

LM (x)  
1065

FRANCK—SYMPHONY IN D MINOR

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## Franck SYMPHONY IN D MINOR

The *Symphony in D Minor* is an embodiment of a musical principle which has come to be thought of as Franck's own. As Alfred Frankenstein points out, the term *cyclic form* refers to the achievement of unity in a significant musical work through the use of either or both of two devices: the quotation of material which has been used in earlier movements, and the use of one or more source motifs from which various themes are developed. Other composers have used the cyclic principle, but Franck alone makes such constant use of it that it is the key to the appreciation of the entire body of his symphonic and chamber music.

In this symphony, which employs both devices, there are two source motifs. The first is a simple statement of the so-called *motto* theme, the *lento* which opens the work with questioning gravity; the second is the closing theme of the first movement, an answer sometimes serene, sometimes restless, sometimes flamboyant in its triumph. From these two musical ideas all the themes of the symphony derive; thus its emotional significance is entirely dependent on them.

## FIRST MOVEMENT

The symphony opens with a slow introduction. The *lento* source motif is heard in the basses, answered by strings. Against a mounting tremolo the questioning subject returns in incisive tones of clarinet, bassoon, and horns. A gradual *crescendo* leads to the main tempo of the movement and the movement proper opens with a full statement of the *motto* theme in the violins. There are crashing chords against a syncope figure, a few quiet measures, and a sudden modulation into F minor, in which the key entire introduction and first theme are repeated.

The second theme follows in canonic fashion, lyrical and serene in the strings, but reflecting increasingly the mood of disturbance. This reaches a climax in an exultant statement of the third theme or second germinal motif. The exposition closes with this theme stated in sequence by solo horn, oboe, and flute, each ending in a soft, sustained chord. The fugue section of the movement, beginning dramatically with the same third theme in the violins, works out the two germinal motifs in their pure form and also as they have been stated in the exposition. The subsidiary themes also reappear, supporting and contributing to the essential mood of struggle between the insistent question and the heroic answer.

An emotional climax is reached, and on the crest of a great wave of sound the *lento* introduction, in brasses and lower strings, returns in canonic fashion, to begin the recapitulation with majesty. Then stormy strings and answering woodwinds state the first theme, *allegro*, in

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E-flat minor. It subsides and gives way to the serenity of the second subject. A moment of doubt is swept away by the surge of the answering third theme, sung by the combined voices of the treble instruments. A plaintive-sounding entry even the heroism of this theme, however, as the melancholy tones of oboe and clarinet are heard in solo, to end the recapitulation similarly to the exposition.

A coda in D minor follows. Against a background of strings the turbulent, uncertain motion of the third theme becomes a furious storm. Inevitably the relentless and canonic *motto* returns, *fortissimo* and in minor. The ecstatic bitterness of this theme is brought to completion in a final major chord, rich, straining, and upward reaching.

## SECOND MOVEMENT

The meditative element natural to Franck's music makes the omission of the conventional slow movement—or rather, the telescoping of the slow movement and the *scherso*—an artistic success. Subtle intimacy of thematic connection establishes the unity of this movement in its complete and profound a sense as that in which the entire symphony is conceived. Hazy and plucked strings suggest the outlines of the principal subject—and after sixteen bars the theme itself appears, in the strangely melancholy English horn. Penetrating and beautiful, the melody is a vivid reminder of both source motifs. Its first statement is continued by clarinet and horn; a moment later, as the flute is added, cellos take up the countermelody. At the end of this theme there is a quick change from minor to major, and the second theme appears in the violins. Suggestive of the second germinal motif, it is nevertheless restrained in its brightness. After some development,

the first theme returns, in the English horn and plucked strings, to bring to a close the slow movement proper.

The *scherso* follows. A fluttering violin theme is heard, above the recurring plucked strings. There are also eerie, will-o'-the-wisp references to the first theme of the movement. In contrast, a flowing clarinet motif introduces the *trio* of the *scherso*. Even here, however, whispering strings soon bring back the mood of restless mysticism. As the *scherso* theme re-enters, its kinship to the first English horn melody is firmly established, for the two are heard over against each other. The woodwind theme becomes more insistent as the key changes to B-flat minor and the English horn is doubled by the bass clarinet.

A coda presents brief reminiscences of the two subsidiary themes. The more thoughtful of the two becomes dominant; shifting chromatic harmonies give voice to impassioned yearnings. The lovely drooping cadence is echoed variously, and finally comes to repose in an undisturbed arpeggio on the harp.

## THIRD MOVEMENT

Fearful chords bring a change of mood, and the first theme is heard in the cellos and bassoons. Subtly reflecting in its melodic line both source motifs, this theme is nevertheless wholly new in spirit. In its syncope and cheerful vigor it breaks completely with the philosophic questionings of the preceding movements. A restatement ending in a troubled climax is followed by organ-like brasses in a choral theme. In the development there is a return to the English horn theme of the second movement. Then the principal motif is developed, beginning with agitated violins. The choral theme is recalled, comes to a climax, and subsides. At the peak of a second *crescendo* which moves through chromatic modulations, the first theme jubilantly returns to begin the recapitulation. In place of a repetition of the second theme the meditative subject of the second movement follows, this time in resounding brasses against a powerful string tremolo.

The coda begins with a sudden change in mood. Soft seventh chords in the strings are somber as they lead into a subdued statement of the closing theme of the first movement. Over a persistent bass figure, which again derives directly from both germinal motifs, the *motto* theme and its heroic answer majestically alternate. But neither is given the victory, for the principal theme of this movement re-enters, to emerge triumphant above the growing tumult of voices and to close the symphony in a sort of rhapsodic splendor. The implication is clear; what gives this music its profound aesthetic significance is its perfect reflection of the duality of emotion that tinges all significant experience.

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