

= André Messager =

André Charles Prosper Messager (French : [mʁsaʁe] ; 30 December 1853 ? 24 February 1929) was a French composer , organist , pianist , conductor and administrator . His stage compositions included ballets and 30 opéra comiques and operettas , among which *Véronique* had lasting success , with *Les p'tites Michu* and *Monsieur Beaucaire* also enjoying international success .

Despite financial obstacles , Messager pursued studies in piano and composition , with teachers including Camille Saint - Saëns and Gabriel Fauré . He became a major figure in the musical life of London as well as Paris , both as a conductor and a composer . Most of his Parisian works were produced in London , where several of them had long runs and numerous revivals , and he wrote two operatic works in English . He was the only French composer to write an original Savoy opera . Towards the end of his career , he composed musical comedies for Sacha Guitry and Yvonne Printemps .

As a conductor , Messager held prominent positions in Paris and London , at the head of the Opéra - Comique , the Paris Opéra , the Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire , and of the Royal Opera House , Covent Garden . Although as a composer he is known chiefly for his light works , as a conductor he presented a wide range of operas , from Mozart to Richard Strauss , and he acquired a reputation as a conductor of Wagner . In Paris he conducted the world premieres of Debussy 's *Pelléas et Mélisande* , Massenet 's *Grisélidis* and Charpentier 's *Louise* . At Covent Garden , he gave the British premieres of operas by Saint - Saëns and Massenet .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early years = = =

Messager was born at Montluçon in central France , the son of Paul - Philippe - Émile Messager , a prosperous local tax collector , and Sophie - Cornélie Lhôte de Selancy . The young Messager was given piano lessons , and at the age of seven he was sent as a boarder to a Marist school where he continued his interest in the piano . After a bank crash brought ruin to the family , which could no longer afford to keep Messager at the Marist school , he was awarded a bursary to study at the École de Musique classique et religieuse in Paris , run by Louis Niedermeyer . This was at the time of the Paris Commune , and to escape the violence in the city , the school was temporarily evacuated to Switzerland . Messager studied piano with Adam Lausset , organ with Clément Loret , and composition with Eugène Gigout , Gabriel Fauré and (after leaving Niedermeyer 's school) Camille Saint - Saëns .

Fauré and Messager quickly moved from being master and pupil to being firm friends and occasional collaborators . In 1874 Messager was appointed to succeed Fauré as organiste de chœur (choirmaster) at Saint - Sulpice , Paris , under the principal organist , Charles - Marie Widor . In 1876 , he won the gold medal of the Société des Auteurs , Compositeurs et Editeurs de Musique with a symphony , the work being warmly received when performed by the Concerts Colonne at the Théâtre du Châtelet in January 1878 . He won further prizes for his cantatas *Prométhée enchaîné* and *Don Juan et Haydée* .

In 1878 , Fauré and Messager travelled together to Cologne to see Wagner 's *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* , and later they went to Munich for the complete Ring cycle , *Die Meistersinger* and *Tannhäuser* and to Bayreuth for *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* . They frequently performed as a party piece their joint composition , the irreverent *Souvenirs de Bayreuth* . This short , skittish piano work for four hands sends up themes from *The Ring* . They also collaborated on the *Messe des pêcheurs de Villerville* .

= = = First successes = = =

In 1878 Messager was appointed conductor at the Folies Bergère , and he began his career

composing for the stage with two short ballets , Fleur d 'oranger (1878) and Les vins de France (1879) . In 1880 a former manager of the Folies , M. Comy , was appointed to run the Eden Théâtre , a new 3 @, @ 000 capacity theatre in Brussels . At his invitation , Messenger resigned from the Folies in 1880 and became conductor of the Eden Théâtre . He returned to Paris in 1881 as organist of St. Paul @-@ St. Louis and from 1882 to 1884 he was maître de chapelle at Ste Marie @-@ des @-@ Batignolles a small church in the north west of Paris , where his assistant was another young composer , Claude Terrasse .

In 1883 , the composer Firmin Bernicat died , leaving an unfinished operetta , François les bas @-@ bleus . Messenger was invited to complete it ; he orchestrated the entire work and composed about 12 numbers . It was staged in November 1883 at the Théâtre des Folies @-@ Dramatiques and was an immediate critical and popular success . It was produced in London by Kate Santley in 1885 under the title François the Radical . In 1883 , Messenger married a distant cousin , Edith Clouette . Fauré played the organ at the ceremony .

In December 1883 Messenger and Chabrier gave the first performance of the latter 's Trois valse romantiques at the Société Nationale de Musique . The concert also included the two @-@ piano version premiere of España . A close friend of Chabrier from the 1880s until Chabrier 's death , Messenger had a great admiration for Chabrier 's opera Gwendoline and swore that he would conduct it in Paris , which he later did . He also prepared a piano reduction of the orchestral parts for the published vocal score of the work .

Following the success of François les bas @-@ bleus , Messenger received , and accepted , simultaneous invitations to compose a ballet for the Opéra and an operetta for the Folies @-@ Dramatiques . The operetta , La fauvette du temple , first performed on 17 November 1885 , confirmed Messenger 's reputation . It ran well into the following year in Paris , and he was able to sell the British rights immediately , though the work was not staged in London until 1891 . The ballet , Les deux pigeons , which became one of Messenger 's best known works , took longer to reach the stage . It was put into rehearsal at the Opéra , but the staging , which showed a tree being struck by lightning in a storm scene , was considered a fire hazard by the police authorities , and the production was temporarily shelved .

A month after the opening of La fauvette du temple the Bouffes @-@ Parisiens premiered Messenger 's opéra comique , La Béarnaise , with Jeanne Granier in the title role . It ran for three months and was successfully produced in Britain the following year with a cast including Florence St. John and Marie Tempest , running for more than 200 performances . The Times said of this production that it gave Messenger a secure footing in London , which led to important results later in his career . A production of La Béarnaise in New York followed in 1887 , under the title Jacquette .

In 1886 Les deux pigeons was finally produced at the Paris Opéra and was a great success . It was Messenger 's last success for four years . His attempt at a more serious opera , Le bourgeois de Calais (1888) , with " a boring historical plot , bad lyrics , and a banal score " was not well received . One critic wrote , " That Le Bourgeois de Calais will have a successful career there is not the faintest chance , for all the patriotic bolstering in the world could not make it an attractive piece . " Messenger followed this with a musical fairy tale Isoline (1888) , which was slightly better received , and a three @-@ act operetta , Le mari de la reine (The Queen 's Husband , 1889) , which failed , although Messenger thought it " the best of my flops . " Also in the 1880s , Messenger published some song cycles , and " sung waltzes " .

= = = Fin de siècle = = =

Messenger 's fortunes revived in 1890 with La Basoche , produced with much success at the Opéra @-@ Comique . The critic who had pronounced so unfavourably on Le Bourgeois de Calais wrote of the new piece , " an exceptionally pleasing work ... a dainty piece which cannot fail to obtain widespread popularity . " An English @-@ language version was produced in London in 1891 by Richard D 'Oyly Carte . The theatrical newspaper The Era wrote , " The Basoche is more than a success ; it is a triumph " , but the piece had only a moderately successful run of three months . A New York production was given in 1893 but was not a success .

In 1892 Messager's career as a conductor began to advance. He was invited to conduct *Die Walküre* at Marseille. As a composer, however, the early 1890s brought him mixed fortunes. *Madame Chrysanthème*, staged at the Théâtre de la Renaissance in 1893, was the first operatic setting of the story by Pierre Loti later set by Puccini as *Madama Butterfly*; it was politely rather than enthusiastically received. *Mirette*, produced by Carte at the Savoy Theatre in 1894, was Messager's first opera written expressly for the London stage and was the only original Savoy opera by a French composer. To assist him in what was for him (at the time) an unfamiliar idiom, he enlisted the help of the songwriter Dotie (Alice Maude) Davis (1859 ? 1938), known professionally as Hope Temple. She became Messager's second wife in 1895, Edith having divorced him. According to Bernard Shaw, Messager, concluding from the reception of *La Basoche* in London that it was unwise to offer the British public anything too intelligent, decided that the new opera was going to be as commonplace as possible. It had a disappointing run, and Messager vetoed any production in Paris.

His next opera, a serious work, *Le chevalier d'Harmental* (1896), was unsuccessful, and for a while Messager and his new wife withdrew to the English countryside near Maidenhead, Berkshire. From 1897, however, his career revived, with the success of his operetta *Les p'tites Michu* at the Bouffes @-@ Parisiens, his appointment in 1898 as musical director of the Opéra @-@ Comique, and the outstanding success of *Véronique* (1898). Both of these operettas had librettos by Albert Vanloo and Georges Duval, whose work was judged to be above the average of their kind.

From 1898 to 1904, Messager's work at the Opéra @-@ Comique left him little time for composition, particularly after 1901, when he also spent May to July at the Royal Opera House in London. He turned down W. S. Gilbert's offer of a collaboration, and wrote only two stage works between 1898 and 1914. His international fame as a composer nevertheless grew, with productions of *Les p'tites Michu* and *Véronique* in countries including Britain, Spain, Switzerland, Germany and the U.S. Unusually for the London stage at the time, *Véronique* was not translated into English but was given in Vanloo and Duval's original French in 1903. An English translation was staged the following year and ran for 496 performances. Messager conducted the first nights of both productions.

At the Opéra @-@ Comique, Messager encouraged Claude Debussy to complete his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* and worked closely with him in getting the orchestration ready for the premiere. He conducted the premiere in 1902 and in gratitude the work was dedicated to him. Messager also conducted the premieres of Massenet's *Griséidis* and Charpentier's *Louise*. As a conductor, he won praise from critics on both sides of the English Channel. The English music critic Francis Toye wrote that good though Arturo Toscanini's conducting of *Pelléas et Mélisande* was at La Scala in Milan, Messager's was still better.

= = = Twentieth century = = =

From 1901 to 1907, Messager was one of the directors of the Grand Opera Syndicate, which ran the Covent Garden opera seasons, featuring the leading singers of the day, including Nellie Melba and Enrico Caruso. Much of his time, according to his biographer John Wagstaff, was spent on administration. From 1901, for two years, Messager had an affair with the Scottish soprano Mary Garden, whom he had met at the Opéra @-@ Comique and conducted when she took over the title role of *Louise*. She also appeared in a revival of his *Madame Chrysanthème*. His first appearance at Covent Garden was in 1902 with the first and second performances of *The Princess Osra* (in French) by Herbert Bunning. He next conducted at Covent Garden in 1904 in the British premiere of Saint @-@ Saëns's *Hélène*, followed in 1905 by *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *Faust*, the world premiere of Franco Leoni's *L'oracolo*, *Orphée et Euridice* and *Roméo et Juliette*; in his final year 1906 he conducted *Armide*, *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *Faust*, the British premiere of *Le jongleur de Notre @-@ Dame*, and *Roméo et Juliette*. In 1906 he also introduced to Covent Garden his ballet *Les deux pigeons*. Despite his reputation as a Wagnerian, he yielded the baton for Wagner performances to Hans Richter, widely regarded as the world's foremost exponent of Wagner's music. In 1906, Messager and the London Symphony Orchestra travelled to Paris to play a

programme of English music at the Châtelet Theatre , including works by Sullivan , Parry and Stanford . When he left Covent Garden in 1907 , the directors found it necessary to appoint two people to fill his place : Neil Forsyth as general manager and Percy Pitt as musical director .

In 1907 Messager returned to composition . His " comédie lyrique " , Fortunio was presented at the Opéra @-@ Comique with great success . In the same year he was appointed joint director of the Paris Opéra , responsible for the artistic direction , with Leimistin Broussan , formerly director of the Lyons Opera , taking charge of administration . The partnership lasted until 1914 but , Wagstaff writes , it was " only moderately successful , because of shortage of funds and disputes with staff " . Messager decided on a policy of making the Opéra " more genuinely French " . He revived Rameau 's Hippolyte et Aricie , for the first time in Paris since 1767 , and presented unusual French repertoire including Fauré 's Pénélope and Ravel 's L 'heure espagnole . Foreign opera was not neglected ; Messager gave Paris its first complete cycle of Der Ring des Nibelungen , presented a Russian season starring Félia Litvinne and Feodor Chaliapin , and gave the French premiere of Richard Strauss 's Salome . At the invitation of the Emperor Wilhelm II , Messager and Broussan took the Opéra company to Berlin in 1908 . Relations between the two co @-@ directors were not always harmonious ; the French government was obliged to refuse to accept Messager 's resignation on at least one occasion , and he finally resigned in November 1913 , a year before their term of office was due to expire . He consented to return in January 1914 to conduct Parsifal ? its first performance in Europe outside Bayreuth . His conducting of the work won critical praise .

On the strength of his experience as a Wagnerian , Messager was appointed conductor of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire in 1908 . Alongside the main orchestral repertoire of Haydn , Mozart , Beethoven , Liszt and French classics , Messager also conducted the Conservatoire orchestra in major choral works by J. S. Bach , Handel , Schumann and Berlioz , as well as introducing early French music such as that of Janequin . In 1909 he delivered the French premiere , very shortly after the world premiere in Boston , of Paderewski 's Polonia Symphony . In the 1913 ? 14 season , he conducted a chronological cycle of Beethoven 's symphonies and his Missa Solemnis , as well as the Verdi Requiem , for the Italian composer 's centenary . Messager took the orchestra outside Paris to Lille , Lyon and Antwerp during these years . During World War I , he took the orchestra on tour to Argentina (1916) , Switzerland (1917) , and the U.S. and Canada (1918 ? 19) giving concerts in more than 50 cities . At the end of that tour he resigned his post . Messager was criticised for performing the music of Wagner , but he maintained that German music represented the noble side of the enemy nation 's nature . Like Fauré , but unlike Saint @-@ Saëns , Messager refused to have anything to do with the National League for the Defence of French Music (La Ligue Nationale pour la Defense de la Musique Française) , which sought to boycott German music .

In 1914 Messager composed Béatrice , described as a " légende lyrique " , based on the 1911 play The Miracle . The premiere was in Monte Carlo . The work was performed in Paris in 1917 but was not successful . In 1915 Messager joined with other musicians in contributing compositions to King Albert 's Book to raise money for " the relief of the suffering Belgian people " ; the other composers included Debussy , Elgar , Mascagni , Paderewski and Saint @-@ Saëns .

In 1919 Messager 's operetta Monsieur Beaucaire was premiered in Birmingham , prior to a long run in the West End . The composer , who generally conducted British premieres of his works , was suffering from sciatica and could not even be in the audience for the first nights in either city . The work received its Paris premiere at the Marigny Theatre in 1925 . Later in 1919 , Messager resumed the musical directorship of the Opéra @-@ Comique for the 1919 ? 20 season , conducting among other works the first complete French performance of Così fan tutte . At the Opéra , he was the conductor for Tristan und Isolde on the 100th anniversary of Wagner 's birth .

= = = Last years = = =

In the 1920s , Messager kept pace with the change in fashion in musical theatre , consciously adopting the styles of musical comedy , lightening his orchestration , but maintaining a Gallic flavour , mostly avoiding American dance @-@ rhythm influences . He collaborated with Yvonne Printemps

and Sacha Guitry on the musical comedies *Deburau* (which he dedicated to the memory of Fauré) , and *L 'amour masqué* . In his late operettas , his lighter touch was balanced by echoes of the nineteenth century , with hints of Fauré and , particularly , Chabrier 's *L 'Etoile* .

In 1924 Diaghilev persuaded Messenger to conduct the Paris premieres of Auric 's ballet *Les Fâcheux* and Poulenc 's *Les Biches* . In 1928 Messenger played a key role in establishing important updates to copyright law , though he was on the losing side of the case . He sued the BBC for breach of copyright for broadcasting his works without his consent . He lost because he had assigned his British performing rights to George Edwardes , whose estate had given the BBC permission for the broadcast . The case established that as the broadcasting rights had not been specifically reserved , the Edwardes estate 's rights included them .

Messenger died in 1929 after a short illness and was interred in the Passy Cemetery . *Coups de roulis* was running in Paris when he died . One critic commented , " Its tuneful melodies show that the veteran composer had lost nothing of the qualities that made *Véronique* such a success . Throughout his life Messenger remained without a peer as a composer of light music . "

= = = Honours , awards and reputation = = =

Messenger was elected President of the *Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques* in 1926 , the first composer to hold this office . In the same year he was elected to the *Académie des Beaux Arts* . In 1927 he was appointed Commander of the *Légion d 'honneur* . In his native town of Montluçon , the new music academy , opened in 2009 , is named the *Conservatoire André Messenger* .

= = Music = =

The biographer John Wagstaff writes that Messenger 's music is notable for its fine orchestration , easy @-@ flowing melody , and skilfully written music , dance @-@ like in character . Messenger 's operettas are in the tradition of Offenbach , Hervé and Lecocq , and some saw him as the last of their line . Wagstaff quotes Messenger 's biographer and pupil Henry Février : " *La Basoche* was the last great French opéra comique of the 19th century , and Messenger ? s next opérettes , especially *Les p ? tites Michu* and *Véronique* , certainly show a difference in style from the earlier works , bringing an altogether fresher approach to the genre . " Although , as Wagstaff notes , Messenger ? s contribution to French music as a composer was recognised by his musical contemporaries internationally , his fame as a composer of light music has tended to obscure his considerable standing in contemporary serious musical circles . The leading composers of the time valued his friendship and advice . Fauré said of him , " familiar with everything , knowing it all , fascinated by anything new " . Messenger 's younger colleague , the composer Reynaldo Hahn , wrote , " I doubt if any musician has ever loved music as much as André Messenger did . It would simply be impossible to have wider musical interests than he did . Right up to the end of his life too . "

Baker 's *Biographical Dictionary of Musicians* says of Messenger , " His style may be described as enlightened eclecticism ; his music was characteristically French , and more specifically Parisian , in its elegance and gaiety . " The English musicologist Gervase Hughes wrote , " He combined melodic richness and economy of means with the fluid grace of Jules Massenet , the aristocratic elegance of Camille Saint @-@ Saëns and the refined subtlety of Gabriel Fauré " .

= = = Recordings = = =

Messenger 's career lasted into the beginning of the recording era . In New York in November 1918 , with the *Paris Conservatoire Orchestra* , he recorded *Les Chasseresses* and *Cortège de Bacchus* from *Sylvia* by Delibes , *Sérénade* and *Mules* from *Impressions d 'Italie* by Charpentier , the *Bacchanale* from *Samson et Dalila* and the *Prelude to Le Déluge* , both by Saint @-@ Saëns , and 4 ½ -minute extracts from *Capriccio Espagnol* by Rimsky @-@ Korsakov and from *Le Rouet d 'Omphale* by Saint @-@ Saëns .

Of Messager 's works performed by other artists , there are complete recordings of several of his operas , and extracts from others . There have been two complete sets of *Véronique* ? a 1953 Decca mono recording conducted by Pierre Dervaux , and a 1969 stereo EMI recording conducted by Jean @-@ Claude Hartemann . Other complete sets of Messager operas include *L 'amour masqué* (1970 ; conductor , Raymond Legrand) , *La Basoche* (1960 ; Tony Aubin) , *Coups de roulis* (1963 ; Marcel Cariven) , *Fortunio* (1987 ; John Eliot Gardiner) , *Isoline* (1947 ; Louis Beydts) , *Monsieur Beaucaire* (1958 ; Jules Gressier) , and *Passionnement* (1964 ; Jean @-@ Paul Kreder) .

Singers who have recorded individual numbers from Messager 's operas include role creators such as Jean Périer (*Véronique*) , Lucien Fugère (*La basoche*) , Pierre Darmant and Yvonne Printemps (*L 'amour masqué*) , Koval (*Passionnement*) , Marcelle Denya (*Coups de roulis*) , and Maggie Teyte (*Monsieur Beaucaire*) , as well as other contemporaries Aino Ackté , Emma Eames , and John McCormack whose recordings have been reissued on compact disc . Singers of the next generation who recorded Messager numbers included Georges Thill and Ninon Vallin . More recent singers who have recorded numbers from Messager 's operas include Mady Mesplé , Susan Graham , Felicity Lott and Anna Netrebko .

Of Messager 's non @-@ operatic works , his *Messe des pêcheurs de Villerville* , written jointly with Fauré , has been recorded by Harmonia Mundi , conducted by Philippe Herreweghe (1989) . Messager 's other collaboration with Fauré , the Wagner send @-@ up *Souvenirs de Bayreuth* , has been recorded by several piano duettists , including Kathryn Stott and Martin Roscoe (1995 , Hyperion) , and Patrick de Hooge and Pierre @-@ Alain Volondat (2000 , Naxos) . A suite from *Les deux pigeons* has been recorded several times , and in 1993 Decca recorded the complete score , with the Orchestra of Welsh National Opera conducted by Richard Bonynges .

= = Works = =