

playing here is the arc Feltsman manages to draw throughout the work, reaching the climax with impressive power. The building intensity of the passionate harmonies is wonderful under his fingers: an interpretation well deserving of a place beside Horowitz's monumentally powerful account.

Overall this is a formidable disc, a must-have for any Scriabin enthusiast, and, as is often the case with the team at Nimbus, the sound has a warm depth of colour which suits Feltsman's playing perfectly.

Francesco Burns

Widor Volume 1.

New

Organ Symphonies – No. 5 in F minor, Op. 42 No. 1; No. 6 in G minor, Op. 42 No. 2.

Joseph Nolan (organ).

Signum Classics SIGCD292 (full price, 1 hour 13 minutes). Played on the Cavaillé-Coll organ of La Madeleine, Paris. Website www.signumrecords.com. Producer Adrian Peacock. Engineer Andrew Mellor. Dates May 18th–24th, 2011.

The growth, in the second half of the nineteenth century, of the concept of organ symphonies may have been, at first, exclusively a Franco-Belgian development, stemming perhaps from Berlioz's five-movement *Symphonie fantastique* (in itself not an entirely original concept). Yet it remains a curious fact that, with few exceptions, the multi-movement nature of such organ works did not transfer to solely orchestral symphonic writing.

In the organ world, the genius of the great organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll (the bicentenary of whose birth was celebrated early last year) almost literally played into the hands of composers, aided by the later developments in Liszt's and Wagner's music (exemplified in later ecclesiastical works by certain French composers). Structurally they reach as far forward as Milhaud's five-movement Second Symphony (1944) and Messiaen's ten-movement *Turangalila-Symphonie* (1949) – both, incidentally, premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra (and it was in Massachusetts that complete recordings of Widor's Fifth and Sixth Organ Symphonies were made, 12 years apart, by Richard Ellsasser).

It is the French connection, rather than that of New England, that concerns us here, and although Widor himself brilliantly recorded the Toccata from his Fifth Symphony, 80 years ago, at the age of 88 (!), that was in the great Parisian church of St Sulpice, where he had been organist for over 60 years, not in the church selected here by Joseph Nolan, La Madeleine (both churches contain notable examples of Cavaillé-Coll's work).

The structure of Widor's ten organ symphonies remains unique and they were subjected to almost constant revision, but there



Joseph Nolan

Andrew Mellor

is a difference between their 'symphonic' nature as opposed to an adoption of 'sonata form'. This may be a fine line, yet we can still be astonished by the continuity of genuine symphonic writing in Widor's works, such as – in the Fifth Symphony – by having an opening movement which is a set of variations, and by ending the work with a Toccata (only in Vaughan Williams's Eighth Symphony do we re-encounter such an enveloping symphonic plan).

It must be clear, even to the non-organ specialist, that these works demand much of the player who would undertake them, and not merely in their technical demands. Nolan gives completely convincing performances of both works, managing to avoid the somewhat pietistic nature which is not so far removed from the ethos of several of Widor's slow movements – and which some pious organists have been known to exaggerate – by the adoption of intelligent and finely sustained tempos, and by avoiding the emotive magnification of certain passages, which ought surely to be performed without emphasis. Nolan is excellent in this regard throughout both symphonies and his registration is exemplary.

However, the newcomer to these works may encounter some difficulties in unravelling Widor's harmonic and contrapuntal thought here, for the actual sound quality is not as clear as one should wish. There is a disappointing element of obfuscation in the sound, which may be endemic to La Madeleine, but which one hoped the engineers might have been able to address more successfully than appears to be the case. This remains, of course, the 'sound' of the church, about which Ateş Orga writes in his accompanying notes, but to appreciate more fully that which the composer has put down, and on which he spent much time, we need a greater resultant clarity than mere 'atmosphere'. Only on sonic grounds do I

hesitate to recommend wholeheartedly this issue: Nolan's interpretations are musically first-class. The booklet tells us that he recorded all ten symphonies at La Madeleine at the time these recordings were made, so future issues in this series may very well reflect a similar aural setting.

Despite my reservations (which are not serious) concerning the recording quality, organ enthusiasts should certainly acquire this disc for the sake of Nolan's admirable musical intelligence.

Robert Matthew-Walker

The Sons of the Morning Vaughan Williams

New

The Lake in the Mountains. Hymn Tune Prelude on 'Song 13' by Orlando Gibbons. Job – A Masque for Dancing (arr. Vally Lasker). Gurney Five Preludes. Chorale Prelude on 'Rockingham' (arr. Stephen Banfield). Iain Burnside (piano).

Albion Records ALBCD015 (full price, 1 hour 3 minutes). Website www.albionrecords.org. Producer Andrew Walton. Engineer Mike Clements. Dates January 18th–20th, 2012.

The Albion label, an offshoot of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, has, in the relatively few years of its existence, issued a number of recordings of the composer's music, some of them of great value and interest, the ethos of the label being that each issue will be planned always to include a first recording. Yet as most of Vaughan Williams's music has at one time or another been committed to disc, a slightly wider remit may have to evolve.

Nonetheless, I do not feel that this latest CD is quite as valuable as the earlier ones: in the first place, VW's solo piano music is more extensive than just these two pieces, and there was certainly enough playing time on the disc to have accommodated it all. Not that the remaining pieces add up to much in musical terms, being written for teaching purposes, but they exist and have been published and a good opportunity to re-record them has been missed. It might have been better to have included his original music for two pianos as well, for the inclusion of Vally Lasker's solo piano arrangement of the ballet *Job* was made for dancers, for choreographers' studio rehearsal purposes, not for concert or recital use. As such, it does not wholly represent the original orchestral contours, but it is a curio, obviously, made with the composer's full approval, and in comprehensive terms deserves at least one