A happy little bit of French music for you to try
(Charpentier's Te Deum Prelude, to be found at the end of this issue)

I am sure that anybody who is likely to read this is probably a victim of earworms - those tunes which randomly appear in the brain and will just not go away until you do something about it.

Being inflicted by one such earworm in the form of the introduction to Charpentier's *Te Deum* (you know the one – the somewhat mangled version of which was used as a Eurovision theme tune), for once I decided to do something with it.

The inspiration for what I did to amuse myself one Sunday afternoon, and I must admit kept me busy for much of the following day, was the nearest organ to where I live, which is the very beautiful Peter Collins instrument in St Michael's Church, St Albans. Unusually and wonderfully for an English organ, this one is capable of a very respectable sort of French *grand jeu* (a very un-English sound), so I decided to do a rather free arrangement of this as a *Dialogue sur les grands jeux*. There are of course arrangements of this for modern organs but I thought approaching this in a character which the composer might recognise might be more fun.

This movement is the short introduction to Charpentier's *Te Deum*, a substantial work for eight soloists, SATB chorus, woodwinds, trumpets, timpani and strings. This prelude is in the form of a *rondeau* in which the trumpets and timpani are silent in the episodes. I have played around with the arrangement of the sections to make it work better as a stand-alone keyboard piece.

Before sitting down to play this, you will need to know a little about *notes inégales.* These apply to much French music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first note of a pair, usually of quavers, is slightly lengthened and the second is consequently shortened. This produces a characteristic flowing rhythm which is more like crotchet/quaver rhythms in compound time rather than the jerkiness of a dotted rhythm. It would be appropriate to play all the pairs of quavers throughout this piece unequally.

Many lengthy chapters have been written on the ornaments in French music of this period, but it is sufficient to begin by remembering that most of the ornaments start on the upper note and tend to be played much more quickly than in other national styles. Ultimately it is very much up to a contemporary player to work out their own most elegant solution within the flow of any particular movement.

Touch and articulation are important. A legato approach is not appropriate - there should be a clear articulation between the notes, the extent of which depends upon the acoustic. The action on French organs is very light but there is a distinct difference between the feel of the *grand orgue* and the *positif*, which is behind the player's back. There is a natural tendency for a more sustained way of playing on the main manual and I have tried to mirror this in the way I have arranged the *grand orgue* refrains.

I have not written any part for the pedals. As you will see from the attached specification, both the pedalboards and the stops were limited on French classical organs: the flue stops, limited to what we would call open woods, provided a bass line for trios while the reeds provided a penetrating sound for the playing of a plainchant cantus firmus around which elaborate counterpoint was played on the *plein jeu.*

French classical registration was very formulaic and consequently the specifications followed clear patterns. I give a typical specification - that of the lovely 1784 Micot organ in St Chinian, home of the celebrated wine *appellation* down near the Mediterranean in the Hérault. The changes in the organs were so insignificant that there was very little new in the hundred years or so between Charpentier's *Te Deum* and this organ.

I POSITIF DORSAL	II GRAND-ORGUE	III RECIT
50 notes, ut1 à ré5 sans ut#1	50 notes, ut1 à ré5 sans ut#1	27 notes, ut3 à ré5
*__Bourdon__ 8	__Montre__ 8	*__Cornet__ 5 rangs
__Montre__ 4	__*Bourdon__ 8	__Trompette__ 8
__Nazard__ 2'2/3	__Flûte__ 8	
__Doublette__ 2	__*Prestant__ 4	
__Quarte de nazard__ 2	__Nazard__ 2'2/3	
__Tierce__ 1'3/5	__Doublette__ 2	
__Larigot__ 1'1/3	__Quarte de nazard__ 2	
__Plein-jeu__ V rgs	__Tierce__ 1'3/5	
*__Cromorne__ 8	__Fourniture__ IV rgs	__PÉDALE__
	__Cymbale__ III rgs	17 notes, ut1 à fa2 sans ut#1
	__*Grand Cornet__ V rgs (ut3)	__Flûte__ 8
	__*Trompette__ 8	__Flûte__ 4
	__Voix humaine__ 8	__Trompette__ 8
	*__Clairon__ 4	__Clairon__ 4

The *dialogue sur les grands jeux* could reasonably be played, as I indicate on the score, on the eight stops with asterisks above.

Equally it could be played with all the stops of the Positif apart from the Plein-jeu alternating with the same stops with asterisks on the *Grand Orgue*.

In both cases the two main manuals could be coupled together.

Either way this is a very satisfying sound with the *Grand Orgue* Cornet reinforcing the trebles of the reeds to match the enormous basses of the reeds, which themselves are so bright that no mixtures are needed.

It is interesting to note that the *plein jeu* (consisting of the principals, bourdons and quint mixtures) and the *grand jeu* were never played together.

If you wish to find out more about the French classical organ, there are two excellent books.

Douglas, Fenner, *The Language of the Classical French Organ: A Musical Tradition before 1800* New and Expanded Edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995)

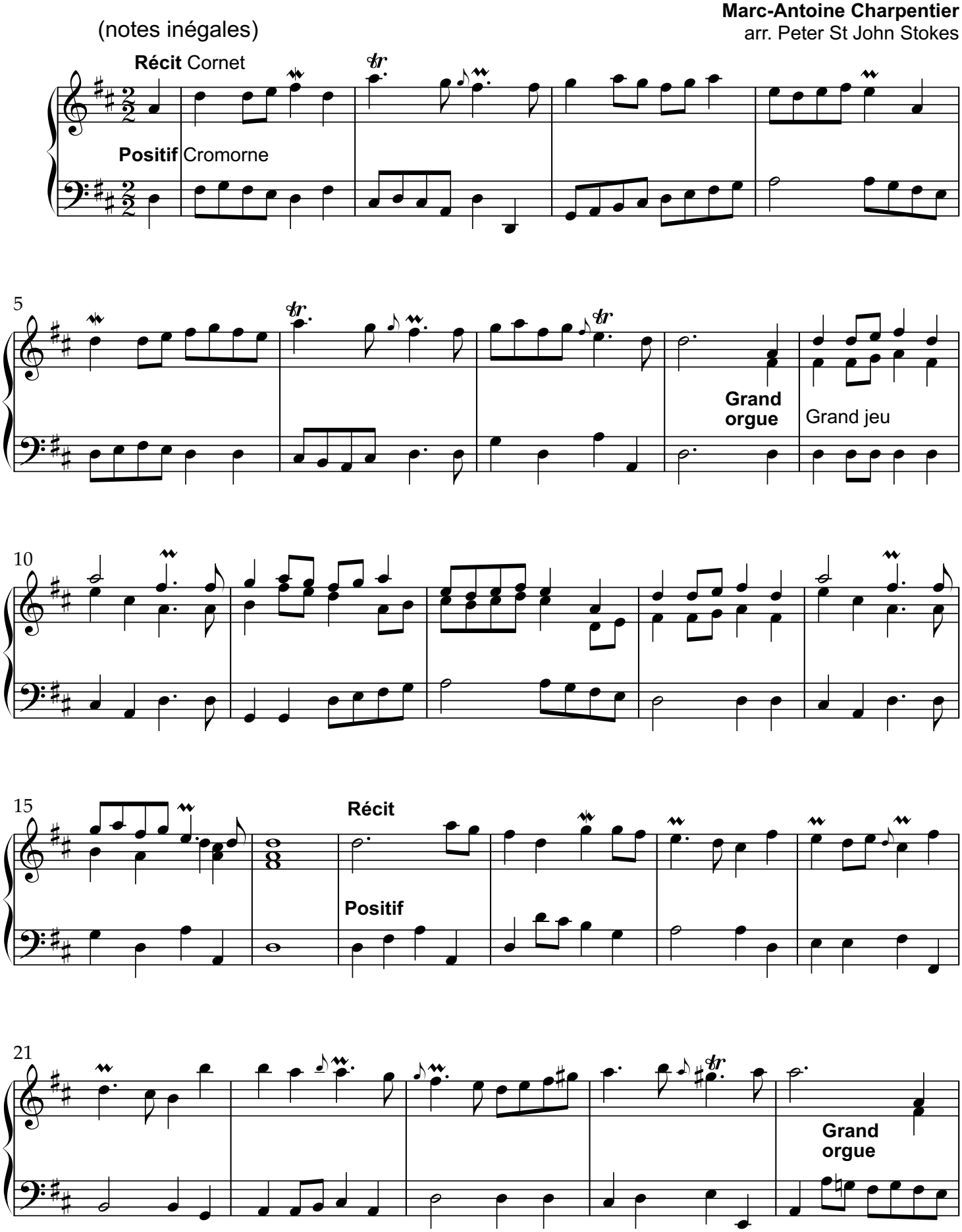
Ponsford, David, *French Organ Music in the Reign of Louis XIV* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

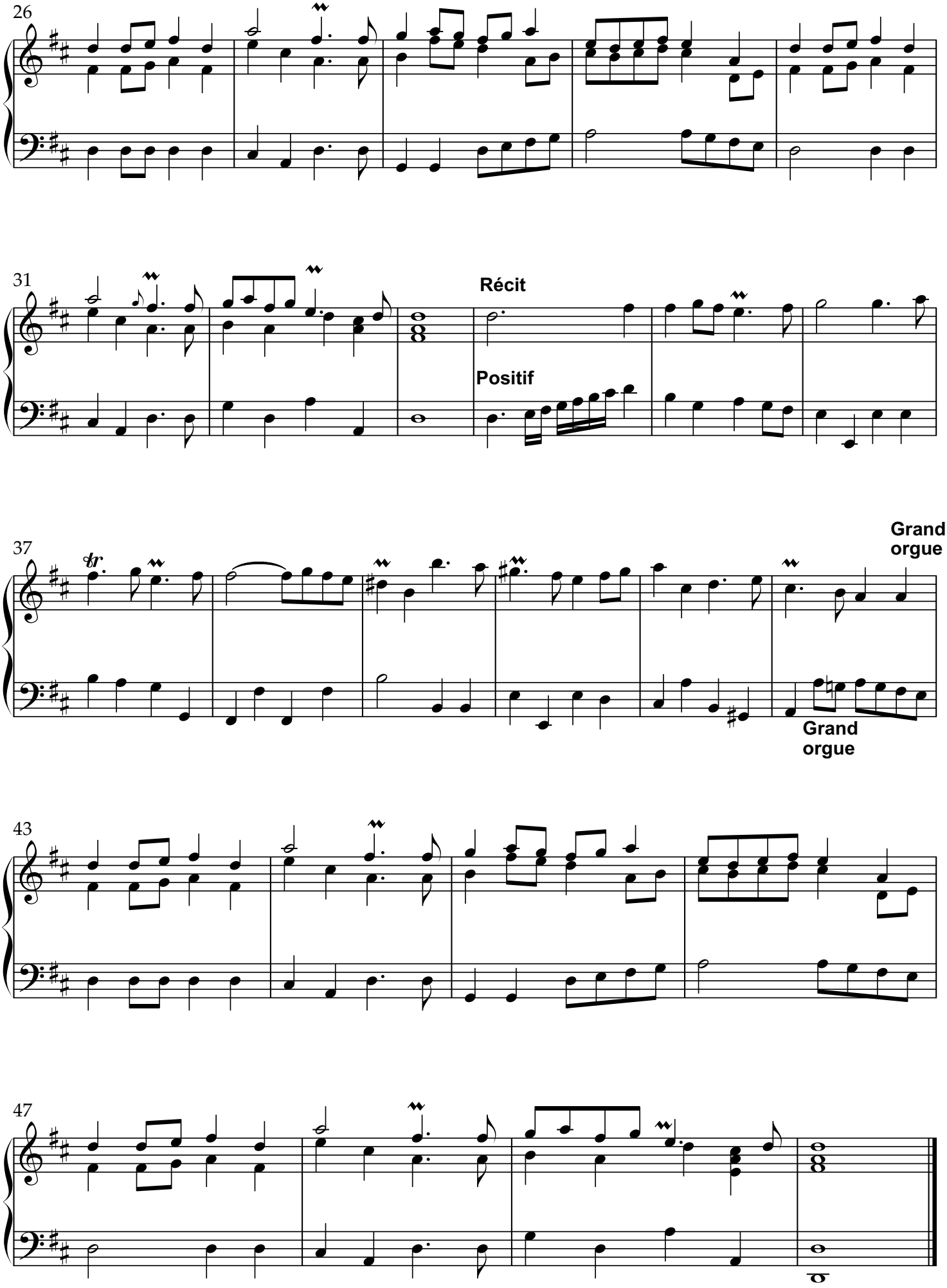
There is an interesting recording of the St Chinian organ available on YouTube, *René Saorgin at the historic organ of Saint Chinian* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZM1TWGox9EQ). The *grand jeu* is heard under the title of Dialogue at 7'20.

Peter St John Stokes

Te Deum

Marc-Antoine Charpentier
arr. Peter St John Stokes

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Récit
Positif
37
Grand orgue
Grand orgue
43
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