



FRANCK SYMPHONY IN D MINOR

Chicago Symphony Orchestra • Pierre Monteux conducting

Produced by Richard Mohr • Recording Engineer: Lewis Layton

PIERRE MONTEUX was already a sixteen-year-old student of the violin at the Paris Conservatoire when, in 1891, Theodore Thomas founded the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Another half century was destined to pass before conductor and orchestra met officially, in 1941—for a week of summer concerts in Ravinia Park, 30 miles north of the Chicago "Loop." That meeting, however, was love at first rehearsal, boundless and reciprocal, promptly seconded by North Shore audiences. Ever since, with the sole exception of 1959, Monteux concerts have been an annual event at Ravinia, where he reigns as the indubitable and unchallenged dean of conductors.

However, Monteux has led the Chicago Symphony Orchestra only twice in home concerts during its long history—in 1949, and then again for two weeks during the 1960-61 season, a visit that included an orchestral "tush"—a brass fanfare—for the veteran French *maitre*, and the kind of audience delight that means re-engagement for as long as Monteux cares to work.

His cherished performance of the Franck D Minor, a model of eclecticism and dignity, has been a staple on programs conducted everywhere in a distinguished podium career that began in 1894. Record collectors here and abroad first learned his interpretation from 78 rpm discs, published two decades ago by RCA Victor (M/DM-840)—the first of two recordings he made with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. Now, the Monteux performance has been perpetuated in the latest high fidelity—stereo and monaural—through the medium of a great and sympathetic orchestra, recorded in a hall of outstanding acoustic properties.

At 9:30 a.m. on the day of the recording, Monteux arrived hatless at the front entrance of Orchestra Hall, a briefcase in his hand, an assistant at his elbow, and the Franck in his mind and heart. Throughout the day, he used a score only for consultations with Producer Richard Mohr.

Inside the hall, on a ledge above the stage, were two play-back speakers, there to save tiring trips back and forth to the lobby (where listening is usually done) or, which is still more taxing, to basement quarters where the RCA Victor staff makes its "office" in Chicago. Shortly before 10 o'clock, Monteux took his place on a high podium stool. The orchestra had assembled to his specifications: violins divided, low strings on the left, woodwinds and horns stage center, brass to the rear, timpani on the right with the second violins and violas. His instructions were concise and to the point, spoken in a voice

whose firmness and projection baffle the passing of so many years—"Don't force, just play. But full tone!"

Level tests were completed and recording proper began at the second movement—the Allegretto, with its beautiful melody for English horn. Then the first movement; and after lunch, refreshed and rested, Monteux and the orchestra returned for the Finale. The result of the day's work? Splendid Franck; I think of such distinction that it will become the yardstick by which all other recordings are measured for the next two decades.

Although Belgian-born, César Franck lived and worked in Paris from his 13th year until his death at 67. He undertook the writing of his single symphony in 1886, when he was 43, completing it two years later. The premiere was a fiasco. The musicians made no secret of the fact that they disliked the work; the audience was apathetic, and the leading musicians in Paris were disapproving. Franck, however, was unconcerned with public acclaim. When asked how the performance went, he calmly replied: "Oh, it sounded well, just as I thought it would." The first performance in America was given in February 1899, in Chicago, by Theodore Thomas. The D Minor eschews the traditional four movement division in favor of three, a departure deplored by vested academicians of the period. In the middle movement Franck explained his wish to combine the elements of Andante and Scherzo. In the Finale, he brought together thematic materials from the preceding movements, in so-called "cyclical" fashion.

Notes by ROGER DETTMER
Music and Theater Critic, Chicago American

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