

signum
CLASSICS

Charles-Marie Widor
The Organ Symphonies
Vol.3

Symphony No.3, op.13
Symphony No.4, op.13



Joseph Nolan
The Cavillé-Coll Organ of La Madeleine, Paris

WIDOR: THE ORGAN SYMPHONIES, VOL.3
THE CAVAILLÉ-COLL ORGAN OF
LA MADELEINE, PARIS

Organ Symphony No.3 in E minor, Op.13 No.3

1	I. Prélude: moderato	[8.58]
2	II. Minuetto	[5.20]
3	III. Marcia	[7.26]
4	IV. Adagio	[3.50]
5	V. Finale: Allegro molto	[7.50]

Organ Symphony No.4 in F minor, Op.13 No.3

6	I. Toccata	[4.09]
7	II. Fugue: Moderato assai	[4.10]
8	III. Andante cantabile: Dolce	[5.36]
9	IV. Scherzo: Allegro vivace	[6.38]
10	V. Adagio	[5.28]
11	VI. Finale: Moderato	[5.38]
Total timings:		[65.01]

JOSEPH NOLAN ORGAN

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ORGAN SYMPHONIES, VOL.3
Nos. 3 & 4

The deaths of Pierre, Ravel, Roussel, Vierne and Widor in 1937 marked the *annus horribilis* of 20th-century French music. Widor – Lyon-born, member of the Académie des beaux-arts of the Institut de France, Grand-officier de la Légion d'honneur, for over 60 years 'king' of the Cavallé-Coll in Saint-Sulpice, successor to Franck and Dubois at the Paris Conservatoire – was then into his 94th year. 'Nestor of French music [...] master organist, composer of operas, symphonies, and organ works, teacher of three generations of French composers' (Nicolas Slonimsky, *Music since 1900*). In his nine decades he lived through a world from Second Empire to Third Republic, Commune to Great War, from Rossini, Berlioz and Liszt, Brahms, Bruckner and Busoni, to Debussy, Stravinsky and Varèse, Mahler, Massenet and Messiaen. His salon was that of a cosmopolitan man of culture and refinement. The court of the city sat his table. At the fashionable Restaurant Foyot on the Left Bank he knew 'everyone', his student Marcel Dupré remembered: 'senators, writers, painters, the entire Parisian artistic élite'. His philosophy was simple. 'All that relates to the intellectual

domain is intimately bound together by obvious connections: music has certain rapport with painting, sculpture, architecture, design, literature, and even with the exact sciences'. 'The brain of a composer is a sort of sponge that absorbs every day the multiple impressions of life [...] The idea which seems to us newest always proceeds from another idea. "One is always the son of someone" [Beaumarchais's *Figaro*]. 'To live well and long, it is enough to work hard, to eat and drink well, and not to turn your head away from a pretty face.' While a bust of Bach watched over him, countesses of endowment shared his bench and turned pages.

'The Isambard Kingdom Brunel of late 19th-century music, the organ world's Chief Engineer' (Andrew Mellor), Aristide Cavallé-Coll (1811-99) provided composers with an epic medium. Father of the French Romantic tracker-action organ, his monumental edifices of metal, wood and ivory commanded the spaces of Notre Dame (where Sergent and Vierne were incumbents during Widor's lifetime), La Madeleine (Saint-Saëns, Dubois, Fauré), Saint-Clotilde (Franck, Pierné, Tournemire), La Trinité (Guilmant, Messiaen), Saint-Denis (his first instrument, dedicated in 1841), and the old Palais du Trocadéro. Their magnificent mechanisms

and vaulting façades crowned the great abbeys, basilicas and cathedrals from Lyon and Bayeux to Orleans and Rouen. In 1862 his ‘magnum opus’ – comprising more than 100 stops (including two 32-foot ranks), nearly 7,000 pipes, 19 *pédales de combinaison*, 20 wind-chests, seven pneumatic Barker levers (ante-resistance devices equalising touch and lightening action ‘regardless of the physical location of the respective pipework’), eight double-rise reservoirs, and five manuals – was installed in Saint-Sulpice, inaugurated by Saint-Saëns. This was the lead-grey ‘monster’ instrument, with its many voices, colours and harmonic overtones, its gradation and immensity of volume, which was to so famously inspire Widor. ‘You know when you’ve heard a Cavallé-Coll organ,’ Mellor says, ‘just as you know when you’ve eaten a properly dressed salad niçoise. The first thing to hit you is the breadth of the sound: a gentle nave-shaking vibration that feels like a tidal wind. Pressured wind powers all organs, but Cavallé-Coll made it part of his sound; a strange, breathing humanity shot through the entire instrument’s register. Then there’s the stops themselves – distinctive strings that have an alluring mysticism; forceful reeds that seem to protest as if wrongfully imprisoned within the woodwork;

the harnessing of them all with a seamless general crescendo [...] that builds rapidly to an overwhelmingly wide full organ sound’ (*Gramophone*, 2 June 2011).

Presaged to an extent by the ‘moral revolution’ of Franck’s cyclic *Grande pièce symphonique* completed in 1863, the eight ‘Symphonies Op.13 et 42/pour orgue par/Charles Marie Widor/Organiste du Grande Orgue de St Sulpice à Paris’ consolidated the genre between 1871 and 1887, two further ones appearing in 1894 and 1899. Public affection for the occasional movement has never waned – the ‘wedding’ Toccata of the Fifth (recorded by the composer at Saint-Sulpice in April 1932 when he was in his late 80s: a fluid if measured reading, distinctive for its harmonic pointing: ‘you must give the organ time to breathe and speak,’ he was fond of saying), the *Marche pontificale* from the First – but for a while appetite for the complete beasts did. Yet however much critics faulted and faded them, especially following the Second World War, most had to admit that there was in fact an inescapable strength to the music and the tradition that spawned it. In Festival of Britain London, Sackville-West and Shawe-Taylor regretted the ‘endemic disease’ of organist-

composers running through them (pedal-points) – but agreed they were ‘impressive pieces of architecture [with detail] often beautiful in itself’ (*The Record Guide*). Martin Cooper, wearying that organ music per se was interesting merely to organists, called for the prosecution Saint-Saëns’s view that the breed was capable only of ‘harmonious noise rather than precise music’ – while conceding that the ‘skilled improvisation and great brilliance of effect’ of the French school, was ‘universally recognised even in those circles where they are not valued highly’ (*French Music*). Today, their naphthalene-odoured associations a distant memory, Widor’s symphonies need no special pleading.

Dedicated to Cavallé-Coll (1879 edition), the four Symphonies, Op.13, engraved in Leipzig, were published in Paris in early 1872. Prefacing the 1887 printing, Widor justified his intentions and answered his critics. ‘The modern organ,’ he wrote, ‘is essentially symphonic. The new instrument requires a new language, an ideal other than scholastic polyphony. It is no longer the Bach of the Fugue whom we invoke, but the heart-rending melodist, the pre-eminently expressive master of the Prelude, the Magnificat, the B minor Mass, the Cantatas, and the

St Matthew Passion [...] henceforth [one] will have to exercise the same care with the combination of timbres in an organ composition as in an orchestral work’.

Planned initially in six movements (a four-voice Fugue, *Moderato assai*, placed fifth, was omitted subsequently, reappearing around 1910 as one of the *Deux pièces pour grand orgue*, together with the discarded original fourth movement of the Second Symphony), the Third opens with a 6/8 Prélude, dynamically contained. The cut of this – ties, suggestions of fluid cross-metre, chromatic progression, harmonic pacing, modulations – establishes a distinctively active quality, *Moderato* tempo and pedal-pointing notwithstanding. The B minor Minuetto, with a trio in G major and a routine *tierce de picardie* coda, breaks no formal boundaries but is interesting in its ‘orchestration’ and for how Widor uses tessitura, rhythm and simple variation techniques to re-angle appearances of the principal *style ancien* idea (from as early as bar 5). The Marcia in F sharp major unleashes hewn majesty but isn’t all about unrestrained volume. François Sabatier (1991) calls it a ‘rondo à refrain varié’ – confirming a design that’s essentially

ABACA, with the central reprise in (classically 'wrong key') A major (tonally anticipating the fourth movement). The first episode is modulatory; the second, more stabilised, moves from B flat to the home tonic. Both provide quieter, voice-led, counterfoils to the refrain – an imposing idea welding a distinctive anacrusis/downbeat dotted-rhythm with a pedal part democratically melodic and harmonic. Anchored by a slow-moving, pedal-pointed bass line, the 6/8 Adagio, a two-part canon-at-the-octave in A major (soprano-led at one bar's distance), looks to the French *pastorale* tradition, vaguely resonant, albeit not modally, of a Mendelssohnian gondola song. Emphasizing the strong compound/triple time/triplet character of the work as a whole, the 'orchestrally' exuberant, swirlingly over-toned, 12/8 Finale is a sonata *allegro* of flowing movement and fluid structure, displaying Widor's evident delight in dramatising epic, German-descended, musical architecture. Both the principle subjects are urgent in different ways: the first through submediant inflections and short-upbeat/long-downbeat rhythms (which latter feature comes to pervade the music throughout); the second through subdominant minor referencing. The closing *moderato/adagio*, based on the second subject,

draws the curtain down in E major – but with enough side-stepping tension to ensure no easy solace.

Neither sonata rigour nor Beethovenian elementals (cf. Alkan's 1857 piano Symphony) underwrite the Fourth. Affirming, like its companions, Widor's early Saint-Sulpice aesthetic, it asserts, rather, the idea of a homo-polyphonic partita-suite, identifiably Baroque in reference (cf. Raff's piano Suites, 1857-76). Preceding the composer's full assimilation of Liszt and Wagner (he attended the inaugural Bayreuth *Ring* in 1876), the harmonic language (unlike some of the key changes) is relatively straightforward, sometimes even plainly simple. That, however, Widor was a natural master of 'fifth species' counterpoint, passing note routines, sequence, and fugal procedure is never to be doubted. With practised ease, he weaves shapely lines and malleable textures, crafting his voices and articulation with an orchestrator's eye. Franck's view of the organ as an orchestra was one he shared – 'an organ of 30, 40, 50 stops is a [wind] orchestra of 30, 40, 50 musicians'.

The *minore* first movement is a single-dotted-rhythm 'French overture' Toccata with florid

interjections characteristic of the type. The second, also in the minor, is a four-part Fugue in 6/8 on a subject related to the gigue from Bach's Third English Suite. Mendelssohn shadows the third and fourth chapters – a winning 'song without words' in A flat major, redolent of that master's Op.19 No.4, played at Widor's funeral (absent from the first edition); and (likewise added only in 1887) a nimbly semiquavered Scherzo in C minor (*pianissimo staccato*) with a common-time trio (in accompanied two-part canonic/imitative counterpoint) which serves also as a coda. The fifth movement, again in A flat, is stylistically a *pastorale* – on the one hand memorable for its *voix humaines* emphases and variations of detail (for instance, the harmonic enrichment and added pedal notes of the reprise); on the other striking for the key swings of the central section. The coda, at the end echoing of the close of the third movement, could not be more beautifully placed or proportioned. The *maggiore* Finale is a sonata-rondo on a 3/4 *quasi*-'martial' refrain *alla* Schumann. Primary and secondary harmonisation contrasts with unexpected tonal event in the reprise following the tripled D minor middle episode, the modified refrain reinforcing B flat and D flat rather than the tonic of expected convention. When F major

is finally reached, it's thundered home in appropriately ringing glory, full organ ablaze. 'Grandeur,' Widor used tell his students, 'is the organ's essential characteristic. This is because, of all musical instruments, [it] can sustain sound indefinitely and with the same intensity'.

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Further Reading: John R Near, *Widor: A Life beyond the Toccata* (University of Rochester Press, 2011)

JOSEPH NOLAN

Joseph Nolan is an internationally renowned organist and musician, acclaimed as 'brilliant and such an astute musician' (Gramophone UK) and for his 'sheer musicianship' (International Record Review).

Joseph was appointed to Her Majesty's Chapels Royal, St James's Palace, United Kingdom in 2004 and broadcast with the choir on BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM as well as playing at the Thanksgiving service for Princess Diana at The Guards Chapel, broadcast on BBC Television.

Joseph also performed on numerous occasions at Buckingham Palace, most notably giving the

inaugural recital of the refurbished Ballroom organ to a distinguished invited audience. Joseph was the first ever organist to record a commercial CD of this instrument for Signum Records ('Nolan uses the organ to amazing effect' Gramophone UK).

This acclaim has led to Joseph being invited to record in some of the world's premiere venues which include St Sulpice, Paris, St Ouen, Rouen, and Buckingham Palace. In May 2011, Joseph recorded the entire ten organ symphonies of Widor at La Madeleine, Paris (where both Fauré and Saint-Saëns were organists) in only seven nights. These discs have been broadcast on BBC Radio 3, ABC Classic FM, Radio France, and USA Pipedreams as well as enjoying superlative reviews and being awarded 'discs of the week' on UK Classic FM and Radio Sweden.

Signum have commissioned Joseph to record the remaining organ works of Widor in 2013 on the grade 1 listed Cavallé-Coll organs in St Francois De Sales, Lyon, and St Sernin, Toulouse. Gramophone UK described Joseph's interpretations of Widor organ symphonies as displaying 'total mastery of the score' and as having 'utter authority'. Joseph was invited to



perform Widor's 5th and 6th symphonies at the World Organ Festival in Rome in May 2013.

Joseph has toured extensively across Europe, Asia, Canada, USA, New Zealand and Australia, including giving concerts in Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris,

Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, London, Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland Town Halls, and for various US conventions including the Year of the Organ.

Joseph has also conducted and accompanied some of the world's leading groups and musicians, including the King's Singers at the Bad Homburg International Festival, The London Mozart Players at St John's Smith Square, UK, as well as giving organ and trumpet concerts with trumpeters David Elton, Crispian Steele-Perkins, and Alison Balsom. Joseph also conducted The Hilliard Ensemble, St George's Cathedral Consort, and WASO players in a performance of Pärt's Passio for Perth International Arts Festival at Perth Concert Hall.

Joseph made his debut with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra at Perth Concert Hall in March 2012, playing Poulenc's Organ Concerto and Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony for the opening of the WASO Classics concerts. This concert was recorded for broadcast on ABC Classic FM in August 2012.

Joseph took up the post of Organist and Master of the Choristers at St George's Cathedral, Perth, Australia in March 2008.

Joseph conducts the nationally renowned choirs, who since Joseph's arrival now are regularly in demand on ABC TV and Radio and have worked with The Hilliard Ensemble, the Academy of Ancient Music, and I Fagiolini.

THE CAVALLÉ-COLL ORGAN OF L'ÉGLISE DE LA MADELEINE

Built by the famed organ-builder Aristide Cavallé-Coll (working with his father Dominique), the Grand Organ of La Madeleine was inaugurated in 1846 by Alexandre-Charles Fessy, with Louis James Lefèbure-Wély becoming chief organist in 1947. Originally comprised of 46 stops over 4 manuals and pedal, it was the third major instrument Cavallé-Coll had produced for a Parisian church, the others being in the Basilique Saint-Denis and Notre-Dame de Lorette. Modifications since then include: restoration work in 1927, extending the keyboard range; the addition of six new stops (including mixtures) in 1957; increasing the number of stops to 57 in 1971, also automating the key and stop action; and an additional stop in 1928. Classified as a 'Historic Monument', it currently has 60 stops and 4426 pipes.

Lefébure-Wely was succeeded by an eminent succession of notable figures in French Church music; Camille Saint-Saëns (1857-1877), Théodore Dubois (1877-1896), Gabriel Fauré (1896-1905), Henri Dallery (1905-1934), Edouard Mignan (1935-1962), Jeanne Demessieux (1962-1968), Odile Pierre (1969-1979) and from 1979 François-Henri Houbart.

STOP LIST

I. Grand-Orgue

Montre	16'
Gambre	16'
Montre	8'
Salicional	8'
Flûte harmonique	8'
Bourdon	8'
Prestant	4'
Quinte	2 2/3'
Doublette	2'
Piccolo*	1'
Fourniture	V
Cymbale	V
Cornet*	V
Trompette	8'
Cor anglais	8'

II. Positif

Montre	8'
Viole de gambe	8'
Flûte douce	8'
Voix celeste 8	II
Prestant	4'
Dulciane	4'
Octave	2'
Trompette	8'
Musette	8'
Clairon	4'

III. Bombarde

Soubasse	16'
Flûte harmonique	8'
Flûte traversière	8'
Basse	8'
Flûte	4'
Octavin	2'
Fourniture*	IV
Cornet*	III
Bombarde	16'
Trompette	8'
Clairon	4'

IV. Récit

Flûte harmonique	8'
Bourdon Céleste‡	8'
Prestant*	4'
Flûte octaviante	4'
Octavin†	2'
Larigot‡	1 1/3'
Plein Jeu†	IV
Cymbale*	IV
Bombarde	16'
Trompette	8'
Basson-Hautbois	8'
Voix humaine	8'
Clairon	4'

Pédale

Quintaton	32'
Contrebasse	16'
Flûte	8'
Violoncelle	8'
Flûte‡	4'
Bombarde	16'
Basson	16'
Trompette	8'
Clairon	4'

* - Added in 1957

‡ - Added in 1971

† - Added in 1988

Manual compass - 56 Notes

Pedal compass - 32 Notes

Recorded at La Eglise de la Madeleine, Paris, from 4th to 8th August 2011.

Producer – Adrian Peacock

Recording Engineer – Andrew J Mellor

Editor – Claire Hay

Cover Image - Shutterstock

Design and Artwork - Woven Design www.wovendesign.co.uk

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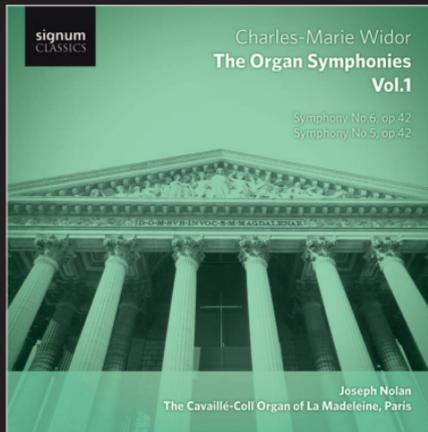
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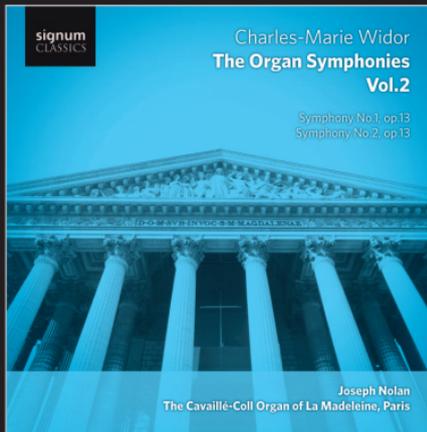


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WIDOR: THE ORGAN SYMPHONIES, VOL.3

THE CAVAILLÉ-COLL ORGAN OF LA MADELEINE, PARIS

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Total timings: [65.01]

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