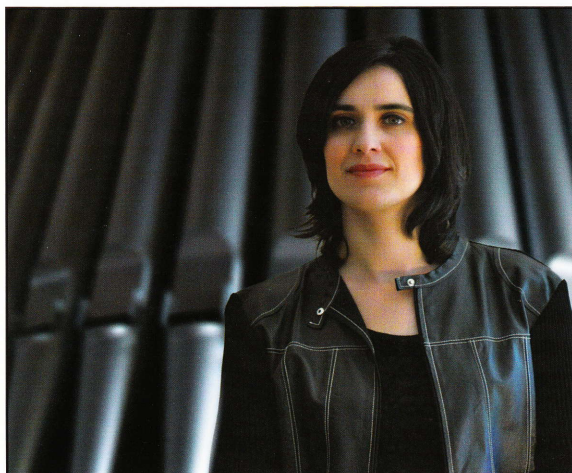


REVIEW

THE POWER OF THE ORGAN 2. MÉLANIE BARNEY, ORGAN.

Fidelio Musique FACD-037. Download the 192kHz/24bit audiophile version at hdtracks.com



Mélanie Barney's first solo recording has been released on the Fidelio Musique label, a Montreal firm specialising in audiophile recordings of classical music and jazz. The programme notes claim an 'audacious' choice of repertoire, though in fact the transcriptions by Edwin Lemare and John E. West (a Novello staffer of yesteryear) and the selections by Vierne

and Widor are well and truly in the main stream of organ repertoire. No matter that: it is the superb performances and recording which are on display here.

Ride of the Valkyries starts off the recital in fine rhythmic fashion, but it is the *Prelude to Tristan und Isolde* which really impresses in this opening pair of Wagner selections. Long, limpid lines underpinned by the organ's signal capacity for sustained bass make time stand still, building ever so gradually to full organ and falling away again. gorgeously finished flutes and solo reeds predominate, a legacy of Casavant's 2002 rebuild of their 1920 organ for l'église Saints-Anges Gardiens in Lachine.

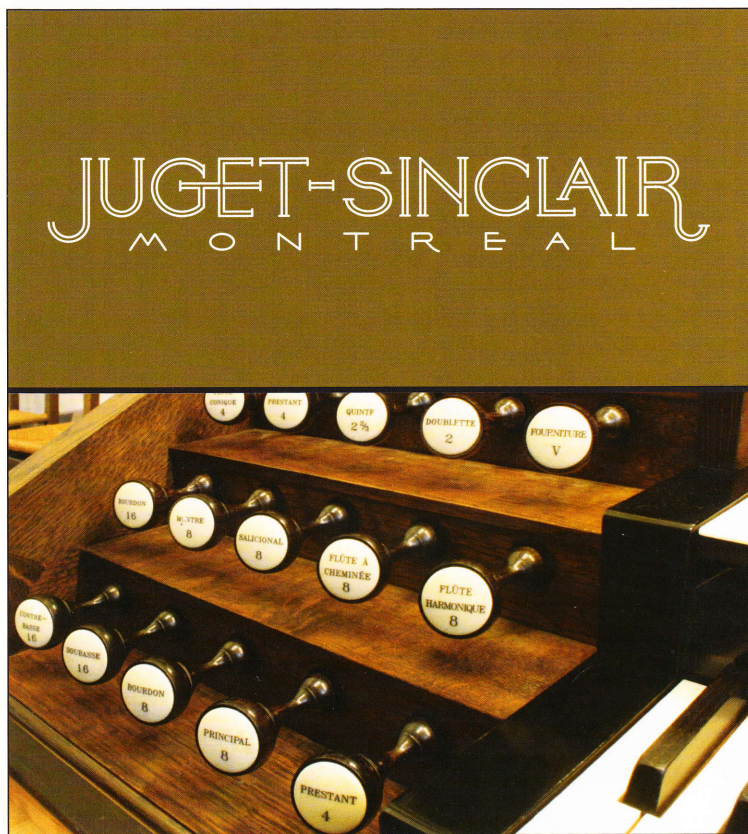
Danse macabre is given a tour-de-force reading, the difficulties made to seem easy: runs of parallel thirds, thumbing down, wide leaps among Lemare's bag of tricks, all the while managing the registration in truly orchestral fashion. The second of a Saint-Saëns pair is the slow movement of the *Organ Symphony*, and though Saint-Saëns is an or-

gan composer, this transcription is less successful than the others. Somehow the arrangement comes off as rather static when shorn of its orchestral clothing.

A set of three familiar Vierne pieces brings us now to organ music proper and *Carillon de Westminster* is a good bridge from the transcriptions to the repertoire, deploying as it does many quasi-orchestral textures. A spell-binding *Clair de lune* and the well-worn *Final* from *Symphonie I* brings the formalities to a close before two selections which this reviewer imagines as encores to a recital programme: *Nimrod* and the you-know-what from Widor's *Symphonie V*. Surely it is time for a moratorium on this until we have explored Widor's other nine symphonies!

The recording itself gives the impression of the listener being ushered into a pew to hear a recital: the ambient sounds of the church are carried through between selections, and occasional sounds from the console only serve to emphasise the welcome sensation of 'presence'. There is much detail in the notes about the techniques and equipment used, right down to the wires. This space might have been given over to a stop list and more photos of the organ, but a visit to Casavant's web site will remedy this omission. Playing and recording are both excellent on this all Canadian production, and it is well worth acquiring whether as an old-fashioned CD or a high-resolution download.

Reviewed by Bruce Cross



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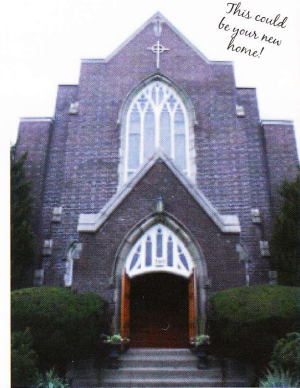
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