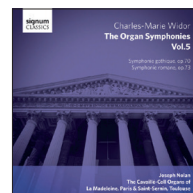


# Instrumental



**Widor**  
**Complete Organ Symphonies Volume 5**  
 Joseph Nolan *org*  
 SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD347  
 ★★★★★

## THE ORGANIST AS COLOSSUS

Nolan brings his Widor cycle to a climax in vast musical edifices

This fifth volume in Perth organist Joseph Nolan's magisterial survey of the complete organ works of Charles-Marie Widor ends his already highly acclaimed traversal of the ten organ symphonies on which Widor's reputation chiefly rests. Where Widor's Op. 13 set of four organ symphonies favours the suite, the four of Op. 42 are more consciously symphonic and discursive. By contrast, 1894's *Symphonie Gothique*, Op. 70 and 1900's *Symphonie Romane* represent a glorious late florescence where the former looks backwards, the latter towards a brave new century.

The Ninth Symphony was written for the grand Cavaillé-Coll organ of the Gothic Church of St. Ouen in Rouen; here it is performed on the equally grand Cavaillé-Coll of L'Église de la Madeleine in Paris. Nolan performs the Tenth on its intended instrument, the beautiful Cavaillé-Coll of the Romanesque La basilique Saint-Sernin in Toulouse.

Nolan is Master of Music at St. George's Cathedral, Perth and was recently made a Chevalier in the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in recognition of his services to French Music, and it comes as no surprise that recent forays into purely orchestral conducting have been met with great enthusiasm, such is his keen ear for the dynamic warp and weft of the musical fabric.

In both symphonies, Gregorian chant provides a fecund source of musical

transformation and metamorphosis: in the *Symphonie Gothique*, the Introit *Puer natus est nobis* from a Christmas Day Mass; in the *Symphonie Romane*, the Gradual *Haec dies, quam fecit Dominus* from an Easter Sunday Mass.

And here is Nolan again, standing like a latter-day Colossus between the two, his generous tempi allowing space for a meditative brilliance – his hallmark – to reach every nook and cranny of these great musical edifices.

The listener is therefore able to enter the *Symphonie Gothique* and marvel at the upper voices rising like delicate spires above the sonorous pedal foundations, the shimmering *Andante sostenuto*, the fugal

*Allegro* which races pell-mell to a shattering finale and, best of all, the capacious *Toccata*, its initially delicate variations rising to a thundering climax before petering out into a mellow-hued chorale at the end.

And if the *Symphonie Romane* is more austere, more introspective than the previous works, in Nolan's hands it takes on the aspect of a Romanesque cloister and its garden, through which one wanders, losing oneself first in the *Moderato*, then the *Choral*, then the *Cantilene*, then the *Finale* – all of which partake of that seemingly infinite metamorphosis which, as much for a Bach as for a Widor, is proof of eternity. **Will Yeoman**

“  
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