

An Interview with
Philippe Lefebvre



The grand orgue of Notre-Dame Cathedral

By Jeffrey Brillhart

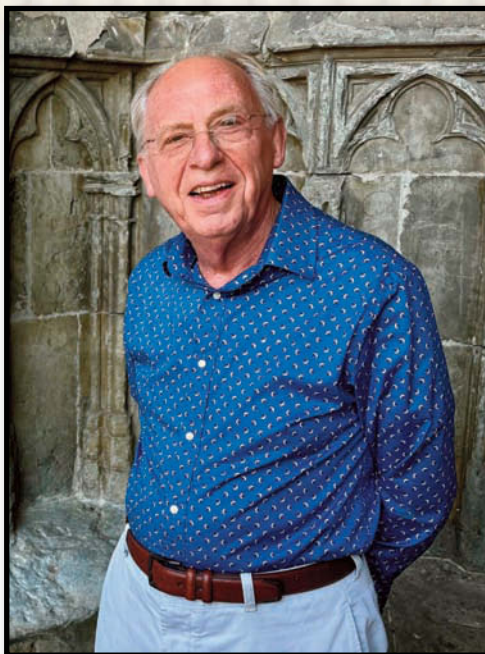
Philippe André Lefebvre (b. 1949) is one of three titular organists at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris and has served as such since 1985. A protégé of the renowned organist and improviser Pierre Cochereau, Lefebvre won first prize in improvisation at the Lyon International Competition in 1971, when he had Rolande Falcinelli as his teacher. In 1973 he won first prize in improvisation at the Chartres Competition and then became titular organist of Chartres Cathedral.

Lefebvre is a guest at major festivals, as a soloist or with orchestra. He regularly gives recitals and masterclasses in Europe, the United States, Japan, Russia, and Eastern Europe. He was director of the Lille Conservatory from 1979 to 2003, before being appointed director of sacred music at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame (2003–06), and then director general of the cathedral (2006–13). From 2002 to 2014 he was professor of improvisation at the Paris Conservatory.

Lefebvre is president of the board of directors of the association *Orgue en France*, president of the *Association des grandes orgues de Chartres*, and president of the association *Les amis de l'orgue et de la collégiale* in Montréal (a small city in southwest France with a historic 18th-century organ). The author interviewed Msr. Lefebvre at his home in Montréal, France, on July 13, 2023.

Jeffrey Brillhart: When I was 14, I heard Pierre Cochereau improvise while on my first trip to Paris. Hearing him in Notre-Dame, I knew immediately that I wanted to be an organist. I believe that you had a similar experience.

Philippe Lefebvre: Yes, I also was 14, and my parents took me to Paris for the first time. I saw the Eiffel Tower, Notre-Dame, etc. We went to the cathedral on Sunday morning for the service. At that time, there were only two services, and you cannot imagine the situation, because the cathedral was not in good condition. It was very dark, and the exterior walls were black; in those days there were not many tourists. We sat in the middle of the nave, and the organ started. I thought that the organ sounded as if it were very far away. But in a few minutes it seemed to advance in the church, and the atmosphere was incredible, because at first it was so quiet and soft, and it steadily grew in power until it filled the entire cathedral like a wave. The whole service was like that, because at that time there were no singers, only the organ. Everything was improvised. After we left, I told my parents, “I must play the organ.” Before that, I only played the piano.



Philippe Lefebvre

JB: What did your parents say to that?

PL: “Yes,” they said, “we have a friend who is an organist in a church. We can ask him if he can give lessons to you.” So for two years I worked with that old man. And then my parents wrote to Pierre Cochereau. He answered my mother, writing, “Come to visit me next Sunday at Notre-Dame.” I was 16 years old. The following summer, I went to Nice, where Cochereau was the director of the conservatory and where he also ran a summer academy in organ. I studied Bach’s *Orgelbüchlein* and various preludes and fugues. It was incredible. There were 20 of us studying with him that summer.

JB: What was Cochereau like as a teacher?

PL: For repertoire, he was very strict. For example, the first time I played Bach’s “Fiddle” Fugue in D Minor, BWV 539, for him, he told me, “You must go see my colleague who teaches violin, to understand how he bows these repeated notes. You must understand how a violinist plays if you want to understand proper articulation at the organ.”

JB: That’s incredible, because Cochereau’s teacher, Marcel Dupré, certainly didn’t teach repeated notes that way!

PL: Yes, it was very different from Dupré. For example, in improvisation, with Cochereau it was all about the rhythm and the construction of the piece. You had to be clear in making the pulse clear to the listener. It was the first time I thought about that, because when you improvise, you start, you play. Cochereau insisted that it was essential to maintain a good tempo and make the pulse very clear. I remember learning how to improvise a *plein jeu* in the French Classic style, and it was necessary to count!

JB: Did Cochereau demonstrate these principles?

PL: He did not demonstrate very much at the organ, but if I played a bad harmony, he was very quick to correct me! Cochereau also said, “You must find your own way.”

JB: Did Cochereau use Dupré’s improvisation methods?

PL: No, never!

JB: One aspect of Cochereau that strikes me so often—and you remind me of him in this way—is that, in the big improvisations, it sounded as if the music was being shot out of a cannon. With Cochereau, the music seemed to begin before he even made a sound. For me, you’re the same.

PL: Sure . . . because, before you start to improvise, you must have something in your mind. You must decide the beginning and the structure of the improvisation, but the organ always gives you the sound you will work with. The organ speaks to me, and

I respond in kind. I have many things in my mind, but when I play, I ask, “Will the organ give me what I want?”

JB: How many years did you study with Cochereau?

PL: Four years, in the summer at Nice, and sometimes at Notre-Dame. Cochereau would call me and say, “I’ll be at Notre-Dame next Sunday. Can you come? We’ll work together.”

JB: So, in Nice, the lessons were on Cochereau’s portable organ?

PL: Yes, it was a small Neoclassic tracker organ. It was difficult, because the action wasn’t so good and the sounds were very high-pitched. But it was very good for practicing.

JB: Were there other improvisers who influenced you?

PL: For me, Tournemire was an incredible inspiration. I love his music, especially Duruflé’s transcriptions of Tournemire’s five improvisations recorded in 1930. Tournemire creates a very special atmosphere because he mixes the influence of Gregorian chant with Impressionism.

JB: Did you work with Dupré?

PL: I met Dupré a number of times, but for me he was very academic. I respected him a lot; he was the king of the fugue! But his harmonic language is not my spirit. Of course, for counterpoint he was very helpful.

JB: What do you think Dupré thought of Cochereau?

PL: I think Dupré admired him, and certainly Cochereau respected and venerated Dupré. At the funeral of Vierné’s successor, Léonce de Saint-Martin, in 1954, Dupré was in attendance. Prior to the service, he took Cochereau aside and said, “Pierre, you will come with me to the funeral, because I want people to see that *you* are my candidate for Notre-Dame.”

JB: The first recording I heard of you was one that you and Loïc Mallié made after you won the Chartres Competition in 1973. How have you evolved as an improviser since then?

PL: Before I met Pierre Cochereau, I played the services at the school chapel. I was 15. I had no repertoire, so it was necessary to improvise a Prelude, Offertoire, Communion, and Sortie every week. That’s how I started. I was a pianist, so I knew that atmosphere. But what was my piano repertoire? I played Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, Liszt, etc., and not many modern composers. So I practiced improvising in those styles. Very often it was very classical. That was my beginning. But after I started to study the organ, I studied some other composers—for example, some easy pieces of Jean Langlais, Jehan Alain, and Olivier Messiaen—and this was new for my ears. I came from Bach, Mozart, Chopin—and now these new sounds. It was incredible. I remember a piece of Langlais that was amazing for me. And it was complicated! How was it possible to play that? So I tried to figure out how to do that. Of course, Cochereau was

amazing, and again I asked, “How was it possible to do what he did?” That was the first period of my life.

The second period came when I became titular organist at Chartres. At Chartres the acoustic is very good, but the organ is not good. So you must find a way to make a good sound, and that is very difficult. It’s not only the harmony, or whether it’s tonal, modal, or modern. I had to figure out how to voice the chords so that the organ would sound better. I was constantly searching, because the organ was not good, so I had to find new ideas and seek out the best sounds. I constantly changed the voicing of chords and searched for different harmonic possibilities. Another composer who has influenced me is Jean-Louis Florentz. His music is very interesting to me.

JB: And Florentz was not an organist! There are so many gestures in his music that are not typical for organists: for example, the harp effect he created in “Harpe de Marie.” I think that too many organists, when improvising, only look to organ music for inspiration; they don’t look at other instruments.

PL: Absolutely.

JB: In 2018 I was at Notre-Dame with your colleague Vincent Dubois. His Communion improvisation was absolutely glorious. I complimented him. He thanked me, responding, “That was not me, it was the organ.”

PL: Yes! The organ is the chief! The organ gives you the music. Especially in Notre-Dame, the organ and the acoustic of the church are my inspiration.

JB: What happens when you encounter an uninspiring organ?

PL: When you improvise on a very bad organ, you shouldn’t practice a lot. You must preserve your energy and your ears. If you practice a long time on a bad organ before a recital, it is not possible to be inspired. So, you do your best to find what is best on the organ, and then keep your energy and your musicality and try to somehow be inspired when the time to play comes.

JB: Do you try to hear a different organ in your mind in this kind of situation?

PL: I hear the key centers and the harmony, and sometimes I can forget the sound if the organ is terrible.

JB: Some people have said that they do not believe that it is possible to teach improvisation. Do you agree?

PL: No! But it *is* complicated. It’s not hard to teach classical-style improvisation, which is a kind of academic exercise. You have so many models, and that’s “pastiche”—anyone can do that. It is difficult, however, to find your own way, your own language and personality. While you cannot teach that, you can show the student different ways. For example, the chords you play, how they are constructed, what happens when you change only one note of a chord,

etc. It depends on each student. Sometimes, the student has in mind an idea that they cannot develop. That's where the teacher can be helpful, to help the student articulate what it is they want to do. While it's difficult to learn to improvise, you can work at it. You must practice. But this does not happen immediately. It takes time.

JB: Have you ever had a student who could not learn to improvise?

PL: Yes. I had a student who was terrible. For months and months, he could not do anything. The problem was not in his fingers but in his mind. He was so afraid, because I was not happy, and always he compared his improvisations with the works of composers and thought, "My language is not good, my chords are wrong, etc." With that kind of student, you have to be very patient. After many months, I asked him, "What *do* you want to hear? What kind of sound do you *want* to make? Choose."

He thought about it. Then, I told him to put his hands on the keys. Do you like that sound? If not, change it. Are you happy with *that* sound, that chord, that melody? And after that, we worked with that sound or only with a few keys.

JB: The first time you came to Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church to teach in a three-day improvisation immersion experience, we had a wonderful group of about 15 students, some of whom were very advanced and some of whom were beginners. One of the students was an older woman and a beginner in improvisation. She was the last student you worked with during those three days. You looked at her and said, "We are going to improvise a toccata!" I still remember the shocked look on her face. And 15 minutes later, you had her improvising a toccata. That was incredible. That was *you*. When she finished, she looked at you and said, "I can't believe I just did that!"

When I met you 30 years ago at a weeklong improvisation immersion in Toulouse, France, I was terrified. I had already been in France for two months on sabbatical, feeling like I was making no progress. There were 20 students; Lynne Davis and I were the Americans. The rest were young French organists. All I could think was, "They are going to be incredible, and I am going to be absolutely terrible." You had this way of bringing calm and confidence into every



Pierre Cochereau

student's experience. Within ten minutes you helped me find my center and begin the process of finding my own musical voice as an improviser. An hour later, I thought, "Oh my God, it all makes sense now." How do you explain this?

PL: Well, it depends on the student. It depends on what the student wants to do. What does the student have in their ear? What kind of music do they like? What kind of organ is being played? What kind of sounds does that organ make? What is the style of music in the church? Does the organist play recitals? Which repertoire? The teacher must know the musical atmosphere in the life of the student, and if the student comes to me to learn to improvise, it means they want something. And sometimes it's difficult because all

they want to do is improvise a toccata in the style of Cochereau. But that is not my way, because you are not Pierre Cochereau. I am not Pierre Cochereau. You are *you* and I am *me*. And you must find the way for *you*. And that is both the most difficult thing and the most important.

I remember that year in Bryn Mawr when I asked a student, a professional organist, what he wanted to accomplish. And he said, "I only want to learn how to improvise a fugue." It's what he wanted to do, but of course he wasn't ready. He didn't want to learn how to improvise a toccata, only a fugue. That's what will make him happy, and that's what the teacher must help him achieve.

JB: When you taught at the Paris Conservatory, did you work from a syllabus?

PL: No, at the conservatory, we work in the Classical style: the partita, the French suite, and sometimes the prelude and fugue. At the same time, we work in the style of Liszt and other late Romantic composers. For me it's still academic, but it *is* improvisation. We also work on passacaglias, both in Baroque and modern style. Also, preludes and fugues in modal style, like Tournemire or Duruflé. Also, on texts. But I don't decide when to do this. It depends on each student. We might work on just one principle for a month or more.

JB: Let's talk about free improvisation. On the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Haarlem Organ Academy, Paul Peters released *The Haarlem Essays*. It is a fascinating book that includes the themes from the first 50 years of the Haarlem Organ Improvisation Competition. In the early years of the competition, you see tonal themes for preludes

and fugues, passacaglias, sonatas, and symphonies. As the years progress, the themes become less and less tonal, with an increasing emphasis on free improvisation. It seems to me that improvisation has evolved greatly from the days of the four-movement Dupré-style “symphony.” How do you approach the teaching of a free improvisation that might last as long as 20 minutes? Competitions everywhere are moving in this direction—Haarlem, St. Albans, and the AGO’s National Competition in Organ Improvisation.

PL: First, it depends on whether you have a theme or not. If you have a theme, is it given to you, or did you choose it? If you have no theme, what does that mean? Is it only an atmosphere? Is it something for the people who are listening? Can they understand the path you have chosen? Is it mostly tonal? Is it just a few chords?

So first, you must expose the theme to the people. After that, in your mind and in your heart, you must reveal your personality. On *this* organ, what do I want to reveal about my personality to these people? When you have decided all that, you must organize the improvisation, and that’s very difficult when it is a long improvisation. Five minutes is not very difficult; 20 is very difficult. In a long improvisation you cannot always repeat the same thing, so you must use a structure. Perhaps it is several movements, each with a different character and sound. Sometimes it is not necessary to use many different key centers. And, of course, I must decide on the organ, “That sound is good; that sound is not good.” Is it possible to develop that sound with a part of the theme or not? Sometimes you develop only the rhythmic part of the theme. If it’s a long improvisation, you must have different parts. It’s the same for a composer.

JB: It is interesting to me that, in the United States, most American organists love the music of Maurice Duruflé and Olivier Messiaen. Jean Langlais, less so; Tournemire, not so much. And very few organists know Jean-Louis Florentz. Of course, to play Florentz without a large organ is challenging. But why do you think that Langlais and Tournemire are often overlooked?

PL: People tend not to play the large pieces of Tournemire. Many people play Duruflé’s transcriptions of his improvisations on *Victimae paschali* and *Ave maris stella*. Most of his music is based on Gregorian chant. And now, there are not many churches that use Gregorian chant. The other thing, for me, is that Tournemire is very good for creating an Impressionist atmosphere and not so good for creating a toccata. So his music is often not immediately understood; it takes time. But sometimes with Tournemire, you have a harmony that is incredible, and you must immerse yourself in what he is doing.

JB: I believe that you can’t fully understand the music of Duruflé, Messiaen, or Alain without first understanding Tournemire’s music. But organists must also listen to and practice, on the piano, many other composers, such as Debussy, Ravel, Prokofiev, and Stravinsky. It is very important to listen to orchestral, chamber, and choral works, as well as works for other keyboards, and not only music for organ.

PL: I think so too, yes. Another thing about Tournemire was that he was a great composer of chamber and orchestral music, and nobody performs that repertoire. It’s very important for organists to be aware of the non-organ music of composers who are celebrated for their organ works. It’s the same with Louis Vierne. His chamber music is incredible, and sometimes it’s better than his organ music. If you stay only with the organ, you are limiting yourself as a musician.

JB: I was in Paris in 1985 in the Lemoine music store and engaged in conversation with one of the clerks. He asked me if I had heard the news about the Notre-Dame organists. He informed me that there were four new organists: Yves Devernay, Olivier Latry, Jean-Pierre Leguay, and Philippe Lefebvre. Most of what he was focused on was Olivier being so young.

PL: Sure. Sure.

JB: So, you encountered Notre-Dame at age 14. You probably did not think, “Someday I will be organist at Notre-Dame.”

PL: I never thought about that. I could not have imagined that I would be organist at Notre-Dame. I thought that Pierre Cochereau would be eternal. I never could have imagined Cochereau dying. It was terrible; he was only 59. He was like a father for me.

JB: How were the four of you chosen?

PL: There was a competition that I heard about when I was on a recital tour in the United States. It began at Sainte-Clotilde with repertoire. We had to play Bach’s Prelude and Fugue in G, a piece of Widor, and some French Classic music. It was very difficult to play at Sainte-Clotilde; the organ was in poor condition. The second part was at Notre-Dame and was entirely improvised. Everybody was terrified. But I thought, “Well, we will see!”

JB: How many organists were in the competition?

PL: More than ten in the final round.

JB: Do you have a most memorable moment at Notre-Dame Cathedral?

PL: I was 19. I went to Notre-Dame to see Cochereau. At the end of the second service, the clergy announced, “And now, Pierre Cochereau will play the Sortie.” This was always announced. I was in the gallery with Cochereau. At that

very moment, he pushed me onto the bench and said, “And now, *you* will play the Sortie.” And as usual, it was on the *Salve Regina*. It was incredible.

JB: *Salve Regina* is sung regularly at Notre-Dame. How do you improvise on the same chant week after week?

PL: I never take the same part of the chant, and I never take the beginning of the chant. Very often I start with the last phrase of the chant. And only in the middle or at the end will I use the opening motif. It’s the same when I improvise on *Regina caeli*.

JB: Duruflé, in his *Prelude, Adagio et Choral varié sur le thème du Veni Creator*, does the same thing in the first movement. We don’t hear the beginning of the chant until the second section.

PL: Yes!

JB: When you became titular organist at Notre-Dame, the organ was not in great shape. The instrument was renovated in 1992. What was your role in that renovation?

PL: The 1992 renovation was very complicated. The organ is owned by the state, and there is a national commission that oversees historic organs. Some of the people on the commission wanted the organ to be returned to its original state, with mechanical action and the Barker machines. Others wanted something else. It was difficult to get a good result because nobody could agree. After months and months, there was finally a meeting with the Ministry of Culture and the organists. We realized that the chests needed to be restored first, in order to fix the wind. At that time, the chests had never been restored. Under Vierne and Cochereau, some stops were added, and some changed, but neither the chests nor the wind supply were restored. So we had to determine the best wind pressures and determine which stops of Cavaillé-Coll needed to be restored, or if copies of historic stops needed to be made (for example, the Récit Clarinette and the Gambe and mixtures on the Grand-Orgue). We believed that the organ represented the entire tradition of French organbuilding, from the 17th century to the present day. We have all the Clicquot reeds, and the organbuilder Boisseau restored the French Classic *plein jeu*. To return it to the condition it was in under Cavaillé-Coll would have meant getting rid of some of its history. In 2014 the action was restored, the console was replaced, and the Petite Pédale that Cochereau installed was extended to become a Résonance division on the manuals. And the Ministry of Culture agreed to pay for this, because they recognized the value of the organ’s evolution. So now, all the mutations that were in the Pedal are extended into the manuals.

JB: Let’s talk about the terrible night of the 2019 fire. The whole world watched Notre-Dame burn. You weren’t in Paris, but at your home in the south of France.

PL: Yes, I watched it on TV. I saw the beginning of the fire. After 20 minutes, I told my wife, “I’m sure that the roof will collapse, and I cannot watch.” Of course, if the fire would have reached the gallery, that would have been the end of the organ. The miracle of course was that the firemen were able to stop the fire just before it reached the north tower. It was incredible. And so, no fire or water on the organ! Only the dust, which of course was not good, because it’s lead dust. But the organ has survived. It’s incredible. This was a real miracle.

JB: You were also the director general of the cathedral for seven years. I think you may be the only person in the world who was organist *and* director of a cathedral. What did that entail?

PL: You must take care of the security, which is very complicated. You must take care of the organization of the liturgy, many events, and papal visits. Sometimes in the forecourt of Notre-Dame they organize markets, and you must deal with that. I had many meetings with the police, which was incredible for an organist. And of course, there were many special events. For example, the funeral of Cardinal Lustiger, which was complicated, because the French president was there, and dignitaries from all over the world as well.

JB: You also managed Pope Benedict’s visit in 2008.

PL: Yes, and it was complicated, because several months before, officials from the Vatican came to explain what they wanted and what they didn’t want. I remember that they told me the center aisle had to be five meters wide, so that nobody could touch the pope. They also wanted chairs set up for 3,000 priests, but Notre-Dame only had 1,500 chairs. So we had to locate 1,500 chairs and set them up all over the cathedral, which then necessitated the installation of dozens of televisions so that the priests could see the Mass. It was crazy.

JB: One of your fondest memories as director general was the visit of President and Mrs. Obama, their two daughters, and Mrs. Obama’s mother. What was that experience like for you?

PL: Oh, it was wonderful. Of course, we had to clear the area in front of the cathedral completely out. It was at night, and the Obamas stayed in the cathedral for over an hour. The girls wanted to see the city from the towers, so they went upstairs. It was fantastic!

JB: You are the president of the association *Orgue en France*. What is that association? What do you organize? What are its main activities?

PL: Here in France, the federal government provides financial support for its 100 cathedrals. Most of the other organs are owned by the cities. Only a few organs are funded directly by the churches. So, with 8,000 organs in France, 95 percent of them depend on the state or the cities for their maintenance. When it is necessary to restore an organ or to commission a new one, everything depends on the government. Most of the organs are in small cities, and many of the best historical organs are in very small villages. You can imagine how complicated it is for the administrations of those cities and villages to manage and organize the restoration of an organ. They know many things about buildings, roads, electricity, water, legal administration, etc., but nothing about organs!

Orgue en France helps by explaining the process, the legal rules, and how they can find financial support. For example, sometimes the county and the regional government can give money, as can private donors, etc. For historical organs, the state provides financial support, and sometimes the state can help acquire a new organ. So our association has a special department of resources and information.

Most organ recitals are organized by local associations (*associations des amis de l'orgue*—"friends of the organ"). We have worked with a lot of local associations; most of them have many questions, so we organize meetings in France to converse with organists, presidents of associations, clergy, municipal employees, etc.

Over the past ten years, we have organized 140 meetings in 80 different cities. I was present in 100 of these meetings! I had the idea of creating this association more than ten years ago. Many friends joined me in 2011 to create that association (Michel Bouvard, Thierry Escaich, Olivier Latry, Karol Mossakowski, Thomas Ospital, Louis Robilliard, Daniel Roth, and many others). Marie-Claire Alain and Jean Guillou were also famous supporters of *Orgue en France*. Now we have around 1,000 members.

Each year we organize the *Jour de l'orgue* (Day of the Organ) on the second Sunday of May, and the annual congress with three days of concerts and meetings. We also organize a special prize to support the local associations that restore an organ or build a new one.

Two years ago, with the help of the French Ministry of Culture, we created a website, *Inventaire national des orgues* (Inventaire-des-Orgues.fr). There we listed the 8,000 organs of our country and invited organists and the local associations to describe each one. Several hundred people have contributed to that project so far.

The year 2021 was the tenth anniversary of the founding of the association. We organized a night of organ music at Saint-Eustache in Paris, and 60 organists played an uninterrupted improvisation over twelve hours, from 8:00 P.M.

until 8:00 A.M. Now we plan to organize a special day for young organists, with 1,000 young organists in the whole country. We prepare for the future!

JB: What's the state of organ studies in France today? Are there a lot of students?

PL: In France we have many young organ students. They start younger here than in other countries. They often start to play the organ in church when they are eleven or twelve. There aren't lessons, but the churches need organists, and if they do alright, they are given a teacher. If all goes well, they enter the conservatory at 17 or 18. It was that way for Thomas Ospital, Karol Mossakowski, and others. In other countries, you study and then, later, you get a church job.

JB: In my opinion, your interpretation of organ repertoire, especially Duruflé, Liszt, and Franck, is simply spectacular. And as an improviser it's amazing to me that, in just one Mass, you might improvise in the French Classic style at the beginning and, later, in a very avant-garde way. But this is not my question. You are also an amazing chef. I have benefited greatly from your culinary skills. What is your favorite thing to cook?

PL: Ha! Many things. First is fish with a special kind of shrimp that comes from the sea north of France. It's a recipe I learned from my mother when I was very young. At age six my role was to peel these tiny gray shrimp. It took three to four hours just to do that! The other thing I love to make is *poulard* with mushrooms and a special sauce. And I change the sauce every single time. It's not always the same.

JB: So, it's like improvisation.

PL: Yes! I like to do that, because sometimes I use white wine, sometimes Tokay, sometimes Porto, sometimes other wines. I try every time to change things. Even the mushrooms change. I am always trying something new. It's the same for the vinaigrette. Every day I change the dressing! It is the same with improvisation. It's not always the same thing. It's not always the same organ. It's not always the same registration. And it's not always the same theme.

JB: Philippe, thank you! This has been a great pleasure.

Editor's note: Jeffrey Brillhart recently published three recordings of Philippe Lefebvre's improvisations on YouTube. To hear them, visit tinyurl.com/palcommunion, tinyurl.com/palsortie, and tinyurl.com/palchristmas.

Jeffrey Brillhart is director of music and fine arts at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church, Bryn Mawr, Pa., and a member of the music faculty at Yale University and the Curtis Institute of Music, where he teaches organ improvisation. A native of Iowa, he studied with Carl B. Staplin, Arthur Poister, Russell Saunders, and Barbara Lister-Sink. Further work with Olivier Latry and Philippe Lefebvre in organ improvisation led to his winning first prize in the AGO National Competition in Organ Improvisation in 1994.