

WIDOR

Symphony 8

SAINT-SAËNS | ROPARTZ

audite

Jean-Baptiste Dupont

Cavaillé-Coll Organ of St. Sernin, Toulouse



CHARLES-MARIE WIDOR

**Organ Symphony No. 8 in B major,
Op. 42/4 (1929 version)**

- I. Allegro risoluto 8:03
- II. Moderato cantabile 5:16
- III. Allegro 4:19
- IV. Variations 10:51
- V. Adagio 7:03
- VI. Finale 6:24

JOSEPH GUY ROPARTZ

6 Pièces pour grand orgue

- II. Prière 5:21

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

Cyprès et lauriers in D minor, Op. 156

- I. Cyprès 7:11



Recording Widor's 8th Organ Symphony at Saint-Sernin in Toulouse is a bit like the fulfillment of an old dream. I have the privilege to play the Cavaillé-Coll organ in Saint-Sernin very regularly, and since many years I wanted to record a disc on it. Widor's 8th Organ Symphony was one of the bedside recordings of my childhood. It needed the feeling of having acquired a certain legitimacy or musical maturity, and the right circumstances and schedule to begin learning this symphony which is considered the most complex work of the composer.

A question arose at the beginning of the recording sessions: is the organ of Saint-Sernin – and in more general also other big Cavaillé-Coll instruments installed in churches with often large acoustics – really the ideal instrument for the interpretation of a Widor Organ Symphony, particularly the Eighth which is sometimes of great harmonic density? Is the organ really capable to faithfully reproduce the intents of the composer?

So let's throw a cat among the pigeons: the answer is yes and no!

No, because the organ of Saint-Sernin has a number of pitfalls which considerably complicate the performance of this music. Some examples: In Saint-Sernin, there is no coupler of the 3rd manual (swell) and the 2nd (positive). The organist is obliged to contort between the 1st and the 3rd manual for parts which are supposed to be played on the 2nd or simultaneously on the 2nd and 3rd, or 1st and 2nd. All these fairly simple manual changes when you have a III/II coupler become complex here and add a considerable number of manipulations. The three keyboards have different mechanisms with three touches and attack speeds. The old Barker machine from the previous organ was retained on the 3rd manual. Its slowness is very noticeable when the 2nd (with direct transmission) and the 3rd manuals are played simultaneously. This problem is audible in "*a tempo ma un poco più animato*" of the *Variations* where the register "Cor de Nuit" of the 2nd manual dialogues with the "Haubois" of the 3rd. We could also mention the enormous pedal $10^{2/3}$, unusable in some parts of the *Variations* where a 32' flute is wanted by the composer but too bulky in Saint-Sernin. Of course, as Widor himself pointed out, anything relating to registration is at the discretion of the performer.

Yes, because the organ of Saint-Sernin has a sound, a sound aesthetic, in perfect coherence with Widor's musical style. It is the right place for historicity and authenticity. There is no need to demonstrate in detail that the aesthetics of the instrument match Widor's musical aesthetics: he himself confessed that if he "had not experienced the seduction" of the sounds of the Cavaillé-Coll organ in Saint-Sulpice, he "would not have written organ music". His music takes its full dimension and unmatched flavour on Saint-Sernin's organ. This repertoire – like others if one admits to deviate from an authentic historical interpretation – is transcended by its tones. If the musician is receptive to it, this organ, with its harmony, touch and mechanisms, sets the path for the interpretation. The magic happens, and we forget all the pitfalls through the huge pleasure of playing this organ – and this 130 years old complex and sometimes capricious machine turns out to be a prodigious musical instrument.

Interpretation considerations

The performer who studies a work from the past systematically questions himself for the different musical orientations in regard to the future performance – even more in the context of a recording project: the performance in a concert is passing; the disc leaves a lasting mark.

As much as the instrument's choice is obvious, this is quite different for the interpretation: Should it be free or historically informed? Should the performer re-appropriate the piece and affix its playing style or respect the original thoughts of the composer?

Here is my approach: a measured liberty while trying to remain faithful to what can be understood from the composer's will.

Let's consider that there is, first, the interpretation during the learning process which is shaped over time by the mechanical appropriation of the work, the understanding of its structure, the observance of the text, the scrutiny of the agogics and the first musical orientations.

Widor's numerous writings (prefaces to the original editions of the symphonies, the 1914th Bach edition, the Lemmens method, etc.) as well as testimonies of his teaching, provide a multitude of information and clues on his musical thought.

In a second step, there is the regular performance of the piece on the organ in Saint-Sernin and the possibility of thus refining the study of a work. This organ immediately tells you what is and isn't achievable, giving precious clues to the meticulous performer.

The third stage is the time of the maturation of the work in the mind of the musician and through the performance in recitals on different instruments. In recitals I am influenced by the sounds, the aesthetics and the size of the instruments, the touch, the acoustics, etc. I allow myself some freedom within the framework set during the learning phase. Thus, each interpretation is different and permits a rediscovery of the work, contributing to its maturation.

The last step then is the recording. A link between the work, the performer and the instrument must be created. The microphones often make things easier: they set free from the need for clarity of intonation for the listener, who would find himself bathed in sounds in the building without microphones, and enable more liberty in the choice of tempo, articulation, phrasing, legato, etc.

WIDOR

Charles-Marie Widor, born in Lyon on February 21st, 1844, first studied with his father, organist at Saint-François-de-Sales in Lyon, before continuing his studies in Brussels with François-Joseph Fétis (theory, composition) and Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens (organ).

In 1860, he returned to Lyon, where he became organist at Saint-François. Around 1865, he moved to Paris and became assistant of Saint-Saëns at La Madeleine in 1868. In 1870, he was appointed Lefébure-Wély's substitute at the Cavaillé-Coll organ of Saint-Sulpice. He never officially became titular organist of the church although he held this post for 64 years.

Widor was appointed organ professor at the Paris Conservatory from 1890 to 1896, succeeding César Franck. In addition, he was appointed in the musical composition class when Théodore Dubois became director of the institution (1905). Among his pupils were Louis Vierne, Albert Schweitzer, Charles Tournemire, Marcel Dupré, Arthur Honegger, Edgar Varèse, and Darius Milhaud. Widor radically reformed the teaching of the organ by the rationalization of its learning and by the knowledge of Johann Sebastian Bach's main works.

As an organ virtuoso, Widor has performed in 23 countries. He was often invited to inaugurate Cavaillé-Coll instruments such as those of Notre-Dame de Paris, Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Saint-Ouen de Rouen, the Palais du Trocadéro, and the new organ of his native parish, Saint-François in Lyon.

He played in public until the age of 90 and resigned from his post in Saint-Sulpice on December 31st, 1933.

The 8th Organ Symphony

Widor's organ music is designed for the large symphonic organs of Aristide Cavaillé-Coll usually found in several of the main churches in Paris. The 9th Symphony, the so-called "Gothique", is dedicated to the organ of Saint-Ouen de Rouen, and the 10th and last Symphony "Romane", composed in 1900, is dedicated to the organ of Saint-Sernin in Toulouse.

Widor is resolutely the first symphonist in organ literature. He knew German symphonic music, but his taste was rather in the French tradition of the suite. The title "Symphonies" that Widor gave to his great works binds them to the German symphonic tradition, but Widor's symphonies are not traditional symphonies in four movements. Widor's first eight organ symphonies are more like French suites than Beethoven's style of symphonies.

The 8th Symphony was originally composed in 1886 and published in 1887. Throughout his career as a composer, Widor has continuously reworked his works. Thus, the 8th was revised between 1888 and 1892, in 1901, 1911, 1920 and finally 1929. During the process, the fourth original movement, the *Prélude* (from 1901), was amputated.

For this recording I have chosen to perform the symphony in its final version in the 1929 edition.

Although the *Prelude* was removed, the symphony remains copious and includes six movements: *Allegro risoluto*, *Moderato cantabile*, *Allegro*, *Variations*, *Adagio*, *Finale*.

The peculiarities of this symphony lie in its character, the writing technique and the exploitation of the resources of the organ which make it particularly orchestral. This orchestral spirit pervades all the movements of the symphony.

Thus, with the **Allegro risoluto** opening the symphony is completely in the spirit of a French Overture with its orchestral introduction, unusual for organ music, in the first two measures by two groups of ascending chords in B major. Widor has the will to move away from traditional organistic composition and to push its writing and execution technique to new limits. The traditional Allegro form of sonatas is abandoned in favour of a Rondo form variant.

The **Moderato cantabile** contrasts with the previous movement by its lyrical character. The musical style is familiar and similar to the Allegro cantabile of the 5th Symphony. This graceful movement has been transcribed several times, in particular by the cellist Jules Delsart who made a version for cello and piano in the 1890s. The work remains generally in the tradition of the organ music but some orchestral effects are relevant, such as the pedal pizzicati (similar to cellos and double basses in orchestral music) or the musical discourse of the development section. The form is a typical mono-thematic A-B-A sonata form.

The fearsome **Allegro** takes the role usually assigned to a Scherzo. It has its lively character but not its formal structure. The main theme works in canon: in the first part, the canon is distributed between the manuals while in the recapitulation, it is distributed between the right hand and the pedal. Similarly to a Scherzo, the form is simple and tripartite (A-B-A'), B being a development from A and not a trio.

The **Variations** constitute the largest piece written for the organ by Widor. Its theme is presented on the bass (pedal) in the manner of baroque passacaglia contrary to what the title suggests. A tribute to Bach and the influence of the Brahms's coeval Symphony No. 4 on Widor can be seen here. But the variations are linked together by entertainment or interludes. The composition style is very diverse and dense. The spirit is of course orchestral (symphonic), but some variations show a great pianistic virtuosity typical of the period. The two parts build up both in slow crescendos leading to a climax and ending in an almost identical cadenza. They are divided by a central *Cantabile* in G major.

One of Widor's deepest and most lyrical works, the remarkable **Adagio** is the pinnacle of an orchestral composition written for the organ. The chromatic density, the melodic moves of the theme and the long expressive sentences are reminiscent of Wagner's musical universe. A central development responds to this lyrical theme. It begins in the manner of a fugato. Then, it freely develops elements of the main theme in a crescendo and an intensified texture leading to a culminating point of orchestral texture where the brass of the orchestra interacts with other instruments. The melody of the theme returns in the soprano above an arpeggiated accompaniment, in a recapitulation full of tenderness and nostalgia.

The **Finale** is in the same spirit as the great Allegros from previous symphonies and is very similar to the Finale of the 7th Symphony or the first movement of the 6th Symphony. The two descending octave jumps echo the introduction of the first movement. This *Finale* is the most organistic movement of the symphony and structured in sonata form variant. Widor's contemporaries had very opposing opinions about it. Albert Schweitzer was very critical: he wrote in his score "Wie schade, dass Widor das geschrieben hat!" [Sic] (What a shame Widor wrote this). However, this work has a strong dramaturgy and expressiveness enhanced by the power and the sounds of the organ of Saint-Sernin.

The additional works

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921): *Cyprès*, from *Cyprès et lauriers*, Op. 156 for organ and orchestra, was written by Camille Saint-Saëns in 1919 to celebrate the victory of the Allies during the First World War. The first movement, *Cyprès*, is a dark, sorrowful, painful piece, with a slow tempo and composed for organ solo for the sake of sobriety. Its title evokes death and mourning symbolized by the cypress, the cemetery tree. We have chosen to record this work to celebrate the 100th anniversary of its composition.

Joseph Guy Ropartz (1864-1955): *Prière* in E major (1896), from *Six pièces pour grand orgue*. Unlike Widor's symphony, where the very title implies profane and concert use, Ropartz's organ work seems to be embraced by the wish to adapt it for liturgical use.

Jean-Baptiste Dupont enjoys an international career. He gave more than 500 recitals in most of European countries, in the USA, and Russia, including e.g. cathedrals in Paris, New York, Berlin, London, Cologne, Copenhagen, Vienna, Moscow, and Berlin, or prestigious venues such as the Mariinsky Concert Hall and Conservatory St. Petersburg, the Bolshoi Theatre Moscow, the Philharmonic Halls in Berlin and Essen etc.

He has a broad repertoire ranging from Renaissance to Contemporary, including many transcriptions. Jean-Baptiste Dupont has been hailed as one of the greatest young improvisers on the organ. He is a frequent guest performer at international festivals and radio stations. As a specialist for improvisation, he is regularly invited to give master classes and workshops. He has been a jury member in competitions in France, USA, and Germany.

Born near Toulouse in 1979, Jean-Baptiste Dupont began his musical studies at the piano aged 9 but stopped after a year – according to his piano teacher he had no musical talent. At age 11, he began to be passionate about the organ and learned by ear the famous Bach Toccata in D minor and the 3rd Choral by C. Franck. However, his first organ teacher gave up on him after two lessons. His second organ teacher finally made him learn “real” music (Bach, Pachelbel, Buxtehude etc.). At the age of 16, he was admitted to the Toulouse Conservatoire organ class after a failed first audition attempt. Four years later, he was excluded from the conservatory because he did not attend music theory lessons but was readmitted the following year thanks to the support of his organ teachers. He graduated with distinction from the organ department at the Conservatoire in Toulouse. As one of the top alumni of the Conservatoire, he was awarded the Francis Vidal Prize by the city of Toulouse in 2006, and subsequently continued his studies at the Centre d’Études Supérieures de Musique et de Danse in Toulouse where he obtained performing and teaching diplomas, e.g. the Diplôme National Supérieur Professionnel de Musicien . His organ, improvisation, harpsichord and piano teachers include Michel Bouvard, Louis Robilliard, Philippe Lefebvre, Jan Willem Jansen and Thérèse Dussaut.

Jean-Baptiste Dupont was finalist and laureate in many organ competitions, both in interpretation and improvisation. He won 1st prize (improvisation) in St Albans International Organ Competition in July 2009, 2nd prize, audience prize, Glinka and De Boni Arte foundations prizes in Mikael Tariverdiev International Organ Competition in Kaliningrad (Russia) in 2009, and 3rd prize in Xavier Darasse International Organ Competition in Toulouse (France) in 2008, to name a few.

His discography includes 15 records; his 10 recordings of the complete organ works by Max Reger have been acclaimed by the international press and gained international recognition. Subsequently, Jean-Baptiste Dupont was invited to several symposiums and international events dedicated to the composer, among them events in Germany in 2016, celebrating the centenary of Max Reger’s death.

Jean-Baptiste Dupont was appointed organist at Bordeaux Cathedral after a competition which took place in April 2012. He was founder and artistic director of Cathedra (an association for sacred music at Bordeaux Cathedral) from 2014 to 2019 and is a strong advocate for the reconstruction of the cathedral organ. From 1996 to 2006, he was assistant to experts in organ restoration projects. In addition, he assorted an inventory of Midi-Pyrénées organs. Since 2019, he is acting as independent organ consultant.

THE BASILICA'S ORGAN

DISPOSITION

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The first organ verifiably known in Saint-Sernin dates back to the end of the 17th century. In 1845, a new organ was built by Daublaine & Callinet. After the completion of the restoration of the basilica by Viollet-le-Duc, Aristide Cavaillé-Coll was asked to rebuild the organ on April 8, 1887. Cavaillé-Coll reused a large part of the excellent material by Daublaine & Callinet which formed the foundation for the creation of one of his most remarkable organs. The work was completed in 1889, when the instrument was received by a commission of 13 members. It took them three days to examine the instrument in all its details, delivering an admiring report which immediately raised the great organ of Toulouse to the ranks of a masterpiece.

There were several interventions during the 20th century: modifications in the wind system, relatively minor changes in the disposition.

It was fully restored by Boisseau-Cattiaux between 1993 and 1996, restoring the instrument to its original condition. The inauguration took place during the first festival "Toulouse Les Orgues" in October 1996.

Finally, it was overhauled in 2017-18 by the organ builder Robert Frères and the mechanics complemented by Pesce. Through these changes the organ recovered all its nobility and poetry. This recording is the first after this remarkable restoration was completed.

<i>1^{er} clavier</i> Grand-orgue 56 notes 20 jeux	<i>2^e clavier</i> Positif 56 notes 10 jeux	<i>3^e clavier</i> Récit express. 56 notes 14 jeux	Pédale 30 notes 10 jeux	Effets auxiliaires
Montre 16'	Montre 8'	Quintaton 16'	Flûte 16'	Orage
Bourdon 16'	Bourdon 8'	Diapason 8'	Soubasse 16'	Pédale en 4
Montre 8'	Salicional 8'	Flûte harmonique 8'	Quinte 10 ² / ₃ '	Tirasse GO
Bourdon 8'	Unda maris 8'	Gambe 8'	Grosse Flûte 8'	Tirasse pos
Flûte harmonique 8'	Prestant 4'	Voix céleste 8'	Violoncelle 8'	Tirasse rec
Salicional 8'	Flûte douce 4'	Flûte octaviante 4'	Octave 4'	Anches Ped
Gambe 8'	Carillon III	Octavin 2'	Bombarde 32'	Anches GO
Prestant 4'	Trompette 8'	Cornet V	Bombarde 16'	Anches Pos
Flûte octaviante 4'	Basson/hautbois 8'	Bombarde 16'	Trompette 8'	Anches Rec
Quinte 2 ² / ₃ '	Clairon 4'	Trompette harmo- nique 8'	Clairon 4'	Chamades
Doublette 2'		Clarinette 8'		Expression R
Fourniture V		Basson/hautbois 8'		Tremolo
Cymbale IV		Voix humaine 8'		Go en 16
Cornet V		Clairon harmonique		Appel GO
Bombarde 16'		4'		Pos / GO
Trompette 8'				R / GO
Clairon 4'				Pos / R
Clairon 2'				R en 16
Chamade 8'				Appel R
Chamade 4'				Pos en 8 et 16



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VIDEO on
YOUTUBE

HD-DOWNLOADS
stereo & surround
available at audite.de

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November 13 - 15, 2019
recording location:
Basilica of Saint-Sernin, Toulouse
executive producer:
Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff
recording format:
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photos:
Laurent Belet
art direction and design:
AB•Design

POINT
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