

Midnight at St Etienne



Tournemire
arr. Duruflé
*Improvisation sur
le Te Deum*; Vierne
Fantômes (no.4 of
Pièces de fantaisie

– *Suite 3*, Op.54); *Scherzo* (mvt
3 of *Symphony no.6 in B minor*,
Op.59); *Final* (mvt 5 of *Symphony
no.5 in A minor*, Op.47); Duruflé
Suite pour orgue Op.5: *Prélude*;
Sicilienne; *Toccata*; David Briggs
*Le tombeau de Duruflé: Veni
creator; Rorate caeli desuper;*
*Ave Maria; Adeste fideles; Hodie
Christus natus est; Puer natus est
nobis; Omnes de Saba venient;*
Attende Domine; Pange lingua;
Ecce lignum crucis; Christus vincit

Joseph Nolan plays the organ of
Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, Paris

The title of Joseph Nolan's latest
CD – itself prompted by Woody
Allen's *Midnight in Paris* movie
– promises a thoroughly Gallic
atmosphere and that is exactly what
we get from this veteran recorder of
the Parisian repertoire.

From the first seconds of the
opening Tournemire, the full-
throated organ could only be
French, and the sheer quality
of the blend in the Vierne that
follows shows off the instrument
impressively (perhaps there's a
touch of sameness in tone and
texture, but the darting jaunty
Scherzo and rollicking *Finale* are
especially nice).

Musically, things get meatier
when we reach the Duruflé *Suite*
and then David Briggs's Duruflé-
inspired piece, which together
form the bulk of the CD.

The organ at St Etienne – a large
and visually gorgeous instrument
with a complex building history
including Cavallé, Coll and



If this is Duruflé in contemplative
mood, the concluding *Toccata* is
thrilling and fierce and played by
Nolan with the virtuosity he shows
throughout the disc; but more than
that, it is unusually musically
satisfying here too. As Nolan
rightly says, 'the toccata comes
alive when it is played as [part of]
a suite, not as a stand alone and
empty showpiece'.

Briggs's *Tombeau de Duruflé*,
receiving its world première
recording here, stands in the
long tradition of French *tombeau*
tributes revived in the last century.
Here we have 11 plainchant-based
movements tracing the story of
Christ, from *Veni Creator* through
the Nativity and Crucifixion to
Christus Vincit at the conclusion.
Its musical language certainly has
a French feel at times but Briggs is
not afraid to stray from that – it is
very far from directly imitative, and
nearly always belongs confidently
to the 21st century.

Many of the movements would
work well on their own. The *Rorate
Caeli Desuper* with its reed solo
would be an effective prelude or
even a concert item; *Adeste Fidelis*
would make a fine voluntary for a
grand Christmas service; the gentle,
flowing *Puer Natus* is lovely, and
so is the *Pange Lingua* movement,
the latter very much like a chorale
prelude on the plainchant theme.

Indeed, the disc is worth it
for the Briggs première alone,
although the Duruflé *Suite* is also
an outstanding rendering of a work
by one of the French repertoire's
most ravishing composers.

Programme notes are
informative and insightful despite
a touch of purple prose; a handful
of misprints on the sleeve ("Vierne"
with an acute accent) hardly

including Cavaliere-Gon and
Clicquot – was Duruflé's own
for more than half a century,
so, of course, his music sounds
gorgeously at home here right from
the long sustained note that opens
the *Suite* and those passages so
reminiscent of the *Requiem* that
follow.

with an acute accent) hardly
detract from the music.

Barnaby Page