unhappily is, the dullest spot on the program.<sup>89</sup>

Logistically, how did she fare in North America? All three of her transcontinental tours were organised by the New York firm Colbert-Laberge Concert Management,<sup>90</sup> who gave advance notice of her visit to organisers of organ recital series in a dignified brochure. The 1953 brochure featured an old publicity photo, probably taken at the time of her 1947 Salle Pleyel series, showing a demure young woman (albeit with long, shiny curls), her eyes lowered in examination of a score in her hands (see Figure 6); curiously, the score was cropped from the

**Figure 6. Jeanne Demessieux photographed for Images Musicales ([Paris]: Reinergue, probably December 1947), Municipal Archive of Montpellier, 4S20**



<sup>89</sup> Barbara Owen, 'Jeanne Demessieux, Woolsey Hall, Yale University,' *American Organist* 41 (June 1958): 223.

<sup>90</sup> Bernard Laberge had managed (or co-managed with Alexander Russell) all of Dupré's transcontinental North American tours to date (Murray, *Marcel Dupré* 84, 142, 169, 189; Dupré, *Recollections*, 83).

photo for the brochure. Brochures advertising her 1955 and 1958 North American tours both showed her as she actually was in 1953, with dark hair, strictly coiffed (see Figure 7). Existing press photographs of her legs and feet on an organ pedalboard, and a colour photo of her silver, high-heeled organ shoes, were, according to one of her former students, taken on the insistence of unspecified US newspapers.<sup>91</sup> According to Claudine Verchère, her secretary, aide and companion on the 1958 trip, Demessieux avoided interviewers and photographers as much as possible while on tour.<sup>92</sup>

**Figure 7. Jeanne Demessieux (Paris: Harcourt, 1953), Van Tuijl collection**



If she ever thought otherwise, France's first woman organist to be acclaimed throughout the United States learned that there was very little glamour in touring there. Upon her arrival by steamship in New York,<sup>93</sup> a Colbert-Laberge employee (Lilian Murtagh in 1955 and 1958)

<sup>91</sup> Conversation with Goosen van Tuijl in 's-Hertogenbosch, Holland, May 2003.

<sup>92</sup> Conversation with Claudine Verchère in Annoire, France, July 2006.

<sup>93</sup> Demessieux chose never to travel by air, having been deeply affected by the case of the young French violinist Ginette Neveu, who died at the age of thirty along with her pianist brother, in a cross-Atlantic plane crash in 1949. See Eric Blom/Diana McVeagh, 'Neveu, Ginette,' *Grove Online* (accessed 4 August 2005); conversation with Claudine Verchère in Regina, 2004.

handed her an itinerary and train tickets. Then, without further ceremony, the artist was on her own to keep up a gruelling schedule of travel, yet perform wonderfully at every church and recital hall.<sup>94</sup> On one occasion, after a concert in Denver in 1958, she was wined and dined at the French consulate, but found little to enjoy because, with the exception of the consul himself, the people assembled struck her as insufferably snobbish.<sup>95</sup> With local arrangements usually made by the church organist, or the local dean of the American Guild of Organists (AGO), she more often endured after-concert receptions with the general public. In a letter to her sister she wrote, 'What they call a "treat" (an invitation, dinner, reception) is not necessarily offered for my pleasure but only because it's the thing to do, without any thought for my fatigue. As for smiling, it's the most tiring of all: I'm required to smile constantly ... Everyone else gets the benefit.'<sup>96</sup> Here was the sort of personal artifice, but not the circumstances and milieu, of which Jean Berveiller had warned.

The financial results of Demessieux's North American tours can reasonably be extrapolated from her personal financial log from her 1953 tour,<sup>97</sup> and from her secretary's records of profits and expenses in 1958.<sup>98</sup> Demessieux's 1953 tour, her first cross-Atlantic trip, began with a subvention from Action Artistique of 150,000 francs, equivalent then to US\$428.<sup>99</sup> On this tour, she commanded an average of US\$340 per recital and played approximately sixteen recitals. After reimbursing Colbert-Laberge for her train fares, remitting their share of the receipts, and subtracting her boat travel, hotel, meals, sundries and shopping, her take-home profit from seven weeks in the United States was US\$1,632.07. This, multiplied by the exchange rate of 350.00 that Demessieux noted at the front of her log, equaled approximately 571,224 French francs in 1953. As a point of comparison, her monthly salary at the Liège Conservatory for ten months of the year in 1966–67 was in the area of 13,000 Belgian francs after taxes and deductions.<sup>100</sup> For the US tour of 1958, records preserved by her secretary show that while a typical fee paid to Demessieux for a recital was still in the area of \$300, hotel accommodation for the two of them averaged a mere \$15 per night across the country.<sup>101</sup> As a point of comparison at home, a ninety-two-square-metre apartment in a Paris suburb that Demessieux was considering for purchase was priced at 234,300 francs (which would have been US\$670.80 in 1953).<sup>102</sup> A further sign of her wealth: when, after her death, one of her former Liège students, Goosen

<sup>94</sup> Demessieux, *Deuxième tournée d'Amérique (1955) (journal de route)*, Montpellier 4S11 (4 February 1955): 3; Trieu-Colleney, *Jeanne Demessieux*, 199.

<sup>95</sup> Demessieux, *Troisième Tournée, 1958*, Montpellier, 4S11 (12 February 1958): 11. Trieu-Colleney, in her transcription of this entry from Demessieux's journal, omitted the phrase 'le snobisme fait rage' (Trieu-Colleney, 211).

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Jeanne Demessieux to Yolande Demessieux (15 February 1955), quoted in Trieu-Colleney, 202.

<sup>97</sup> Demessieux, personal notebook, Montpellier, 4S10.

<sup>98</sup> Archive of the Association 'Les Amis de Jeanne Demessieux,' examined June 2006 in Annoire, France.

<sup>99</sup> The subvention in US dollars, and in francs, is noted near the beginning and on the 'Recapitulation' page of her personal financial log for her 1953 tour (Montpellier, 4S10).

<sup>100</sup> Demessieux's pay stubs from the Royal Conservatory of Liège for 1966–67 are in the Van Tuijl collection.

<sup>101</sup> Claudine Verchère's personal scrapbook of mementos from the 1958 tour, Archive of the Association 'Les Amis de Jeanne Demessieux,' Annoire, France, examined July 2006.

<sup>102</sup> A sales brochure for the 'Résidence du Parc de Saint-Cloud,' containing Demessieux's handwritten notes concerning prices, exists in the Van Tuijl collection.

Van Tuijl, befriended her sister Yolande in the south of France, he became aware that Jeanne had left multiple properties in Paris and the south of France to her sister.<sup>103</sup>

Among the professional distinctions that would have permitted Demessieux to command high fees in the 1960s, her 1959 recording of the complete major organ works of César Franck won the 1960 *Grand Prix National du Disque*. Figure 8 shows the artist's photo used by Decca in its brochure publicising the prize-winning recording in France. Shortly afterward, Messiaen agreed to the proposition that Demessieux should record his complete organ works. In protracted correspondence with Van Wyck regarding negotiations with recording companies interested in this project, Demessieux rejected successive offers while questioning the same contract points repeatedly—surely the overriding reason the project was not yet underway at the time of her death from cancer in 1968.<sup>104</sup>

**Figure 8. Jeanne Demessieux (Paris: Harcourt, ca 1960), Van Tuijl collection**



According to Van Tuijl, it was characteristic of the Demessieux family to drive hard bargains in business negotiations.<sup>105</sup> Nothing in Jeanne Demessieux's personal correspondence indicates

<sup>103</sup> Conversation with Goosen van Tuijl, May 2003.

<sup>104</sup> Demessieux's file of correspondence with her British agent, Van Wyck, concerning negotiations with recording companies regarding the Messiaen project, is in the Van Tuijl collection.

<sup>105</sup> Conversation with Goosen van Tuijl, May 2003.



that her principal aim as a musician, though, was money. To her family and friends she spoke of serving the art of the organ as a privilege, in the liturgy as well as in the concert hall.<sup>106</sup> Despite the greater financial rewards of giving concerts, to the end of her days she remained a devoted church musician and advocate from within church musicians' unions for the role of the organ in liturgy and for employment rights of church musicians in France.<sup>107</sup>

### Conclusions

In Paris in the 1940s, some of Dupré's marketing methods for Demessieux's artistry were devious, but there is no evidence that anyone found reason after her debut to say he had misrepresented his protégée. Nevertheless, his boast that Jeanne Demessieux would prove to be the greatest organist in the world is best understood as illustrative of the French national penchant for identifying individual cultural figures as the epitome of their discipline. London organists' dislike of her playing is difficult to separate from the blow to their collective pride dealt by her refusal to audition for them in the autumn of 1946. Enthusiastic reviews from all other quarters, her fan mail, and the praise of French and Belgian newspaper critics for her success in North America, show that Demessieux fulfilled Dupré's expectations as a cultural ambassador.

Jean Berveiller's suspicion that Dupré's goals for presenting Demessieux in America lacked good taste cannot be corroborated. She noted no such misgivings in her journal of 1941–1946. In the end, her success in America did not depend upon becoming a media idol: photographically in America she was represented as an example of the serious artist, rather than a model of feminine allure. Neither was she dependent upon the attentions of the press, or rubbing shoulders with other celebrities.

Today, the evidence of Jeanne Demessieux's musicianship exists in her recordings, some of which have been reissued on compact disc in recent decades by the Dutch firm Festivo, and most of which survive in libraries. In its cover photographs for a series of compact discs that are compilations of Demessieux's playing, Festivo eventually moved from depicting the carefully coiffed mature woman (for volumes one to three) to the tousle-headed woman in her twenties (for the fourth disc).<sup>108</sup> More appropriate to her serious artistry and sense of avocation, the Festivo reissue of the most magnificent of Decca's Demessieux recordings, the complete major works of César Franck, depicts on its cover the flood-lit Church of the Madeleine in Paris, where the recording was made, and where, in 1963, she ascended to the post of *organiste titulaire*.

In 1967, her fan mail included a letter from a California musician (identified on his letterhead as a music teacher, music critic, AGO dean, and sponsor of European tours) just returned from Paris to his home in the general vicinity of Hollywood. He began by writing:

I want to thank you...for the beautiful playing of the Widor Allegro (Symphony VI) and the Messiaen—at least it sounded like Messiaen—on Sunday morning, August 27 at High Mass [at the Church of the Madeleine] ... [and, towards the end:] It has been

<sup>106</sup> Montpellier, 4S30; Trieu-Colleney, *Jeanne Demessieux*, 217–18.

<sup>107</sup> Montpellier, 4S34.

<sup>108</sup> *Jeanne Demessieux*, vols. 1–3 (Festivo CDs 131, 132 and 141) and *The Legendary Jeanne Demessieux* (Festivo CD 6961 862).

years since you have played for us in America. Can't you find some way to resume your recital tours? I shall be glad to make a spot for you in Los Angeles...<sup>109</sup>

Unfortunately for her American devotees, Demessieux discontinued travel to North America after 1958, reportedly out of a desire to remain close to her aging parents.<sup>110</sup> In response to the above letter, and in her characteristically reserved fashion, she instructed her secretary simply to thank the sender and tell him that the work he had attributed to Messiaen was, in fact, an improvisation.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Letter from Halstead McCormac of San Marino, California to Jeanne Demessieux, 2 September 1967 (Montpellier 4S14).

<sup>110</sup> Conversation with Claudine Verchère in Regina, Canada, June 2004.

<sup>111</sup> Montpellier, 4S14.