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Peter Bruns: WIDOR, VIERNE on HÄNSSLER



Classical Reviews - Composers & Works

Written by [Steven E. Ritter](#)

Tuesday, 16 December 2008

WIDOR Suite in e, op. 21. **Cello Sonata in A**, op. 80. **VIERNE** Cello Sonata in b \flat • Peter Bruns (vc); Annegret Kuttner (pn) • HÄNSSLER 98.294 (59: 05)

It was no easy task for 46-year-old Charles-Marie Widor to assume the class left vacant by the much-revered César Franck in December of 1890. After all, Widor, though the veteran of over 20 years as organ master at St. Sulpice and a noted composer for the instrument, quickly let the incoming class know that he was not enamored of previous educational practices at the school. Widor boasted brilliant ancestry, tracing a line of study all the way back to great Bach himself, and the young Louis Vierne, attending his class and later to become his assistant at St. Sulpice, soaked in every moment he could of the new teacher's time. Evidently it paid off, Vierne becoming (perhaps unfairly) affixed to the label "Widor, Jr." His excellent Sonata, carefully wrought in its ironclad arguments supported by an underlying yet controlled Romanticism that never loses its Gallic sensibilities, must have surprised Widor and not a few others in its elegant classical structure. The piece could be equally at home had it been composed even 10 years later than its original 1911 inception. Both composers would live to see the works of the other rise and fall, each leaving this life in 1937, far more of a tragedy for the star-crossed Vierne.

**Charles-Marie Widor, Louis Vierne:
Cello Sonatas
Audio CD; Import
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Widor is actually the one who comes across as the more Romantic in temperament, perhaps because Vierne already had one foot in the realm of the soon-to-be-modern masters. His Suite is a collection of three character pieces, not interrelated at all (they could almost stand alone, and indeed, have), and posing little difficulties for anyone wanting about nine minutes of pleasant music for a break. The Sonata is another matter; this gargantuan work, if not quite in its half-hour length as in its monumental structure and musical demands, is an ear-opener from start to finish. Widor manipulates melody in very subtle but ardent ways, and his last movement shifts us to and fro from 4/4 to 5/4 time in a delicately nuanced fashion that pervades every aspect of this haughty and yet curiously confident work. This is French Romanticism writ large, structurally sound but deceptively rhapsodic, and it takes very fine players to maintain strength of line while letting the hair down a little in the more florid passages.

Peter Bruns and Annegret Kuttner are two such players. Bruns of course is one of the finest cellists in the world, and his Bach suites should be in the top two or three of anyone's best-of list. Kuttner has the flying fingers that move harp-like over the keys while never letting the underlying pulse lose step with the undeniably firm rhythmic impetus. The sound is excellent, with fine local ambiance that lets the instruments sing without seeming to penetrate their personal spaces. This is labeled as Volume 1 of "French Works for Cello and Piano," so we all have a lot to look forward to. I have not heard the other four recordings of the Widor, including Adrian Corleoni's rave over a Hyperion release featuring cellist Mats Lidström and pianist Bengt Forsberg (*Fanfare* 27:2), though I do know that Bruns is the top name of any of the available recordings, and his performances here are going to be tough to beat. **Steven E. Ritter**

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