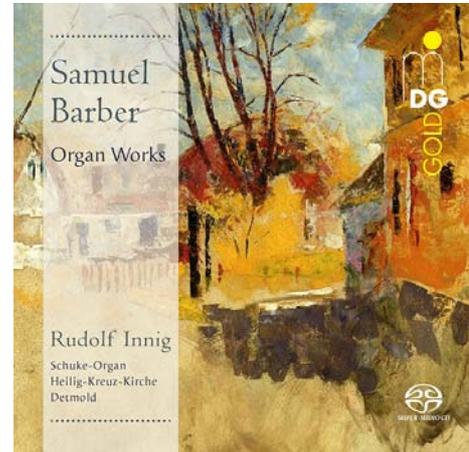


Samuel BARBER (1910-1981)

To Longwood Gardens (1925) [7:27]
Three Chorale Preludes (1927) [9:58]
Partite diverse sopra Straf' mich nich in deinen Zorn I (1927) [4:09]
Partite diverse sopra Straf' mich nich in deinen Zorn II (1927) [5:50]
Prelude and Fugue in B minor (1927) [7:30]
Suite for Carillon (1932) [7:06]
Chorale for a new Organ (1936) [2:44]
Adagio for Strings op. 11 (1937, rev. 1945) [8:59]
Wondrous Love: Variations on a shape-note hymn op. 34 (1958) [7:54]
Chorale Prelude on 'Silent Night' from 'Die Natali' op. 37 (1960) [3:21]
Rudolf Innig (organ)
rec. 2016, Heilig-Kreuz-Church, Detmold
Reviewed in surround
MDG 917 2010-6 SACD [65:04]



Rudolf Innig has made numerous recordings for the MDG label, turning here to what appears to be Samuel Barber's complete works for organ. Barber was given organ lessons at an early age and kept an interest in the instrument for his whole life. He wrote relatively few works for organ however, and these recordings are the result of the appearance in 2010 of a centenary celebration volume that includes previously unpublished works.

To Longwood Gardens is Barber's first organ piece composed at the age of 15. It opens with a Wagnerian flourish, and develops into a "an imaginary walk through the 'enchanted garden'" of Longwood, where he had heard many concerts at the venue's ballroom. There is some disarming salon-style melodic invention, and Barber throws in a few jazz-tinted chords to create something surprisingly inventive if a little oddly structured. The *Three Chorale Preludes* are influenced by J.S. Bach, carrying melodies such as *Ach Gott, vom Himmel* above figurations that combine Barber's own nascent style with that of his great musical ancestor. The third of these works the melody *Straf' mich nich in deinen Zorn* over moody chords, the two following sets of four *Partite* developing variations from straight chorales to a final *Canone alla Quarta* – all finely wrought and worthwhile exercises for any budding composer. The *Prelude and Fugue in B minor* retains some Bach-like features, but is something of a quantum-leap in the ambition of its harmonic development. The fugue in particular builds from its complex theme into something quite powerful.

The *Suite for Carillon* was, as its name suggests, originally conceived for the 'Bok Singing Tower' set up in Florida by Mary Curtis-Bok and her husband Edward; in its day the biggest carillon in the USA. The piece's four short movements work well enough on organ, though the impression remains that it would have been a different piece had it been intended for pipes rather than bells. *Chorale for a new Organ* comes from Barber's time in Rome after being awarded the American Prix de Rome in 1936. This is a brief celebratory work written at the same time as Barber was working on his *First String Quartet*, from which comes the famous *Adagio*. The *Adagio for Strings op. 11* has been arranged for just about everything since, this organ version having been made by Barber's friend William Strickland with revisions made for publication together with the composer in 1945. Always highly effective as a piece of music, the organ version remains somewhat cool however when compared to the impassioned quality that can be whipped up by a good string orchestra.



Wondrous Love: Variations on a shape-note hymn op. 34 is another work made to inaugurate a new organ. The hymn *What wondrous love is this, oh soul* seems unpromisingly stark at the outset, but Barber's resourceful skill in working his material into intriguing variations brings to mind something of which Hindemith might have been proud. From first to last, Barber's final work for organ is the *Chorale Prelude on 'Silent Night'*. This was originally part of a 20-minute orchestral work *Die Natili op. 37* and the chorale prelude reworked for organ by Barber as a "commission by myself." As a restful conclusion this is a piece that manages to pack in a remarkable amount, with gently disruptive rhythmic features and elegant bitonal harmonies that set the famous melody in a new light without losing its magical atmosphere.

The Schuke Organ used in this recording is a fine instrument and appropriate for this programme, though the acoustic in which it is set encourages intimacy rather than grandiloquence. The sound is perfectly fine of course, deep and detailed, working at its best in full surround-mode to make the most of the instrument's size and complexity. The disposition and all stop selections are given in the booklet. With little or no competition for most of these pieces and world premiere recordings of the earliest works, this is the place to be when it comes to Samuel Barber's music for organ.

Dominy Clements