

Aesthetics, Interpretation and Context in the Symphonic and Didactic Organ Music of Marcel Dupré

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Abstract

There is an absence of objective writing on the music of Marcel Dupré, despite its considerable, but often-unacknowledged, importance for the evolution of the organ and its music in the twentieth century. Central to the thesis is a detailed analytical examination of the symphonic and didactic works of Dupré, the music in which his aesthetic is perhaps most clearly revealed. The thesis also aims to set this music in its historical and stylistic context and consider how effectively it bridged historicist and modernist compositional inclinations. Thus, an underlying question the thesis seeks to answer is whether its composer can be seen ultimately as a reactionary constructivist or as an innovateur brillant.

Dupré's self-confessed aim was to elevate the organ's status in artistic terms and his music exemplifies the significant developments in both organ design and pedagogy over the course of the twentieth century. That his organ music also reflects contemporaneous influences from outside and beyond the organ loft has hitherto remained unacknowledged. Thus there is an attempt to identify more cosmopolitan influences that were exerted on his music by the wider Parisian artistic culture of the time. Finally, it is hoped that the recordings forming an integral part of this submission - representative of the twelve CD set (Guild Music) of the Dupré Intégrale recorded by the author in 1998 – endorse in interpretative terms, analytical aspects exposed by the written.

Part 1 forms an appraisal of Dupré's musical and artistic milieu. After Chapter 1's Introduction, Chapter 2 elucidates the stylistic antecedents of his music and Chapter 3 attempts to identify his specifically organ-based aesthetic, the backbone of his compositional idiom. In Part 2, Chapter 4 elucidates an Analytical Method and Chapters 5 and 6 form an analytical study of the Symphonic and Didactic music for organ. Although Dupré's stylistic traversal across a number of genres represents an adaptability of inspiration and craft, I concentrate on music of seminal importance in which the Dupré aesthetic is exposed.

In Part 3, chapter 7 engages with interpretative issues concerning the performance of Dupré's works. A summary of Dupré's compositional language is made in chapter 8 before Chapter 9 forms the Conclusion. Appendix A gives a biographical timeline, Appendix B contains the organ specifications referred to in Chapter 3 and Appendix C cites a lecture given by Dupré to Paris Conservatoire students in 1954 - a document which expounds elegantly, and in Dupré's own words, the kernel of his artistry. Appendix D is a discography and Appendix E catalogues the complete Dupré oeuvre.