

## GABRIEL PIERNE

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Henri Constant Gabriel Pierne was born in Metz on 16 August 1863 and was a French composer, pianist, organist and conductor. His father was a singer and his mother was a pianist. The Franco Prussian War of 1870 resulted in Metz being annexed by Germany and the family moved to Paris. Gabriel studied at the Paris Conservatory with Marmontel, Lavignac, Durand, Franck ( for organ) and Massenet ( for composition ). He was an excellent student.



Pierne gained first prize awards in piano, organ, counterpoint and fugue. He won the Prix de Rome for his cantata Edith in 1882 which takes place at the time of the battle of Hastings of 1066. He studied for three years in Rome. Incidentally, Edith was dedicated to Massenet.

One of Pierne's most notable claims to fame was to conduct the premiere of Stravinsky's Firebird on 25 June 1910. Around 1926, he conducted Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto with the seven year old Ginette Neveu as soloist.

In 1890, he married one of his piano pupils. This was also the year he succeeded Franck as organist at St Clothide. In 1903, he was appointed deputy conductor of the Colonne Orchestra and when Colonne died in 1910, he became chief conductor. Pierre Monteux was in the orchestra as a violist.

Pierne was a refined and wise musician and gave premieres of Debussy, Ravel and Roussel.

He became a member of the Academie des Beaux Arts in 1925 and was made a Commandeur de la Legion d'Honneur in 1935.

He made recordings for Odeon Records from the late 1920s

He wrote several operas

La coupe enchantee 1895

Vendee 1897

La fille de Tabarn 1901

Two comic operas

On ne badine pas avec l'amour 1910

Sophie Arnould 1927

Fragonard 1934

There are nine ballets written between 1891 and 1935

Le collier de saphia

Les joyeuses commeneres de Paris 1892

Bouton d'or 1893

Le Docteur Blanc 1893

Salome 1895

Cydalise et le chevre pied 1919

Impressions of a Music Hall 1926

Grafton 1934

Images 1935

An early work dating from 1887 is the Piano Concerto in C minor Op12, a curious piece of under 20 minutes and cast in three movements without a slow movement. The movements are Allegro, Allegro scherzando and Allegro. It is attractive enough but with some usual cliches. But the real problem is that we have some magnificent piano concertos such as those by Liszt and Rachmaninov so that composers like Pierne cannot compete with them.

He composed other works for piano and orchestra namely Fantasia ballet ( 1895), Scherzo -Caprice (1890) and Symphonic poem ( 1903). He wrote a Concertstück for harp and orchestra (1903) and a Fantasia basques for harp and orchestra ( 1927 )

A more successful work by Pierne is the Piano Quintet Op 41 of 1917 which is more original and has interleaved material.

It is often said that a composer who does not write a String Quartet or a Symphony

may be lacking in some respects. If that is so, then Pierne is sadly lacking but his interest lay in the stage and in the theatre, his music for which is not readily available.

He died on 17 July 1937 at Ploujean, Finistere.

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