

WIDOR Organ Works - SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD438 [SSi] Classical Music Reviews: September 2017 - MusicWeb-International

Charles-Marie WIDOR (1844-1937)

Solo Organ Works

Suite Latine, Op. 86 [34:14]

Trois Nouvelles Pièces Op. 87 [13:49]

Bach's Memento [24:43]

Marche Americaine [03:55]

Conte d'Avril: No. 6. Marche Nuptiale [05:39]

Joseph Nolan (organ)

rec. Cavaille-Coll Organ of St Francois de Sales, Lyon, 2013; Cavaillé-Coll Organ of Saint-Sernin, Toulouse, 2014

SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD438 [48:10 + 34:29]

To quote a friend of mine "I have the Toccata, I have done Widor", and despite the fact that he plays the said Toccata (Symphony No. 5), and plays it well indeed, he is so wrong. There is so much more lovely music to enjoy by this enigmatic figure of French music, and not just in his organ works either. Whilst, sadly, I do not have all of Joseph Nolan's excellent recordings of Widor's Organ Symphonies, those that I do own soon became my favoured recordings and occupy pride of place in my collection.

Having completed the cycle of symphonies, Nolan has now turned his attention to the lesser-known works for solo organ, all of which were composed after the symphonies had been completed; he brings to them all the panache and skill he brought to the better-known works, performing them in a fashion that should see them gain new popularity. These works are no mere fillers, as is clearly evident here.

The first of the works here is *Suite Latine*; it was composed in 1927, and featured in Widor's final foreign concert, so the composer himself must have thought highly of the work. It consists of six movements, three of them, ii *Beatus vir*, iv *Ave Maris Stella* and vi *Lauda Sion* being based upon Gregorian chant melodies. Whilst for me these are the three stand-out movements of the work, the remaining three pieces, especially the opening Preludium, mark this as a work that is no mere afterthought of an ageing composer, but one that is every bit as important as those that had gone before.

This is followed by the *Trois Nouvelles Pièces*, the composer's final organ work, completed in 1934 when he was 90. The title might be seen as something of a misnomer, as they seem to be just three new pieces, rather than three pieces in the more modern style. They all have a meditative quality to them; perhaps these represent the musings of an old man, one who lacks the vigour to play his famous Toccatas; whatever the reason, these three short pieces make a fine conclusion to the first disc.

The second disc opens with *Bach's Memento*. This is the earliest of the major works presented here, having been composed in 1925, some 25 years after the tenth and final of Widor's organ symphonies. The booklet notes describe this suite of six pieces as "paraphrase-transcriptions", a term that does not do justice to the work, since these are more 'elaborations' or even 'variations on' certain well known themes of J S Bach. I know that Widor described the pieces as "orchestrations", but even this is somewhat misleading; take the fourth movement for instance, which clearly opens with the first of the Schübler Chorales, before Widor embarks on a series of short variations, sometimes masking the original completely, before returning to the original Chorale. An interesting work and a valuable addition to the recorded catalogues, especially in Nolan's hands.

The final two works presented here are transcriptions of music Widor composed much earlier. His *Marche Americaine* has its origins in a series of twelve piano pieces composed in 1876, and here transcribed by Marcel Dupré. The *Marche Nuptiale* comes from incidental music for a play loosely based upon Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* which Widor composed in 1890. Both pieces are

typical Widor, even when in the hands of his student Dupré, and both deserve their place in this survey of the composer's complete solo organ works.

The playing of Joseph Nolan, as with all the volumes of the symphonies that I have, is excellent, he has an ability to bring this music to life, especially on these wonderful old organs. The recorded sound is excellent as are the booklet notes. This recording is a must for all organ devotees and especially Widor fans.

Stuart Sillitoe