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Jean-Baptiste Dupont plays Widor: Symphony No. 8

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The famous Cavaillé-Coll of St Sernin and Widor: a tantalising combination! However, that promise takes a very long time to be fulfilled and, ultimately, I wonder whether it was really worth the effort.

Jean-Baptiste Dupont seems lacklustre at the start of the Symphony, and the recording lacks edge. Perhaps the fault might be Widor's – the opening allegro risoluto is not one of his most memorable creations – but while Dupont is piling on the stops, it all feels a little too stodgy for my taste. But the second movement also fails to impress; Dupont's pacing feels unnatural, and what could be a magical solo flute, is marred by a poor registration balance, with the pedals very heavy and the accompaniment figurations too vague. Things start to look up with a chatteringly animated third movement, delivered with some nicely spiky articulation, while with the fourth movement Variations, Dupont finally settles into his stride. He draws some glorious sounds from this glorious instrument, paces the music well, and conveys a strong sense of the movement's architecture. The Adagio which follows finds this historic and fabulous instrument more obviously in its element, with richly shimmering strings and deliciously silvery montres giving weight to the stronger passages. So far, however, nothing either Dupont or this organ have done will win many converts to Widor's Eighth Symphony. However, the saving grace of the work is the Final, which in his booklet notes Dupont describes as "the most organistic movement of the Symphony". Here, at last, everything comes together in a welter of sumptuous sound and gloriously agile fingerwork, with the thundering pedal as the work reaches its climax magnificently captured by the engineers.

The banner heading on the back of the CD case describes the Widor as his "most complex work". That may well be so, and its complexity is countered on this recording by following it with the gentle Prière from the 6 Pièces by Ropartz. A dreamy, sometimes meandering piece, it gives us a pleasing tour through the organ's more tranquil and expressive character stops.

Closing the CD with the organ solo introduction from Saint-Saëns's late (and, it has to be said, largely uninspiring) work for organ and orchestra, Cyprès et Lauriers, seems an odd decision. It is a grim, at times tragic, piece, which, after an imposing start turns into a shapeless solo which leads up to another big climax and then descends into an abyss of nothingness. After this, the orchestra would normally join in and steer the piece to some sort of logical conclusion but without that ending, the piece rather hangs in mid-air. As a showcase for the instrument, it has its purpose, but there are many more appropriate ways of ending a CD than this, even if

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the choice of Cyprès was made as the recording marked the centenary of its composition.

Charles-Marie WIDOR (1844-1937)
Symphony No 8 in B minor, Op 42 No 4 (1886/1929) [41:56]
Joseph Guy ROPARTZ (1864-1955)
Prière in E major (1896) [5:21]
Camille SAINT-SAENS (1835-1921)
Cyprès, Op 156 (1919) [7:11]
Jean-Baptiste Dupont (organ)
rec. 13-15 November 2019, Basilica of Saint-Sernin, Toulouse, France
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