

Next on

Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Encore presentations of the entire *Discoveries* series every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. on WRTI-HD2

Saturday, February 12th, 2011, 5:00-6:00 p.m. (Second Saturday this month!)

[Aaron Copland](#) (1900-1990). *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* (1924). Wayne Marshall, organ, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Andrew Litton. Delos 3221. Tr 13-15. 23:52

[Charles-Marie Widor](#) (1844-1937). *Symphony No. 3 for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 69* (1894). Ian Tracey, organ, BBC Philharmonic, Yan Pascal Tortelier. Chandos 9785. Tr 6-7. 29:32



The organ world in Paris, January 1870 was buzzing when the top names in the business saw to it that a 25-year-old got the biggest job in the city. St. Sulpice Church was looking for someone to pilot its newly installed five-manual organ, the greatest and largest instrument by Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, known as the greatest organ builder of the 19th century. Camille Saint-Saëns, Charles Gounod, and Cavaillé-Coll himself all said that there was only one person for the job: Charles-Marie Widor. The church offered Widor the appointment on a temporary basis.

He kept the job for 64 years.

Among all his activities, Widor created an entire literature for this "new" instrument, including ten works for solo organ he called, indeed, "Symphonies," and three Symphonies for organ with orchestra, the last of which we'll hear today. In it, the organ is not only a part of the orchestra, but it is on par with it. The power, sophistication, and range of color of the Romantic, symphonic organ are stunning. To understand the revolution in organ building at the time, Widor himself tells us that it was Cavaillé-Coll who

"conceived the diverse wind pressures, the divided windchests, the pedal systems and the combination registers... pneumatic motors... and perfected the mechanics to such a point that each pipe—low or high, loud or soft—instantly obeys the touch of the finger... the freedom of mixing timbres, the means of intensifying them or gradually tempering them... the balance of contrasts... harmonic flutes, gambas, bassoons, English horns, trumpets, celestes, flue stops and reed stops of a quality and variety unknown before."

The clean, discrete sounds of the Baroque organ, so perfect for contrapuntal music, had now given way to a truly symphonic instrument.



Widor, of course, is well-known for organ music. Aaron Copland isn't. But it was his own *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* that launched his career. He went to France at age 21 to study composition at the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau, which had just been set up by Gen. John J. Pershing, Walter Damrosch, and others for the American troops stationed there. It quickly evolved into a mecca for American composers, however, and Copland led the way, studying with the organist and composer Nadia Boulanger. He admitted later that he'd never "before thought of studying with a woman." But her inexhaustible knowledge and theoretical rigor (along with her charm) won over Copland and the generations of musicians who flocked to her until her death in 1979.

Serge Koussevitzky, presenting concerts in Paris in 1924, was just about to take over as conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He, along with Damrosch (at the New York Symphony Orchestra), had asked Boulanger to play in the States, and she insisted that her student Copland write something for her. This *Symphony* is that something.

America noticed, and Copland's career took off. It may never have happened without Boulanger and the Conservatory, which would not have been established—Pershing or no—without the help of French influence at the highest levels. One of those most involved became the Conservatory's first Director. His name? Charles-Marie Widor.

Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, at the Parkway Central Library of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).