

VICS-1061 STEREO



BEETHOVEN
SYMPHONY NO. 7

MONTEUX
London Symphony Orchestra



Von Kalmbach Two Pairs of Lovers and an Old Woman

The Dynamic 7th— the “Dance” Symphony



The “Dance” Symphony? It has been so called, though not by Beethoven, nor by his publishers or contemporaries; but by those who must have a program for every musical work. Indeed, the Seventh has actually become a ballet and has been danced; but then, so has the austere and introspective E Minor (Fourth) Symphony of Brahms. Still, the romanticists and the balletomanes may not be so wide of the mark, for the varying but always imperiously commanding rhythmic pulses of this potent music are demanding as well; our bodies may not move with them, but our blood must.

This is perhaps the concept of the dance put forward by Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (*Twilight of the Idols*), and one which surely would have elicited at least an amiable grunt from Beethoven. Says the German philosopher, “Dancing in all its forms can not be excluded from the curriculum of all noble education: dancing with the feet, with ideas, with words, and, need I add that one must also be able to dance with the pen?” Surely Beethoven was, in the most precise sense, “nobly educated”; surely the

contours of his ideas, the power and expressiveness of notes (which were words to him) and the sureness, eloquence and discipline of his pen, constitute the kind of spiritual choreography of which Nietzsche speaks.

But if we must associate the dynamic Seventh with the visible, the physical—and that is difficult to avoid—the Pyrrhic dance of the ancient Greeks may come to mind. This was a highly stylized dance, one based on military movements of attack and defense, swordsmanship and bowmanship, obsequies and victories. The participants usually—though not always—were virile warriors, not professional dancers. The dance was one of great vigor, even violence, yet was formal and disciplined; it was a battle, not a bacchanal, even in the celebration of victory.

The parallel with the Seventh is not difficult to establish. Your own imagination, stimulated by this virile and exciting performance by Pierre Monteux and the London Symphony Orchestra, will supply the details.

There is nothing obscure or esoteric in the Seventh Symphony; this is one of its virtues. The first move-

ment has a long, extraordinary introduction which leads into a vigorous vivace. While the Allegretto moves like a stately procession, the third movement has been described often as one of the happiest expressions of Beethoven's capacity for ungovernable joy. The Finale is a movement of wild, almost savage dance rhythms, which was probably what led Wagner to call this symphony “the apotheosis of the dance.”

PIERRE MONTEUX, renowned as a conductor of the symphonic literature, opera and ballet, is one of the most celebrated and beloved figures in the entire musical world. Since his podium debut in 1911 he has led virtually every great symphony orchestra both here and abroad. His first visit to the United States, 1916-24, included two seasons with the Metropolitan Opera and five years with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Following a decade of activity in Europe, Monteux returned to America for sixteen years with the San Francisco Symphony. Since 1961 he has been conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra.

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