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GUSTAVE CHARPENTIER

Gustave Charpentier (June 25, 1860 – February 18, 1956) was a French composer, best known for his opera *Louise*. He was born in Dieuze, the son of a baker, and after studying at the conservatoire in Lille entered the Paris Conservatoire in 1881. There he studied compositions under Jules Massenet and in 1887 won the Prix de Rome for his cantata *Didon*. During the time in Rome that the prize gave him, he wrote the orchestral *Impressions d'Italie* and began work on the libretto and music for what would become his best-known work, the opera *Louise*.

Charpentier returned to Paris, and continued to compose, including songs on texts by Charles Baudelaire and Voltaire. He eventually completed *Louise*, and it was accepted for production by the Opéra-Comique. A realistic portrait of Parisian working-class life, it is sometimes considered a French example of verismo opera.

The premiere of *Louise* on February 2, 1900 under the baton of André Messager made it the first new opera to be produced at the Opéra-Comique in the twentieth century. It was an immediate success, soon being performed all over the world and bringing Charpentier wide acclaim. It also launched the career of the Scottish soprano Mary Garden, who took over the title role during an early performance. A film version of the work was made in 1939 with Grace Moore in the title role, and *Louise* is still occasionally performed today, with the soprano aria "Depuis le jour" a popular recital piece.

In 1902, Charpentier founded the Conservatoire Populaire Mimi Pinson, intended to provide a free artistic education to Paris's working girls. However, he became unproductive as a composer. He worked on a sequel to *Louise*, *Julien, ou la vie d'un poète*, but it was not as great a success as *Louise* on its 1913 premiere and was quickly forgotten. Charpentier wrote virtually no more music for the rest of his life. He died in Paris.