

REJOICE! THE LORD IS RISEN!

based on “Final” from *Symphonie pour orgue et orchestre, opus 42[bis]*

by **Charles-Marie Widor**

arr. **Douglas Mears**

for **SATB Choir
and Organ**

Brass and Percussion
(optional)

1 Horn in F
3 Trumpets in B^b
3 Trombones
Tuba
Timpani
Crash Cymbals
Bass Drum

Notes

As a child, Charles-Marie Jean Albert Widor had such extraordinary musical talent that he was offered the position of organist at the lycée in his hometown of Lyons, France, at the age of eleven. His early music education had been capably provided by his father, a distinguished organ builder and church musician. But it soon became apparent that the young prodigy should pursue more formal training. As a result, Widor travelled to Belgium where he studied with Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens, a highly respected organ teacher at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels. He quickly became one of Lemmens' most successful students, and when Widor returned to Paris, his musical career was enthusiastically encouraged, especially by a close family friend, the preeminent French organ builder, Aristide Cavaillé-Coll. Soon, Widor came to be recognized as one of the most respected organists of his day. He was invited to inaugurate new organs, including Notre-Dame and La Trinité, and in 1869 he became Saint-Saëns' assistant at the Madeleine. Then, in 1934, at the age of twenty-five, Widor was made *organiste titulaire* of St. Sulpice, the most prominent and respected organist position in all of France. In addition to the prestige of this new post, Widor presided over the magnificent St. Sulpice organ, considered to be Cavaillé-Coll's masterpiece. This instrument's new style of tonal design, with its orchestral range of colors, inspired Widor to compose ten masterful symphonies for the organ.

Widor also composed works for other genres, including five orchestral symphonies and an unnumbered and all but forgotten *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra*. Perhaps the composer never assigned a number to this symphony because it is actually a transcription of three movements from his earlier organ symphonies. In the fall of 1880, the Prince of Wales (later, King Edward VII of England) had commissioned Widor to write an organ concerto to be performed in the Royal Albert Hall as part of a benefit concert for a London hospital. Widor's extremely busy schedule may have contributed to his decision to transcribe some of his existing music rather than compose a brand-new piece. The American premiere of the *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* was performed by organist Charles Marie Courboin and the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski in 1919, at Philadelphia's famous Wanamaker department store. By all accounts, the work was enthusiastically received before an audience of over twelve thousand (and perhaps as many as fifteen thousand). It is quite surprising, therefore, that in the years following, the symphony disappeared from the concert stage. Somehow, the score and parts were lost, and the work became a footnote in the catalogue of Widor's compositions. Fortunately, in the early 1990s, two manuscript copies of the score were found, one in the collection of Albert Riemenschneider, an American organ student of Widor, and the other in the library of Courboin, who had died in 1973. As a result of these discoveries, the forgotten symphony was revived. David Bowden, who conducted a recent performance with the San Diego Symphony, observed: “Now it is only a matter of time before this *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* takes its place in the standard repertoire alongside Widor's other great works. For, like the symphonies for solo organ, this piece demonstrates a wealth of warm lyricism, intricate rhythms, subtle orchestration, and powerful fortissimos.”

The joy and exuberance of the symphony's concluding movement, the *Final*, is well-suited for the addition of chorus with the Easter text, “Rejoice! The Lord Is Risen.”