

# JOHN LINKER

## ORGANIST

24 NOVEMBER 2021

1.10PM RECITAL

ST MARY'S RC PRO-CATHEDRAL  
CHRISTCHURCH

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Symphonie gothique, Op. 70 (1895)

Charles-Marie WIDOR  
(1844-1937)

- I. Moderato
  - II. Andante sostenuto
  - III. Allegro
  - IV. Moderato; Allegro; Moderato; Andante; Allegro
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## PROGRAMME NOTES

In France during the mid nineteenth century a particular organ builder in by the name of Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, often in collaboration with organist César Franck, developed a style of organ building that embodied lush symphonic sounds, a departure from the somewhat “top heavy” brilliance of organs of previous generations. The ability of these instruments to play a wide variety of dynamics kindled the development of the symphonic school of organ playing and composition in France, chiefly thanks to an organist and entrepreneur-organ builder at the height of the industrial revolution.



**Aristide CAVAILLÉ-COLL**

Enter Charles-Marie Widor, hailing from Lyons and showing remarkable promise at a young age. M. Cavaillé-Coll introduced Widor to Jacques Lemmens, the famous teacher at Brussels Conservatoire, a “descendent” of Bach’s pupils. After Widor made remarkable progress, he was appointed “provisional organist” of Saint-Sulpice in Paris succeeding Léfèbure-Wely, in 1869 at the young age of 24. The years went by and though Widor was never officially appointed to the post, he remained there for 64 years.



**Widor at the monumental Cavaillé-Coll organ,  
St Sulpice, Paris**



**Console of the Cavaillé-Coll organ,  
St Sulpice, Paris**

Widor, inspired by Cavaillé-Coll’s instruments, composed no fewer than 10 organ symphonies. Symphonie gothique is unique among them in that it is dedicated not to a person, but to a building, the soaring gothic structure of the Church of St Ouen in Rouen. This imposing edifice, begun in 1319 and bearing the name of a seventh-century bishop, and its superb Cavaillé-Coll organ were the objects of Widor’s greatest admiration. Of the organ, which Widor inaugurated in 1890, he liked to say, “There is some Michelangelo in this organ.” Symphonie gothique is in fact Widor’s ninth symphony, but he once stated that he should not allow it to be called a “ninth” out of respect to Beethoven.



Nave of St Ouen, Rouen



Cavallé-Coll organ in St Ouen, Rouen

Of the first movement, musicologist Alfred Riemenschneider states: “The persistence of a flowing theme in eighth-notes with a chord theme as a countersubject, gives the impression of a desire to establish firmly the Gothique principles, such as the arch and flying buttress...” Émil Rupp, a friend and early writer on Widor’s music, suggests that the first movement represents the desolation and comfortless darkness that covered the world before the birth of Christ, which is then celebrated in the last two movements with the introduction of the Gregorian chant Introit antiphon for Christmas day, “Puer natus est.”

408 In Nativitate Domini.

AD TERTIAM MISSAM. IN DIE.

Intr.  
7.  
P  
U-er \* ná-tus est nó-bis, et fí-li-us dá-tus est  
nó-bis : cú-jus impé-ri-um super hú-me-rum é-  
jus : et vocá-bi-tur nó-men é- jus, má-gni consí-  
li- i Ange-lus. Ps. Can-tá-te Dó-mi-no cánti-cum nó-  
vum : \* qui- a mi-rabí-li-a fé- cit. Gló-ri-a Pá-tri.  
E u o u a e.

**Introit for Christmas Day, “Puer natus est” (“A Child is born for us”)**

The second movement purportedly brings the listener inside the church. Riemenschneider describes it as “a rare movement with a spiritual content so chaste and pure that involuntarily the atmosphere of prayer and incense suggests itself.”

The fugal third movement is at once brilliant and majestic. Riemenschneider describes this movement “in the tempo of a gigue or scherzo portrays the pomp of some grand-fete day when the splendour of the parades asserts itself.” Towards the middle of the movement, the pedal introduces a slightly modified initial phrase of “Puer natus est” in solemn juxtaposition to the exuberant 6/8 lilt of the contrapuntal upper voices.

The fourth movement is entirely given over to the development of the plainsong melody in a theme, five variations, three of which are canonic, and a free-style finale. Again, Riemenschneider’s analysis: “Thus one set of variations or choral preludes in various moods follows another, as if to portray the different parts of a service at the cathedral, until the entrance of a toccata-like allegro which designates the sortie at the close of the service. This allegro works up to a superb climax over the hymn and at the close dies away to a tranquil section, as if in benediction.”



**Charles-Marie WIDOR**

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## **JOHN LINKER**

Dr John Linker is Director of Music at ChristChurch Transitional Cathedral (appointed 2014). John is also Music Director for Christchurch City Choir (appointed 2016), Canterbury’s premiere symphonic choral ensemble. Both the Cathedral Choir and the City Choir are integral to the religious, artistic, and musical life of the Canterbury region, and provide a sense of cultural stability in the ever-changing landscape of Christchurch.

A native of Princeton, Illinois, USA, John holds music degrees from Northern Illinois University (Bachelor of Music), Chicago Musical College at Roosevelt University (Master of Music), and University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (Doctor of Musical Arts) and is active in and has held leadership positions in numerous musical organisations.

Prior to coming to New Zealand, John led choir programmes in Kentucky and Illinois to critical acclaim. An active organist, John has performed throughout the US, the UK, Europe, and New Zealand, and was recently a featured performer for the New Zealand Organ Association National Congress. In addition to teaching, John is passionate about chamber music and collaborative music making.

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