

Marcel Dupré

Complete organ works volume 1

3 Preludes & Fugues op 7; 24 Inventions op 50 (1-12); 4 Fugues Modales op 63; Tryptique op 51

Jeremy Filsell (organ)/ St Boniface Episcopal Church, Sarasota, Florida
TT67'15". Guild GMCD7156

Complete organ works volume 2

Variations sur un Noël op 20; Miserere Mei op 46; Cortège et Litanie op 19; Lamento op 24; In Memoriam op 61

Jeremy Filsell (organ)/ St Boniface Episcopal Church, Sarasota, Florida
TT63'30". Guild GMCD7157

Complete organ works volume 3

3 Preludes & Fugues op 36; 24 Inventions op 50 (13-24); 3 Hymnes op 58

Jeremy Filsell (organ)/ St Boniface Episcopal Church, Sarasota, Florida
TT62'39". Guild GMCD7159

Complete organ works volume 4

Vitrail op 65, Souvenir op 65bis; Le Tombeau de Titelouze op 38; Symphonie Passion op 23

Jeremy Filsell (organ)/ St Boniface Episcopal Church, Sarasota, Florida
TT66'22". Guild GMCD7162

Works for organ volume 8

Variations sur un Noël op 20; 3 Preludes & Fugues op 36; Symphonie Passion op 23

Stefan Engels (organ)/ Katholische Heilig-Geist-Kirche, Mannheim
TT66'58". Naxos 8.553920

Jeremy Filsell's advocacy of the music of Dupré – not only organ works but also piano and chamber music – is well known, and here are the first four volumes of a set of twelve which will contain the complete organ works. It is clear from his contribution to the liner notes of these CDs that he cares deeply about this music and wants his audience to do the same; his commitment to this end is evident in the playing of every piece. Also constantly in evidence is his effortless musicality, shown to particularly good effect in *Le Tombeau de Titelouze* and the *24 Inventions*. Often used - and abused - as study material, these pieces are allowed to speak for themselves simply and directly, subtly expressive without striving for effect; the beautiful *Te lucis ante terminum* in particular is an object lesson in expression without affectation. It is also apparent from an early stage that Filsell's technique is the equal of his musicianship. In opus 7, for example, the complexities of the B major fugue and the filigree of the G minor prelude are never smudged or unsteady, and in the much later *Musette* from opus 51 – also on the first CD - the fiendish repeated pedal semiquavers are so smooth that one could imagine them played on the manuals.

The organ he has chosen was built in 1979 by Möller (III/60) and was intended to show a French influence; according to the notes this was at first only apparent in the reeds, so the

organ was revoiced in 1997 with the intention of making the rest of it comparably French. This seems to have succeeded although the organ is still limited in this respect by its specification, lacking an 8' harmonic flute on the manuals, an oboe, and a 4' chorus reed on the Great, despite the very generous provision in other directions. The revoicers describe it as "American...with a French accent – essentially the style of instrument for which Marcel Dupré conceived most of his concert music". If the recordings had been collated chronologically a French organ might have been preferable for the early works, but Jeremy Filsell has rejected this approach in favour of mixing 'the familiar and the unfamiliar, the concert and the liturgical'. (This approach pays unexpected dividends: in volume one for example the texture and rhythms which end the *Fugue in G minor* make a reappearance - harmonically and melodically transformed - in the *Dithyramb* composed nearly half a century later). In fact the limitations of the organ are much less apparent than one might expect; the opus 7 *Preludes and Fugues* contain some of the few places where one might wish for a 'genuine' French organ. In the final section of the B major fugue the manual 16' reed tone is too dense in the resonant acoustic and obscures the detail in the right hand; the same register is also too prominent in the opening of the G minor fugue. Although the organ has a large pedal department, it does not seem particularly weighty, and its reeds in the closing section of the same piece - where Filsell sustains the top notes of the chords in order to bring out the melody – don't cut through the texture as they might on a Cavaillé-Coll.

One of the landmarks of 20th century organ music, the *Symphonie Passion*, also appears in volume 8 of Stefan Engels' series recorded for Naxos at the Heilig-Geist-Kirche in Mannheim. This organ, by Göckel (III/42) is German with a pronounced French accent, and like the Florida organ has its limitations, such as the lack of any 16' manual register except the Great Bourdon. Like the Florida instrument it is much more successful than it appears on paper; the sound of the massed *fonds* is wonderfully French, and there is a beautiful harmonic flute. The recorded sound of both instruments is excellent, though the Naxos issue has a little more space and clarity, and a weighty sound in the pedal which rarely obscures the details. Engels, like Filsell, has a fine technique, and both accounts of the opening *agitato* are fluent and dramatic. Their approaches diverge at the arrival of the second subject – Filsell treats the plainsong flexibly and expressively while Engels prefers a stricter approach. In the second movement (*Nativité*) one begins to feel the limitations of the Mannheim organ, as the quiet flues and reeds don't blend and the latter have the slight 'squawk' on release that one sometimes hears in German organs; in Florida however the blend is so good that the swell oboe is hardly missed. The march of the shepherds is also more successful here: Filsell keeps it crisp in character but with an iron grip on the tempo – Engels is a little more

lugubrious but less steady. In the final section the beautiful celestes and harmonic flute at Mannheim combine with the spacious recording to produce a quite magical effect. But it is in the *Crucifixion* that we gain the most benefit from Filsell's intense commitment to this music. He gives a terrifyingly inexorable and controlled approach to the climax, which increases the hushed effect of the *Stabat Mater* in the strangely still coda. Engels' account is fine but lacks this intensity, and it also suffers from uneven reed voicing at the start of the movement. For anyone who does not already have a recording of this important work either performance would be perfectly acceptable, but Filsell's combination of technical control and ability to get inside the music makes for compelling listening.

Also recorded by both performers are the unjustly neglected opus 36 *Preludes and Fugues*. The impressionist shimmering of the opening prelude is impeccably played in each instance but at Mannheim the 4' flute melody in the pedal does not stand out from the texture as it should; Engels also adopts a style of articulation in the fugues which suits the mechanical action but sounds inappropriate for the music. From Filsell's set, the final C major fugue is particularly enjoyable, relishing the crisp rhythms and occasionally jazzy harmonies.

It is clear from the remarks in the booklet that he is keen for some of this more obscure and 'difficult' Dupré to become more widely known. Certainly the composer's final work, *Vitrail* opus 65, is expounded clearly and makes a convincing case, while the account of *Trois Hymnes* opus 58 shows some very beautiful playing, particularly in the simplicity of *Matines*. The opus 63 *Quatre Fugues Modales* remain a little austere for my taste; but in these pieces as in others, Filsell doesn't try too hard to persuade us, preferring to let the music speak for itself.

No advocacy is needed for the remaining piece on the Naxos set, the *Variations sur un Noël* opus 20. Both Filsell and Engels are excellent, the only reservations being that Engels is too cautious in some of the fast music, particularly the final fugato and toccata, and neither player uses a real legato in the chromatic double thirds of the penultimate variation. But personal preference must decide, and Filsell's account, like his playing of other earlier works, is not for metronome-mark enthusiasts or slavish followers of performance directions. His devotion to Dupré is not of the pedantic sort – he has lived with this music and made it his own, and even if one quibbles with individual details, the performance as a whole has integrity and is faithful to the musical concept.

The rest of his second CD again shows the benefits of avoiding a chronological programme. As well as *Cortège et Litanie* opus 19 it contains a fascinating cross-section of elegies – *Lamento* opus 24, *Miserere Mei* opus 46 and the formidable *In Memoriam* opus 61. *Lamento* (1926) was composed for a colleague who had lost a son, and is very expressive, almost vocal in style with a consoling conclusion (this was the only piece in this collection where I

really felt the lack of a solo oboe). If this is a public lament for a private grief, *Miserere Mei* – composed 22 years later following the death of a friend – seems to be an intensely private expression of a more universal tragedy; this time there is no final consolation. *In Memoriam* is based on the set of pieces which Dupré improvised at St Sulpice the day after the death of his only daughter. Sometimes intense, sometimes shadowy and disturbing, this music might be better suited to private listening than public recital – particularly the vanishingly brief variations which comprise the enigmatic *Quod libet*. Most extraordinary is the *Ricercare*. In its six-part counterpoint we find something very rare outside the music of Bach: absolute intellectual rigour forming a piece of limpid and beautiful serenity. Jeremy Filsell's playing does full justice to this amazing music; one could ask for no more than that.