

Toccata from the Fifth Organ Symphony

Charles Marie Widor (1844-1937)

Saint Sulpice, not Notre Dame, was and is the most prominent position for an organist in Paris. Because of the lobbying of legendary organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll and composers Camille Saint-Saëns and Charles Gounod, Charles Marie Widor was appointed as "provisional" organist of Saint-Sulpice when he was only 25 years old. He remained as organist there for nearly 64 years. His students included Marcel Dupré, Louis Vierne, Darius Milhaud and Albert Schweitzer.

Widor was at the forefront of a movement that utilized a new organ design pioneered by Cavaillé-Coll with a much warmer sound, a vast array of stops, unprecedented abilities for smooth crescendos and diminuendos and a truly orchestral range of voicing that was fully symphonic in scope.

Many organists speed through the 5th symphony's monumental Toccata as a breathless demonstration of dexterity and virtuosity. But Widor preferred a more controlled articulation. Saint Sulpice is an extremely tall, narrow and live cathedral. The reverberations are long and loud. Musical lines must be made deliberately quite distinct to be heard through the decaying din of their predecessors.



Charles Marie Widor at his 5 manual Cavaillé-Coll at Saint Sulpice

+PROGRAM NOTES BY ROBERT PRIMES +