

Henri Mulet

French organist-composer

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Henri Mulet was born in the Eighteenth District of Paris, France, on October 17, 1878 at eight o' clock in the evening. He was right-handed and grew to a height of five feet, six and one-half inches. Because of his birth date, he is considered a Middle-Impressionist composer. His parents, Gabriel Leon Mulet and Blanche Victoire Patie Mulet, were Catholic. They were considered first-rate performers, but neither of them composed. Gabriel was a pianist, a singer, and director of the choir at the Basilique du Sacré-Coeur. Blanche was a professor of piano, a singer and an organist at the harmonium of the Basilique. Henri had a brother named Gabriel who died in Paris at the age of sixteen. The brother was quite intelligent and had received a bachelor's degree by the time of his death. Henri received his early musical training from both his parents, including harmonium and piano lessons from his mother. He began to study the violoncello shortly after he began piano lessons. Other than the piano lessons he received from his mother, he did not continue his study of the piano and remained an average player throughout his life.¹

Early life

Around 1888, Mulet began to substitute for his mother, playing the Benediction at the Basilique. He eventually succeeded his mother at the harmonium, but the position had a major drawback: the Basilique was still under construction and every time that rain fell, Mulet had to play beneath an umbrella. He hated the experience so much that later in life, whenever he heard the harmonium he would flee. Because of the great musical ability he displayed as a child, Mulet was enrolled at the Paris Conservatory around 1889. At this time, he was in the *sofège* class of Paul Rougnon. Rougnon found Mulet to have exceptional talent and enrolled him in the violoncello class of Jules Delsart, one of the most famous cellists of the time. Mulet was also a classmate of the virtuoso cellist Paul Bazilaire. The jury members were Salome, the organ composer, and the arranger J. B. Weckerlin, whose Bergerette album for voice is still in print.²

In 1891, Mulet won the second prize for *sofège*. In 1892, he won the first accompaniment prize for violoncello. In 1893, the first three prizes for violoncello were awarded to Mulet (first), Herouard, and Hasselmann. Mulet was not happy with the prize because he felt that all he had to do to win was imitate his teacher. He no longer had an interest in the violoncello, because he felt that one had to be a "showoff" to be a great cellist and he flatly refused to go along with this idea. Even though he stopped taking lessons, he continued to play the cello until he was eighteen. At that time, he became interested in composition.

While at the Paris Conservatory, Mulet played the cello at concerts in the Theatre du Chatelet. Jules Delsart had formed a student trio consisting of a violinist (unknown), a cellist (Mulet), and a pianist (Alfred Cortot). They performed in prestigious homes in Paris, Rouen, and Versailles. Mulet also accompanied his parents when they sang at boarding houses to entertain the other guests who were on holiday at the seashore.

First compositional period

In autumn 1893, Mulet enrolled in the organ class of Widor (for which Vierne was a substitute) and the improvisation class of Guilmant. Widor was considered to be the best organist of the time and was thus nicknamed "The Emperor." Between 1893 and 1896, Mulet studied composition and orchestration with Widor and harmony with composers Pugno and Leroux. In 1896, Mulet won the first prize in harmony. In 1897, he

won the second prize for organ and improvisation. Vierne, in his memoirs, said that Mulet was "rattled by nerves" and that he could have won first prize had he not been. The jury members for this contest were Cesar Franck's students Dallier and Pierné and the composers Samuel Rousseau, Pugno, and Gabriel Fauré. Although Mulet never knew Fauré personally, he greatly admired him. Also in 1897, Henri was employed by the Church of St. Pierre-du-Petit-Montrouge.³

In 1901 and 1902, Mulet played many recitals and organ dedications in Paris, the French countryside, and in Belgium. Mulet's favorite composer was César Franck, and he played Franck's works as often as he could. He also admired the Widor symphonies and played them often. (The Widor symphonies that are played today are the 1914 to 1918 revisions, which were published in 1920. Mulet played only the original versions).

Second compositional period

In 1902, Mulet ceased most of his activity with the outside world. A trip to Lombardy, Italy, during an August holiday may have had some bearing on this decision. His compositions also changed quite drastically. He was hostile to the changes and innovations of the twentieth century, and his style remained strongly rooted in the symphonic organ of Cavallé-Coll of the nineteenth century. It was during this period that Mulet composed his *Esquisses Byzantines (Byzantine Sketches)*, one of his most famous works. He spent the majority of his time in church meditating and playing the organ. He spoke little with his friends, who referred to him from this point as being secretive and mystical.

Mulet left his position at St. Pierre-du-Petit-Montrouge sometime in 1901, but because of the periodic destruction of church records, the exact dates of Mulet's church positions are difficult to determine. After his position at St. Pierre-du-Petit-Montrouge, he held the position of organist at St. Marie-des-Batignolles, apparently until sometime in 1904. At some point in 1905, Mulet became the choir organist at St. Eustache, a post he held until 1907. He was joined at this time by Joseph Bonnet, who was also employed as another organist by the church. In 1907, Mulet became the organist at St. Roch. The organ, a two-manual instrument, had a direct influence on Mulet's compositions. His writing from this period shows less intensity, but greater artistry. Up to this point, Mulet's scores displayed an interest in calligraphy. Many of his titles were done in ornate script. After this time, it appears that he had lost interest in the subject.

Third compositional period

Around 1909, Mulet was associating with another composer, Albert Perillou, who was a student of and a companion to Saint-Saëns. He may have met Perillou through his friend Libert. In this same year, Mulet tried his hand at conducting the St. Nationale Orchestra. At that time, anyone who had both a score and the parts was allowed to conduct. The orchestra consisted of some eighty performers from the Colonne, Lamoreaux and the Schola Cantorum orchestras. Felix Raugel, who played the violin, said that Mulet was an excellent conductor and that he never let his nerves show while conducting; however, his autograph scores have all of the tempi re-marked in gigantic letters written in crayon. Mulet conducted only the St. Nationale Orchestra and only the premieres of his own compositions. He conducted between 1909 and 1914, the greater portion of his premieres taking place between 1909 and 1911. After the St. Nationale concerts had run their course, Mulet's works were heard at the Colonne, Lamoreaux, and Inghelbrecht

concerts. Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht (1880–1965) was the most important instrumental conductor of the time, and he promoted Mulet's works more than any other conductor. On many occasions, he conducted Mulet's works for radio concerts.

By 1909, Mulet's social life consisted of attending intellectual gatherings comprising mostly teachers of English literature, religion, architecture, history, and music. The gatherings were held in private homes, and the guests were merely acquaintances and not close friends.

In 1910, Henri became a member of the Society des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Editeurs de Musique. He was admitted through Widor and Inghelbrecht. After July 1, 1910, Henri met the famous choral conductor Felix Raugel at the home of Libert. Raugel, a former student of Libert, became Henri's second closest friend. Raugel said of Henri: "... he hardly ever spoke, and he was very reserved and mystical." He never knew Henri's entire compositional output because Henri never spoke of his music. Raugel greatly appreciated what little he understood of Henri and was eager to write several articles about him for various dictionaries. He also conducted Henri's early choral work, *Laudate Dominum*, quite often at St. Eustache and St. Honoré d'Eylan. Raugel said that he had also heard Mulet improvise and that he was expert at it.

Married life

It was at one of these gatherings that Mulet met his future wife, Isabelle Marie Board Rochereau. She was born in Lougne in the *département* of Maine-et-Loire on August 7, 1878. After their initial meeting, Isabelle joined the choir of St. Roch so that she could see Henri quite often. She also saw Mulet conduct in 1909 and was very impressed. Henri courted Isabelle for about one year, and they were married at St. Elizabeth's Church, Place de la République in the Eleventh District of Paris on July 12, 1910. The organist at the wedding ceremony was Joseph Boulnois, to whom Marcel Dupré dedicated the third *Prelude and Fugue* from his opus 7. The Mulets seemed to have chosen this church out of convenience, as their address after the marriage was 28 Place de la République. Prior to his marriage, Henri's address was 26 rue du 4 Septembre, Paris 2.

Within a year of the marriage, Henri composed four orchestral sketches that he intended to orchestrate. When the sketches were finished, he went to see about conducting one of his works and was flatly refused. Raugel said, "... after 1910, it became more difficult to conduct or to have one's pieces performed by an orchestra."⁴ Because of this, Mulet stopped composing in 1911. Raugel continues, "Prior to 1911, if one felt talented, he had only to climb to the podium." This is how Berlioz, Busser, Messager, Pasdeloup, Colonne, Lamoreaux, Rheue-Baton, Inghelbrecht, Gaubert, and he (Raugel) started. During the time of Gaubert, conducting classes were introduced.

In 1911, Mulet transcribed the four sketches along with an earlier unperformed orchestral work for the harmonium in a desperate attempt to have his music performed. He submitted some of these pieces to a publisher of religious music, Abbot Delepine, who liked Mulet's music, and the two became friends. Henri's student, Henri Heurtel, stated that Isabelle could have pushed Henri to compose after 1911, but she saw no reason for doing so. Isabelle was not a musician, did not understand music, and had no interest in it. She did, however, have an interest in business and, at some time between 1911 and 1913, she convinced Henri to open a real estate office. Henri, however, had no talent for business, and it quickly failed.



A photo of Henri Mulet published in the 1910 *Comœdia Illustré* article that reviewed his *Fantaisie Pastorale*. This photo was reproduced from Mulet's personal copy of the article.



An undated photo of Mulet, which was in the possession of Felix Raugel



Identification photos of Isabelle and Henri Mulet taken during World War II



A photo of Henri Mulet taken in 1936. This photo was reproduced from the article by Dr. G. Bedart, which Mulet had kept in his possession.



An undated photo of Henri Mulet and Albert Riemenschneider at the foot of the steps of St.-Phillipe-Du-Roule, taken in the early to mid-1920s



The only known color photograph of the Mulets. It was taken by a cousin of Henri, "after a good lunch in the garden of the hotel in Draguignan," according to Isabelle Mulet, sometime between August 7 and October 17, 1959.

Isabelle and her husband did not go out a great deal after they were married. Her explanation for this was that Henri had done many things before the marriage; he did, however, take her to see one opera (Felix Raugel said that Henri sometimes went to hear the performances by the Society of Concerts).⁵ Henri also forbade Isabelle to dance, which she never understood, but she respected his wishes. At some point, Henri acquired a practice pipe organ so that he no longer had to practice at the churches where he was employed. Because Henri did his practicing at home, Isabelle offered this as an explanation as to why Henri did not marry a musician. She said, "You must understand that a man like my husband who often had to stay home to work on the organ pieces that he played every

Sunday at the eleven o' clock mass could not marry a piano teacher or a singing teacher. He did not like to work on his organ studies while having, in the next room, the stumbling playing or singing of a pupil."⁶ At the time of his marriage, Henri still had his cello, although he had not played it for some years. Sometime afterward, he apparently gave it to his former classmate, Hasselmann.

The mystic, Mulet

Mulet improvised in the manner of César Franck. The Mulets and the Raugels often had lunch at the Liberts' home, and the Raugels also accompanied the Mulets on their month-long holidays in August. Henri owned a small Renault, and he always did the driving. Raugel said that they always visited the scenic rural areas. The countryside had a profound affect upon Henri's composing.⁷

When Henri premiered his *Fantasia Pastorale*, a symphonic poem for orchestra, on May 20, 1911, a review in the *Comœdia Illustré* stated that it was "the most interesting of the new works, containing spontaneity, drive, vigor, and pace. The work was quite dramatic, developed, and descriptive; moreover, it was well-orchestrated, calling up impressions Mulet felt upon looking at the countryside of the Haute Durance." The motto of the work is also quoted, "Smiling in the sun or tragic under the storm." This composition is the best remembered of the missing works. Raugel stated that after Mulet ceased to compose in 1911, he amused himself with his thought and would sit, meditating, without saying anything. He was very reticent and months and years went by in silence.

The Niedermeyer School

From 1911–1922 and from 1922–1936, Henri was employed at St. Philippe-du-Roule, apparently in two different positions. In 1913, Henri became a professor at the Niedermeyer School in Paris. He acquired the position through Libert, who was teaching piano there. At the time that Henri joined the faculty, the school was being run by Niedermeyer's granddaughter and her husband, Henry Heurtel, and by his grandson, Lefebvre. The Heurtels had eight children who assisted in administrative duties. At one time, Gabriel Fauré was connected to the school, and the Niedermeyers were very close to him. Fauré was godfather to one of the Heurtel daughters.

Two of the Heurtels' eight children studied the organ with Mulet: Henri Heurtel and one of his sisters. Henri was the only student of Mulet's that Isabelle ever knew. She knew the Heurtel family and was invited by Mrs. Heurtel to visit. Apart from the Raugels, the Liberts, and the Heurtels, Isabelle appears to have met very few of Mulet's professional friends and acquaintances. She never met Joseph Bonnet, despite his and Mulet's close friendship.

At the Niedermeyer School, Henri taught organ, cello, and solfège. He was noted for his ability to sing solfège, but he never sang anything else. He had even directed choirs without singing a note, a practice also carried out by Raugel. He gave only a few cello lessons at the school and never played at these lessons. This practice stemmed from his bitterness at having imitated Delsart's playing. He never lost the fear that his students would imitate him and he always said, "You must not imitate anyone; you must be personal."⁸

Even though the Niedermeyer School had a varied curriculum, it was considered primarily a school for serious organists. When Henri joined the faculty, its members did not speak with one another; however, Mulet's earlier acquaintance, Bellenot, and a friend, Albert Perilhau, taught there as well. Henri Heurtel said that nothing was known of the teachers' private lives because they never discussed their affairs with their students; however, Felix Raugel said that Perilhau was a former student of and companion to Saint-Saëns. He states that Saint-Saëns would visit Perilhau at the Church of St. Severin, where the latter was organist. Saint-Saëns would seat himself at the organ and, at seventy years of age, would

improvise like a young man. Raugel also said that Saint-Saëns would improvise an entire fantasy. Additionally, Raugel stated that even though Saint-Saëns had a great talent for improvisation, he hated César Franck and remained envious of Franck until he died. Raugel said that Franck's music did not become popular until 1900, and the more that Franck's music was performed, the more bitter Saint-Saëns became.⁹

Another teacher at the Niedermeyer School was Henri Dallier, who had studied with Franck. It is surprising that Mulet and Dallier remained only acquaintances, because Dallier primarily played Franck's music, which Henri greatly admired. Dallier's students called him "The Terror of the Pedals." Dallier had been a concert pianist and would tell his students that the fourth finger is the most important aspect of playing. Dallier eventually adopted the mystic style of Mulet; when this occurred, he was rejected by his composition students at the Paris Conservatory. They labeled him a bore.

Henri Heurtel, who appears to have been Mulet's most successful student, said, "Mulet was always very reserved and quiet and never talked about himself or about other people. It was difficult to know what he was thinking about anyone. Mulet never boasted about the success of having his orchestral works performed at the great concerts, and he never talked outside of lessons. He was very witty and joked with a straight face."¹⁰ According to Heurtel, Henri was an excellent organ professor. He never allowed a student to go on with a piece if there was one wrong note. As with cello lessons, he never played the organ for his students. Mulet said, "The secret to learning a piece (he used the Bach *Fantasia and Fugue* as an example) is to let it ripen," meaning to work it out for a long time with great care. He also told his students that to play in church, a repertoire of at least fifty major compositions was necessary. Henri's best-remembered quotation was "Time is precious, for tomorrow you will be seventy years old."¹¹

Final appearance as conductor

In 1937, Heurtel succeeded Libert as organist at the Basilica of St. Denis and held that position until 1977. Libert had held the post from 1896 to 1937. On May 17, 1914, Mulet made his final appearance as a conductor with the premiere of *Le Talion*, a song written in declamatory style. It was sung by Georges Mary, a baritone whom Mulet frequently employed for his oratorio concerts. As Mulet became older, he became more and more demanding of his students, to the point that they did not want to attend lessons. Henri Heurtel's sister would beg her mother to "... spare her this torture." Her brother said that she cried at every lesson; but one day, she did exactly what Mulet wanted and they became good friends. He used to call her "The Princess."

Mulet's bitterness

Heurtel stated that Henri's bitterness was a result of his observation that high art was on the decline, principally because the younger organists broke the tradition of playing legato at an allegro tempo. Mulet remained strongly enmeshed in the style of the symphonic Cavaillé-Coll organ of the nineteenth century. He detested the playing of Marcel Dupré and considered Joseph Bonnet to be one of the last performers to play the organ correctly with excellent technique. Heurtel himself stated that "... modern performers get drunk on the speed they can attain by using the wrong approach."¹²

Two additional things that affected Mulet are revealed in an incident that occurred when Henri Heurtel's mother questioned Mulet as to why he gave up composing. Mulet was said to have lost his great reserve, showed great bitterness and replied, "... cartloads of music in France are waiting to be played and published. It is not worth the trouble of writing if the music will not be played."

After 1918, it was very difficult to have music published in France. Raugel said that all of the Parisian musicians ignored Mulet's music, and he came to hate Paris.

After 1911, Mulet displayed a rather overwhelming bitterness. Isabelle Mulet said that Henri never discussed any of these affairs with her. They had no children, and each had their own separate lifestyles. She said that her husband loved her very much, but she never completely understood him. She said of Henri, "... he was like in a dream-world, and later, feeling that he had failed, Henri became even more withdrawn." She added that he was never really content. The only time that he appeared to be happy was when he was driving somewhere or was on holiday. Isabelle said that driving gave him the greatest pleasure and only then did he become relaxed and sociable; otherwise, he remained very much to himself.¹³

Around 1914, the Mulets moved to the town of Triel-sur-Seine, which is about thirty-five kilometers from Paris. Between 1914 and 1924, Henri, who had no relatives outside of Paris, rarely returned to the city, except when he visited his paternal grandfather. These visits were infrequent. In 1914, Vierne dedicated his *Canon* (No. 6 from *Twenty-four Pieces in Free Style for Harmonium and Organ*) to Mulet. This appears to be the only published work ever dedicated to him.

Mulet's lectures

Sometime between the 26th and the 31st of July in 1921, Henri gave two lectures to the General Congress of Sacred Music, which took place in Strasbourg, Germany. The members included many Parisian musicians including Raugel, Gabriel Pierné, Henri Rabauch, Samuel Rosseau, Eugène Gigout (who also taught at the Niedermeyer School), and Vincent D'Indy. One lecture dealt solely with the technical placement of pistons on organ consoles and the pitch arrangements for mixtures, the other was titled "The Harmful and Anti-religious Tendencies of the Organ." This lecture dealt with the so-called "French Registration" and attacked some other items including the tremolo. Below is an excerpt of that lecture:

The Harmful and Anti-religious Tendencies of the Organ by Henri Mulet

It is very probable that the invention of the organ occurred from the need that one try to imitate the wind instruments by mechanical means, undoubtedly to save the human soul. The result was rather satisfactory, but it contained a surprise: an inert sound. The inertia of the sound of the organ is its fuel, it is accompanied by homogeneity of duration, of intense stability and creates a sound in the world apart. Those who like the Organ like its inertia. If the Organ were not inert any more, it would not be the Organ. The Organ recalls the timbre of certain instruments. It does not imitate them. This is not its role. It has better to do. It is self-sufficient because it is as rich as the richest orchestra. The orchestra is a painting; the organ is stained glass. Its sounds of calmness, imposing and seizing, bathe the atmosphere of our cathedrals; just as the lights of our stained glass, sharp as well as ever so soft, induce faithful meditation. Like stained glass, the organ has its colors. One can say, if one wanted, that the flutes are blue, the reeds red, the plains jeux yellow, the cornets purple, and the gambas green. As in the stained glass, this inertia precisely constitutes the base of any beauty of the organ. If it did not exist, it would have to be invented. Also, it is necessary to deplore the fact that, from time immemorial, it was people who, not appreciative of this beautiful inertia of the sound, always worked to fight it.

The tremolo does not have any other origin than this, but its beats, being always equal to themselves, produce another kind of inertia which without the good qualities all claimed, has only the disadvantages of primitive inertia.

Fortunately, there are a few organists in France who love the organ in the old manner, who never play transcriptions (such as the overture to *Tannhäuser*) and who will not allow our stained glass to be demolished in order to put in its place a sort of "cinema-organ-orchestra," the organ of the Antichrist. These orchestral tendencies are, moreover, illogical and one is in vain pursuit of a phantom.

Imitating instruments, even perfectly, is not at all the same as imitating the orchestra. Even if, impossibly, the inertia of sound were completely overcome, you would still have to execute the notes. Those who are generous enough to believe that this has

been accomplished make us think that they have never read an orchestra score.

In order to merely play the notes, we would have to have 20 hands and as many keyboards. To make the nuances, we would need at least 20 swell boxes. Even then, it would not be exact, because the instruments of the orchestra change timbre when they change intensity. You can close an organ trumpet in a box, but it will never be a true trumpet pianissimo.¹⁴

Mulet, the organist

In 1921, Mulet left his post at St. Roch and the following year became the titular organist at St. Philippe-du-Roule. He played all of his organ works at this church on a Cavaillé-Coll-Mutin built in 1903. It was noted by the abbot of St. Philippe that Mulet's playing was well-appreciated among the parishioners.

Shortly after Mulet accepted this position, his student, Henri Heurtel, became his assistant for one year, pulling stops for Mulet's performances. This seems odd, since Mulet lectured against having an assistant while performing. Heurtel said that Mulet always practiced at home and no one but Isabelle knew how much time he spent at the organ. While at his post at St. Philippe, Mulet improvised to fill in the gaps at the services. Heurtel said that he never improvised a prelude or a postlude. Heurtel questioned Mulet as to how one learned to improvise. Henri answered that, "... one has to be born with the gift of improvisation which cannot be learned under any circumstances." Henri was in disagreement with what Dupré and others termed "improvising." He felt that improvising was spontaneous, and that the performer developed ideas immediately, rarely remembering what he had played. Raugel said, "... when Dupré was in his early twenties, he could improvise only short stanzas. He planned everything in advance and memorized it. On one of his early concert tours, he declined to improvise, something that one possessing the true gift would never do."

The late composer, Georges Migot (1891–1976), who was a contemporary of the last of the French Impressionists, confirms this: "... none of them (referring to Dupré and others) could improvise spontaneously; everything was planned in advance." Vierne wrote of Mulet, "... Mulet of St.-Phillipe-du-Roule, was a musical personality of the sharpest. He was a solid virtuoso and a beautiful improviser. ... Mulet has written some very significant pieces which have justly become part of the repertoire for very serious organists." Isabelle Mulet said of her husband, "... if he had written down all of the improvisations that he played on different occasions, he would have been renowned."

In 1922, Paul Bedouin became the choir organist at St. Philippe-du-Roule. Bedouin, who was also a pianist, was a student of Vierne and Gigout and knew Felix Raugel. Despite Bedouin's association with Mulet's colleagues, he said that he did not see Mulet often at that time. During the summer of 1923, Mulet met the Canadian-born organist Lynnwood Farnam (1885–1930) through his friend, Libert. Farnam was to achieve considerable success in the United States, especially in New York City. Farnam was studying with Libert while the latter was assisting Widor at the Conservatory of Fontainebleau. Also, at this time, Mulet had his photograph taken with American organist and conductor, Albert Riemenschneider (1878–1950), who often vacationed in France. It seems likely that Mulet knew Riemenschneider from the time that Albert studied with Widor and Guilman.

From 1924 to 1931, Mulet taught at the Schola Cantorum in Paris as well as at the Niedermeyer School. He may also have done some substitute teaching at the Conservatory of Fontainebleau, but this has not been substantiated. During this time, Mulet received correspondence from two parishioners of St. Philippe-du-Roule. One, dated January 26, 1926 reads:

Sir:

I should like to ask you for some information. I should be very grateful if you

could give it to me. Though I have not had the honor of meeting you, I have often had the pleasure of hearing you play on Sundays at St. Philippe's. Last Sunday, January 24th, you played a piece which I would like to know the name of. It must be by Franck, probably.

Thanking you in advance,
I remain very truly yours,
Y. Reul
RSVP

PS. You played the piece in question at the end of the 10:30 mass.

The other letter, which is not dated, reads:

Mr. Georges Thomas would be very grateful to the organist of St. Philippe-du-Roule for the title of the piece which he played in a most charming manner, on Sunday, January 8th at the 11:30 mass right after the sermon; and requests, if this is not too much trouble, to ask that he leave the title for him at No. 1 Courcelles Street, just a step or two from St. Philippe's.

(This card was probably written in 1928, as January 8th fell on a Sunday in that year).

In June of 1927, Mulet donated his practice organ to the Gothic church of St. Martin in Triel-sur-Seine. Both Raugel and he gave a dedicatory concert on Sunday, June 26, 1927. Mulet played César Franck's *Choral No. 3*, J. S. Bach's *Prelude in E Minor*, an excerpt from Widor's *Seventh Symphony*, and the Buxtehude *Fugue in C Major*. Raugel then directed the choir from St. Eustache in works by Pitoni, Marcello, Copulet, Fauré, and *Psalms Fifteen* by Franck.

Around 1928, the publisher Emile Leduc went with his son, Gilbert, to Triel-sur-Seine to meet with Mulet. (The Leduc Publishing House was founded by Alphonse Leduc in 1848 and was taken over by Emile in 1904 after Alphonse's death.) Raugel said that Mulet had been at odds with the publishing company for years. When the *Esquisses Byzantines* was published in 1920, Mulet was given a seventy-dollar advance payment for royalties, but he was never paid another penny, despite the fact that thousands of copies of the collection had been sold. Mulet was well aware of the sales, because Leduc had to file them with the French Composer's Society. Raugel said that Mulet was like a "shorn lamb" and that composers who dealt with Leduc had to "know how to defend themselves."¹⁵

The April 30, 1930 issue of *Le Monde Musical* contained an article about Mulet written by Charles Tournemire: "Henri Mulet, strange and great artist, caught up by a mystical ideal. Calm improviser, sometimes lively, religious. Artist worthy of the Middle Ages, which, in his case, does not exclude the feeling of understanding modern art. Mysterious thinker."

In 1932, a student of César Franck's, Louis de Serres, founded the Ecole César Franck. Mulet taught there sometime between 1932 and 1937, along with his friends Vierne, Bonnet, and Bedouin. Felix Raugel said that Mulet made use of Marcel Dupré's compositions for teaching purposes and that he appreciated their technical properties, especially the ostinati; however, Raugel further states that Mulet found little aesthetic worth in these pieces and refused to play them.¹⁶ In 1934, Mulet left the Niedermeyer School because it was too difficult for him to climb the hill on which it stood. The school continued to operate until the end of World War II, when it ran out of funds.

During the 1930s, Bedouin frequently visited the Mulets at his home. Bedouin wrote, "He (Mulet) always greeted me in a very friendly manner when I used to go with my little family to visit him at Triel-sur-Seine where he lived."¹⁷ At some point, Mulet met the famed teacher, Nadia Boulanger. She said of Mulet that she did not really know him, but when they were introduced, "He was that most cordial one." She added that his talent was widely recognized.¹⁸

In 1936, Désiré Inghelbrecht directed Mulet's *Petit Suite sur des Airs Populaires Français*, which was played by Inghelbrecht's radio orchestra. A postcard sent to Mulet by the orchestra's secretary reads:

The only extant letter written by Mulet (written on graph paper), page 1

15 July 1936

Dear Sir:

Your *Petit Suite sur des Airs Populaires Français* will conclude the program of the Federal Broadcast of Tuesday, July 21st. Mr. Inghelbrecht has set the rehearsals of your work as follows: Saturday, July 18th at 9:00 AM Salle Gareau and the following Tuesday, the 21st after the intermission, Salle Gareau, also, that is to say at 10:45 AM. At the dress rehearsal in the afternoon, he will see the whole program in order, that is to say that you will be on supposedly toward 4:30 PM. Since the concert is public, I will have at your disposal the number of tickets that you might desire.¹⁹

After the performance, Inghelbrecht returned this score to Mulet along with two other orchestral works entitled *Souvenirs de Lorin Bardie*. Inghelbrecht appears to have had possession of these scores from 1911 until 1936. Also in 1936, Mulet had a small article written about him in an unidentified American music magazine. Mulet kept a copy of the article, which was written by a Dr. G. Bedart. It proved to be quite inaccurate except for his having quoted Mulet as hating "Vainglory." (In 1921, Mulet had lectured against an article that Bedart had written, labeling Bedart as a "careless thinker.")

Retirement

In 1937, Mulet felt forced to retire from his musical life in Paris. His feelings of failure coupled with his notion that the "moderns" did not question the validity of ideas were both prevailing influences in his decision; but the final blow came from the church authorities of St. Philippe-du-Roule. Mulet was informed that "modern" music was favored in place of Franck, Widor, Bach, Buxtehude, or any other master composer whose works were in the standard organ repertoire. By coincidence, Mulet received an inheritance at this time, and he officially retired from St. Philippe on Easter Sunday, March 28, 1937. The postlude was Widor's *Toccata* from the *Fifth Symphony*. Michael Boulnois, the son of organist Joseph Boulnois, was hired to succeed Mulet. He was present at the Easter service and said that Mulet played the *Toccata* brilliantly.

Before leaving Paris, Mulet gave all of his keyboard music to Paul Bedouin. Bedouin said the music was more or less ruined from having been used so fre-

quently. Mulet gave the three orchestral scores returned by Inghelbrecht in 1936 to Raugel in the hope that he (Raugel) could get them performed.

After his retirement, Henri moved with his wife, her sister, and her mother to a small home in Draguignan, which is in Provence. Their home overlooked the beach at Frejus on the Mediterranean Sea. Before moving, Mulet had added his new address to the title page of his orchestral work *Dans le Vallée du Tombeau* (*In the Valley of the Tomb*). "Dans" is an interesting piece to choose to list what was to be the last place where Mulet would live.

The final move

Henri then became the organist at the Cathedral of Draguignan—a position that, for Mulet, proved to be an ordeal, because the organ contained every one of the faults that he had argued against in his 1931 lecture. The instrument was a two-manual Merklin built in 1888. It was unified and did not have one mixture or one mutation rank and the pedalboard only went up to D2. Henri called this organ "The Bagpipes." While at Draguignan, Henri wrote only to Raugel and Bedouin. Libert had died in 1937, and his position at St. Denis was given to Henri Heurtel, the student of both Libert and Mulet. Of Henri's correspondence, only one letter has been preserved. It was sent to Felix Raugel, who said that this was the only letter in which Henri exposed his thoughts, although Raugel did not seem to understand it completely:

7 August 1946

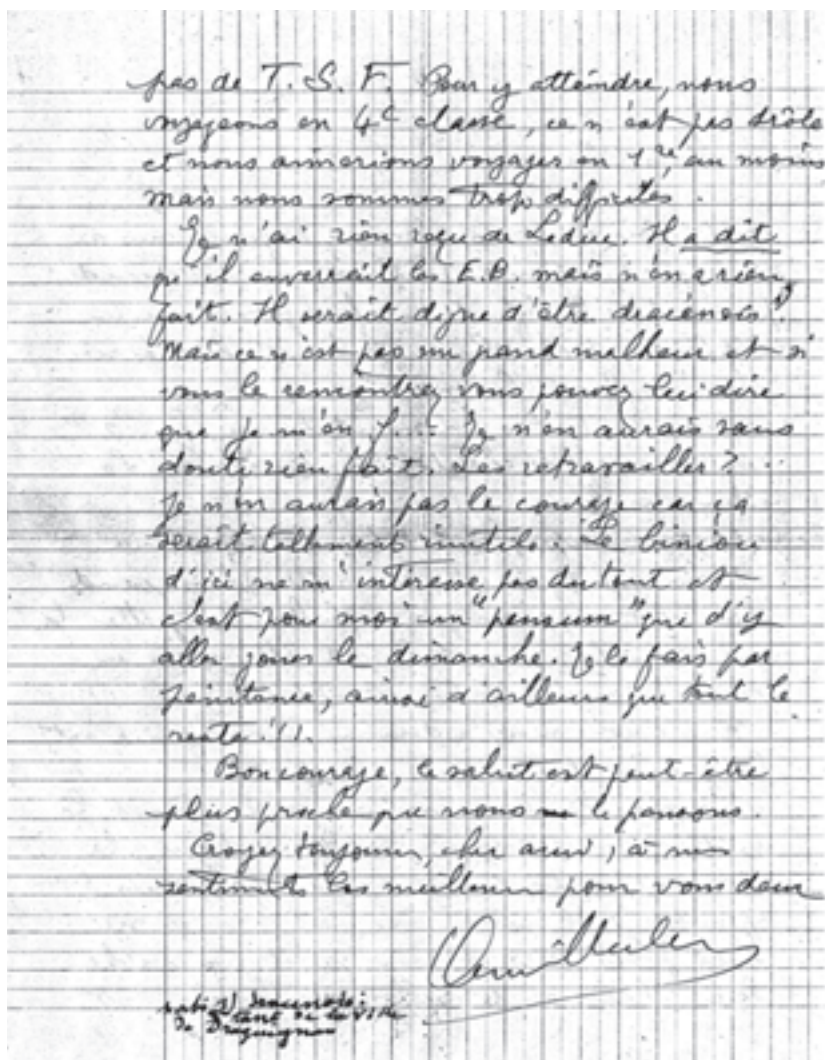
My Very Dear Friend,

Three times you have written me and I have not answered! I am very ashamed and I ask your forgiveness. I am down in the dumps, a depression as big as an elephant, and this is what has kept me from writing because it stops up my brain.

You are singing the Lamentations. I don't have the courage to sing the Ténèbre. Silence alone ...

All that, after all, is of no importance and surely happens for our greater good. Is it to keep us from missing the life of this lower world? Perhaps, but in any case, this is the result.

We are going to die tomorrow, our agony is long and hard, but the important thing is to have our passport in order. All the rest is beneath our attention. Let us forget, then, the earth and especially its horrible inhabitants. And let us think of that "other world"



Mulet's only extant letter, page 2

where the sea is no longer. But I think that there will be beautiful lakes and beautiful mountains and no radio [referred to as T.S.F. . . . Mulet did not like the change to popular music on the radio!]. To reach it we travel in fourth class, at least! But we are being too difficult.

I've received nothing from Leduc. He said that he would send the E. B. [*Esquisses Byzantines*] but he has done nothing about it. He is worthy of being a Dracenois [interpreted by Raugel as being a resident of Draguignan] but it is of no great misfortune and if you meet him, you can tell him that I don't give a damn . . . [written *je m'en f. . .*] Doubtless I would not have done anything about it. Rework them, these pieces? I would not have had the courage because that would be so useless. [Mulet was asked to rewrite his E.B. so that Leduc could gain a new copyright on the collection.] The "Bagpipes" [the Merklin organ] here does not interest me at all and for me it is a punishment (or penance) to go to work there every Sunday. I do it only as penance, just as I do everything else.

Take courage, salvation is perhaps nearer than we think. My best wishes to both of you, Henri Mulet. [Oddly, in the letter, the body is very clear, yet the signature is nearly illegible.]

In 1955, Mulet found a summer home for Paul Bedouin in Draguignan, where Bedouin visited Mulet every summer. Because Bedouin visited every season, he and Mulet did not correspond. Despite their long friendship, Bedouin said that Mulet was a mystic and that he (Mulet) never confided in him. Bedouin summed up their relationship by saying that "Henri Mulet, in spite of his kindness, his willingness to please, never completely abandoned a certain reserve. He did not give himself willingly. He was an interior man."²⁰

In 1956, the Cathedral of Draguignan was closed for major renovation; consequently, Henri faced another retirement. Isabelle's sister and mother appear to have died before 1959. In that year, Henri became quite ill and needed the assistance of a cane for mobility. He had dizzy spells and, at one time, he fell his entire length on the ground. Later, he had no memory of the dizzy spell or the fall. Because of this incident, the Mulets moved to the convent of the Little Sisters of the Poor in Draquigne between late October and December of 1959. Henri had become so ill after his arrival that he

was unable to play. It was discovered that Henri was also afflicted with otosclerosis, a genetic illness which causes the bone in the inner ear to grow. This disease will eventually cause deafness, a ringing in the ears and a softening of the voice. At that time, there was no cure.

Henri remained ill for seven years. The Little Sisters said that during this time he cared only about his wife whom he loved very much. On the morning of September 20, 1967, Henri complained of back pain and his doctor was unable to offer him any relief. At nine o'clock AM, he muttered "I am dying," and he had a dizzy spell during which he lost consciousness. The doctors were unable to revive him and he died at 10:45 AM. Isabelle said that she believed that he died of an internal hemorrhage. He was buried at the local cemetery in Draguignan. Raugel said that Henri died in silence. No obituary was ever published in any French newspaper.

Sometime after Henri's death, a letter written by some unknown person (Isabelle could not remember the name) was forwarded to Isabelle requesting information from the authorities of St. Philippe-du-Roule about her husband. The authorities of St. Philippe-du-Roule were unable to remember the dates of Henri's employment. Ironically, the Abbot had once written that Henri was very much appreciated.

In the March 1968 issue of *THE DIAPASON* (p. 17) an article was published about Henri's death, which resulted in Isabelle's reception of one letter of condolence, sent from a Mr. Jerry Koontz of Washington State, USA. Sometime between 1968 and 1972, Isabelle moved to the convent in Nice. She no longer heard from Bedouin, but the Raugels paid her a surprise visit. Isabelle had a cousin in Paris with whom she kept in touch until the early 1970s. Isabelle became increasingly deaf and blind. Between 1967 and 1975, she read books on archeological findings and the history of France. She also corresponded with the French Society of Archeology. Additionally, Isabelle collected stamps, which were sold to raise money for missionaries in Africa.

By 1975, Isabelle was totally blind and could not read or write. She returned to the convent at Draguignan. The sisters said that she was always an interesting conversationalist, even though there was

an occasional language barrier. Many of the sisters were from the United States and were not well versed in the French language. Around November of 1976, Isabelle broke her leg. She never recovered from the trauma of the accident and she died on March 24, 1977.

Henri Mulet had his photograph taken at least five times. There is an undated photograph from his student days that was owned by Felix Raugel. One appeared in the 1910 issue of the *Comœdia Illustré*. A third was taken with Albert Riemenschneider on the steps of St. Philippe-du-Roule during the 1920s. The fourth photograph was published in the 1936 article by Dr. Bedart. The final photograph is a color picture taken by a cousin of Henri between August 7 and October 17, 1959. According to Isabelle, it was taken ". . . after a good lunch in the garden of the hotel in Draguignan."

Mulet, the enigma

By nature of his birth, Henri stands as a Middle Impressionist, if Henri Daller (b. 1849) is taken as the first French Impressionist and Maurice Duruflé (b. 1902) is taken as the last French Impressionist. Although Mulet lived for 88 years, he composed for only fifteen of them, between 1896 and 1911. Even though this is a relatively brief time, his compositions can be divided into three periods such as those of other composers who wrote over their entire lives.

Because Mulet never dated anything and often published his compositions years after they were written, it is impossible to make a chronological arrangement for some years. The order given is based upon his compositional traits. The three periods range from c. 1896 to c. 1902, c. 1903 to c. 1909, and c. 1909 to c. 1911.

Very few autograph scores have survived, because Mulet simply threw them away when the pieces were published. At present, the author has two of the remaining autograph scores in her possession: *Offertoire sur un Alleluia Grégorien* and *Carillon-Sortie*. He only retained originals when the printed scores contained a multitude of errors. For the most part, Mulet did not own copies of his own works. As of the present, eight scores have disappeared, seven of which were written in his third period. Six of these were in the possession of Raugel at one time, but when Raugel returned them to Mulet in 1937, Mulet loaned them to some unknown person who claimed the ability to get them performed. They disappeared and have still to be recovered. As with the scores of many other composers, they may someday be found in some Parisian attic. Of the other missing scores, one was an opera burned by Isabelle at Henri's request and the other simply went out of print. Although the scores were lost, eight-measure themes to each work were registered with the French Composer's Society.²¹

Isabelle said that Henri had no set time for composing. Mulet himself stated that "One composes when seized by the spirit. To be inspired is the most important thing." Felix Raugel said that Mulet would not permit himself to be influenced by any other composer.²²

The music of Henri Mulet is unique. Mulet achieved much tension between any two notes. As a result, Mulet was an extremely efficient and concise composer. Not one note can be extracted from a Mulet piece without causing major disruption of the musical line. According to his friends and his wife, Mulet had to struggle for every idea that came to him; therefore, even though Mulet had an incredible depth of inspiration, he cannot be classified as a compositional genius. The master composers always had a flood of ideas that came rapidly. Henri never achieved this.

When Mulet worked on the autograph scores of his first period, he was fascinated by calligraphy. Three types of writing appear on his scores. The titles are written very thickly with ornaments. Other comments are much smaller and much less ornamental. In the organ manuscript *Offertoire*, the registrations appear in his normal handwriting. In comparing Mulet's scores to those of master composers

of the time, none other took the time to write things out so carefully.

Mulet's attention to detail yielded extraordinarily balanced musical parts. His music became more and more flawless, especially in his second period compositions. These are written completely in contrary motion, a trait that is rather unusual for an Impressionist.

Where Mulet succeeded so flawlessly in sound, he was quite the opposite when it came to copying out his scores. He composed sketches first and then transferred his works to an actual autograph score. He thought nothing of putting an oboe part on a clarinet line, he never repaired errors when a piece was published, nor did he bother to tell anyone about the mistakes in his printed scores.

Henri Mulet will probably remain enigmatic in the world of music. Because of his lack of correspondence, few friends, and solitary lifestyle, information regarding his life is limited. The information in this article was gleaned from correspondence to his wife Isabelle, the French Composer's Society, the Little Sisters of the Poor, Paul Bedouin, Henri Heurtel, and from Felix Raugel. Hopefully, the little information that is available will offer some insight into his life and will elevate his much-deserved standing in the world of classical composers. ■

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Copies of Mulet's extant works are available from the author at a nominal fee. Send e-mail to <dwdonnamary@aol.com> for a list of works and details about ordering.

Notes

1. Correspondence, Isabelle Mulet, 1970.
2. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, Oxford University Press, 2003, vol. 17, s.v. "Mulet, Henri."
3. *Ibid.*
4. Correspondence, Felix Raugel, July 7, 1973.
5. Correspondence, Isabelle Mulet, 1973.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Correspondence, Felix Raugel, July 7, 1973.
8. Correspondence, Isabelle Mulet, 1973.
9. Correspondence, Felix Raugel, July 7, 1973.
10. Correspondence, Henri Heurtel, December 29, 1968.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. Correspondence, Isabelle Mulet, 1973.
14. "The Harmful and Anti-religious Tendencies of the Organ," lecture to the General Congress of Sacred Music in Strasbourg, Germany, July 1921.
15. Correspondence, Felix Raugel, June 19, 1976.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Correspondence, Paul Bedouin, March 24, 1975.
18. Correspondence, Isabelle Mulet, 1973.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Correspondence, Paul Bedouin, March 24, 1975.
21. Correspondence, the French Composers' Society, 1976.
22. Correspondence, Felix Raugel, June 19, 1976.

Author's note:

This project was begun in the late 1960s by Kenneth Saslaw, who was a doctoral student at the University of Michigan. Kenneth was my vocal coach for many years, and when, at age 35, he lay on his deathbed, he asked me to complete the work and have it published. He had spent a great deal of time corresponding with the above-mentioned people to track down what information was available about Mulet, to the extent that the French Society of Composers and Musicians named him the world authority on Mulet. I acquired the materials several years after his death. The task of sorting through letters and notes was monumental, as I had to spend many hours peering at his handwritten notes with a magnifying glass in order to decipher them. As far as I know, the information is accurate. Kenneth has finally gotten his wish; may he rest in peace.