

MUSIC

Vincent Dubois brings Notre Dame artistry to Saratoga, reflects in Q&A

BY CARLA DE LUCA

Renowned French organist Vincent Dubois, one of the titular organists at the Notre Dame Cathedral, will return to Saratoga this month for a solo recital at Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church on April 23 at 7:30 p.m.

Known internationally for his technical precision and expressive performances, Dubois has appeared in major concert halls across Europe, North America, Asia, and the Pacific, and has performed with leading orchestras including the Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Dallas Symphony.

His upcoming performance follows the release of "Eternal Notre Dame," the first organ recording made at the cathedral since its restoration after the 2019 fire. In advance of his return to Saratoga, Dubois spoke with The Outlook about his early connection to the instrument, his work at Notre Dame, and what continues to inspire his performances.

Edited lightly for brevity.

Q: When did you first start playing the organ, and what drew you to the instrument?

I was 7 years old when I heard an organ for the first time. I was totally fascinated by the physical aspect of the instrument and by the sound. It was the Cavallé-Coll organ of Saint-Brieuc's Cathedral, my hometown. I immediately asked my mother to start, but she told me I was too small! So I had to wait until age 11. In the meantime, I started the piano.

Q: When did you realize you wanted to pursue playing the organ professionally?

I realized it when I discovered the organ of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. I was 16 when I played it for the first time. That was a real artistic shock!

Q: As you juggle the demands of your varied schedule, what do you like most about touring and performing?

Many things are so rich when you play a concert somewhere: discovering a new city and a new instrument, meeting new people, sometimes making lifelong connections, hearing a new language, and discovering — even briefly — a new culture.

Q: And now as a professor, what do you like best about teaching?

I am so happy to help, to advise, and to guide. I also enjoy learning through teaching. It brings reflection on my own technical and artistic abilities, and on how to explain them to students. This is sometimes challenging,



A live video feed brings organist Vincent Dubois' performance from the loft to the audience below at Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church in Saratoga in 2025. *Courtesy photo*

but so interesting, because it requires going deeper in every way into the music you play.

Also, seeing students succeed in competitions is a real joy—for them, for the school, and for me.

Q: What does it mean to you to play the organ at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris?

It means playing a fabulous and magical instrument in a venue that is truly unique in the world — I think!

The instrument brings you

to heaven, if I may express my feeling that way. The colors, combined with the acoustics of the cathedral, are infinite and amazing. It is difficult to describe if you are not there, but everyone I have met who has gone to the organ loft during services has been deeply moved by the experience.

Q: How has playing the organ changed since the rebuilding of Notre Dame after the devastating 2019 fire?

Mostly, the resonance of the instrument has changed

because of the cleaning of the walls and stones. The sound is now brighter than before, but it will probably return to how it was in a few years, as more than 30,000 people pass through the cathedral daily, leaving dust, along with ashes from the incense used in nearly 2,000 services each year.

Q: Please share about the recent launch of your latest album, "Eternal Notre Dame," the first organ recording since the rebuilding. How do you feel about it, and what inspired

your composition selections?

It was a big challenge to do right after the reopening, for many technical reasons, but I am happy that everything worked so well in the end. I built the program as a large homage to the organ in general, and to the one at Notre Dame in particular.

I chose to play some universal works of Bach, as well as works by Widor (including the famous Toccata) and Franck. These composers greatly inspired the organ builder Aristide Cavallé-Coll, who built the organ of Notre Dame.

The second half of the recording is dedicated to organists and composers who served Notre Dame and its instrument: Balbastre, Vierne, and Cochereau. I also included some works of Maurice Ravel (transcriptions I have made), as 2025 marked the 150th anniversary of his birth.

Q: What are you looking forward to doing on this next trip to Northern California?

I hope to take time to admire some of the beautiful landscapes of this magnificent state — perhaps some of the tallest sequoias in the world — and spend a little time in Napa Valley, ideally to sample some excellent wines (there are so many!).

Q: What are some of your favorite places or experiences you can recommend to someone visiting Paris — besides going to the Cathedral of Notre Dame, of course?

One of my favorite places is Place Dauphine, about a five-minute walk from Notre Dame, on the west side of the Île de la Cité. Then I recommend a walk along the banks of the Île Saint-Louis, just beyond Notre Dame.

In between, you can eat at my favorite "cantine," le Pain d'Épices, a restaurant on Rue du Bellay and also a headquarters for French comedians.

Then admire the views of Paris from the bridges over the Seine, and end the day with a charming and poetic "soirée" in Montmartre. Of course, there are so many other wonderful places in this fabulous city to discover that make you feel like you are escaping time.

See Vincent Dubois in concert Thursday, April 23 at 7:30 p.m. (doors open at 6:30 p.m.) at Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church, located at 13601 Saratoga Ave. Find tickets (\$30) and more information at st-andrews-saratoga.org or call (408) 867-3493.