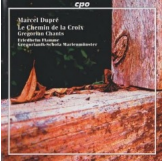


Marcel Dupré - Le Chemin de la Croix (2005)

Written by bluesever

Saturday, 03 April 2010 18:21 - Last Updated Saturday, 02 November 2013 11:01

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01. *Pange lingua gloriosi corporis mysterium*
02. 1.Station - *Jesus est condamne à mort*
03. 2.Station - *Jesus est charge de la Croix*
04. *Crucem tuam adoramus*
05. 3.Station - *Jesus tombe sous le poids de sa Croix*
06. 4.Station - *Jesus rencontre sa mere*
07. *Christus factus est pro nobis*
08. 5.Station - *Simon de Cyreeneen aide Jesus à porter sa Croix*
09. 6.Station - *Une femme pieuse essuie la face de Jesus*
10. 7.Station - *Jesus tombe à terre pour la seconde foix*
11. 8.Station - *Jesus console les filles d'Israël qui le suivent*
12. *Popule meus, quid feci tibi; Vers 1*
13. 9.Station - *Jesus tombe pour la troisième fois*
14. 10.Station - *Jesus est depouille de ses vetements*
15. *Popule meus, quid feci tibi; Vers 2*
16. 11.Station - *Jesus est attache sur la Croix*
17. 12.Station - *Jesus meurt sur la Croix*
18. *Stabat Mater dolorosa*
19. 13.Station - *Jesus est detache de la Croix et remis à sa mère*
20. 14.Station - *Jesus est mis dans le sepulcre*

Friedhelm Flamme, Mühleisen Organ
Gregorianik-Schola Marienmünster
Hans Hermann Jansen, 2005

There have been, I believe, at least three previous recordings of Dupré's masterpiece. There's a Naxos version by Mary Preston. Jeremy Filsell recorded it as part of his critically acclaimed intégrale of Dupré's organ music for Guild (see review). And most recently a version by Ben van

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Oosten appeared on the Dabringhaus und Grimm label (MDG3160953-2). I've seen reviews elsewhere praising all three of these versions. However, as far as I am aware, this present version from Friedhelm Flamme differs from all of them in at least one important respect. Flamme's performance is interspersed with six passages of Gregorian chant for Passiontide. These are sung by the Gregorianik-Schola Marienmünster under the direction of Hans Hermann Jansen.

Le Chemin de la Croix originated as a set of improvisations. In February 1931 Dupré gave a recital in Brussels. He played some Bach and then there took place a reading of Le Chemin de la Croix (1911) by the French poet, playwright and sometime diplomat, Paul Claudel (1868-1955). After each of Claudel's verse meditations on the Stations of the Cross Dupré played a short improvisation inspired by the preceding reading. In the following year, having elaborated and written down the improvisations, he gave the première of the work we know today.

Friedhelm Flamme has chosen to play Dupré's great work on the new Mühleisen organ in the Church of St. Anastasius and St. Innocentius in Bad Gandersheim, in Lower Saxony, Germany. It would appear from the notes accompanying this CD that the church itself dates back to at least the fifteenth century. In the 1980s it was decided to install a new organ and the Strasbourg firm of organ builders, Mühleisen, built the new instrument between 1996 and 2000. It was inaugurated on Easter Sunday 2000. The organ has three manuals as well as a pedal board and there are 50 stops on it, including a 32-foot Bourdon stop on the pedals. A full specification is included in the documentation. I should say straightaway that it sounds to be a magnificent organ, offering a wide range of tonal colours, which Friedhelm Flamme exploits resourcefully and to the full. He and the organ have been served splendidly by the CPO engineers. The recording, which I heard as a conventional CD, is stunning in its range and immediacy.

The short organ pieces, the longest of which plays here for fractionally over 6'00", are mainly sombre in tone and often measured in tempo. This is in keeping with the subject matter. There's not much that's overtly illustrative, rather Dupré builds atmosphere to telling effect. The organist doesn't get too many opportunities for bravura display (though the tumultuous ninth station, 'Jésus tombe pour la troisième fois' (track 13) is something of a virtuoso test). However, the pieces constitute nonetheless a searching examination both of technique and of the organist's intellectual application and emotional response to the music. It seems to me that Friedhelm Flamme passes these tests triumphantly.

There are a few powerful episodes in the cycle, such as the aforementioned ninth station and also the eleventh station, 'Jésus est attaché sur la Croix' (track 16). However it is compassion,

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suffering and sadness that predominate in these pieces and Flamme conveys all this with proper intensity and feeling. He plays the fourth station, 'Jésus rencontre sa mère' (track 6) with supreme sensitivity and also captures well the pathos that characterises much of the twelfth station, 'Jésus meurt sur la Croix' (track 17). In his hands the concluding 'Jésus est mis dans la sépulcre' (track 20) is a poignant slow march and the last pages have a quiet, gentle serenity that is musically and spiritually most satisfying.

Le Chemin de la Croix is a fine work of art but it's also a devotional piece and that comes across very well in this dedicated performance. The interpolations of chant serve only to enhance both Dupré's music and Flamme's incisive and atmospheric account of it. The chosen pieces of chant are adroitly placed. Thus, for example, we hear 'Pange lingua gloriosi' as a prelude to the whole programme. 'Populus meus, quid feci tibi' follows immediately after the eighth station which depicts Jesus consoling the women of Jerusalem. Most appropriately of all, 'Stabat Mater dolorosa' comes between the twelfth station - the death of Jesus - and the thirteenth in which his body is given back to his mother. I'm not sure how many (male) singers comprise the Gregorianik-Schola Marienmünster. This is a specialist group founded in 1999 by Hans Hermann Jansen. Here they sing the chants uncommonly well and they are recorded with just the right ambience round the voices.

The documentation, in English, French and German, includes all the texts of the chants. I have only one criticism of the documentation, indeed of the whole enterprise. There is a somewhat woolly note about the idea of combining the chant with the organ music, which is fine so far as it goes. However, there is very little indeed about the music itself and I think an opportunity has been lost to comment on the music and how Dupré constructed his marvellously evocative pieces. As the music was inspired by Claudel's verses in an ideal world it would have been nice to have them reproduced and included in the booklet but that's a counsel of perfection.

Apart from my one caveat about the documentation I have nothing but praise for this issue. Here we have deeply felt and evocative organ music superbly interpreted and played. The plainchant interpolations, devotedly performed, enhance the organ music and are in just the right proportions – any more would have risked distracting the listener from Dupré's masterpiece. The recorded sound is state of the art, even "simply" in CD format. This is one of the finest organ discs I've heard in years and even if you already have a version of Le Chemin de la Croix in your collection I suggest you consider investing in this issue as well. Recommended very strongly indeed. ---John Quinn, musicweb-international.com

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