

## NOTES ON THE PERFORMANCE

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On May 31, 1963, at the eleventh Vienna Festival, Pierre Monteux, 88 years young, conducted the London Symphony Orchestra in the *Grosser Konzerthausaal*. The program was all-Tchaikovsky, opening with the Overture-Fantasy *Romeo and Juliet*, followed by the *Piano Concerto No. 1* with John Ogdon as soloist, and, after intermission, the *Fifth Symphony*. The evening was one of three appearances at the prestigious festival by Maître Monteux and the ensemble that had but recently appointed him its Music Director for 25 years (with an option for renewal, as the evergreen conductor gleefully recounted). By good fortune, the concert was recorded, using the highest technology then available. The mastertapes, misfiled for almost thirty years, were only lately rediscovered in mint condition. Vanguard Classics takes great pride in offering this piece of buried treasure, this exciting bit of history.

Of all the truly great conductors of his epoch, including Toscanini, Kleiber, Furtwängler, Klemperer and Walter, Monteux was certainly one of the greatest and undoubtedly the most ubiquitous. Whereas most of his artistic peers limited their appearances to a few cities and exclusive celebrity concert series, Monteux could be seen and heard virtually everywhere and all year round. Music lovers of modest means could find this little Summer Santa Claus at New York's plebeian Lewisohn Stadium (for as little as thirty cents), Chicago's Ravinia Park, and Philadelphia's Robin Hood Dell.

He was an authentic legend, this musician who had as a young violist played one of the Brahms String Quartets for the composer and received from him the highest praise; who, as chief conductor for Diaghilev's famed Ballet Russe, had led the premieres of such works as Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe*, Stravinsky's *Firebird*, *Petrushka* and the tempestuous premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps*.

After leaving Diaghilev, Monteux served as music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1919 to 1924, in which post he was followed by Serge Koussevitzky. Charles Munch, immediately upon assuming the stewardship of the Boston Symphony in 1949, invited Monteux to return as guest conductor. From January 1951 virtually up until his death on July 1, 1964, Monteux returned to the Boston Symphony every season, at Symphony Hall and at Tanglewood.

Monteux returned to Europe after his responsibilities as music director in Boston ended, where he spent a brilliant decade co-conducting the Amsterdam Concertgebouw with Mengelberg and building his own outstanding Orchestre Symphonique de Paris. In 1935, he was summoned by Mrs. Leonora Wood Armsby to take charge of the revitalized San Francisco Symphony and, despite

many hardships imposed by financial insufficiencies and union difficulties, left that American orchestra immeasurably healthier than he found it (he stayed until 1952). Subsequently, after a fabulous round of guest-conducting, he assumed the position of Music Director of the London Symphony.

Indeed, Monteux conducted all of the world's great orchestras, e.g., Cleveland, Philadelphia, Chicago, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, New York Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, Leningrad Philharmonic, and many of its lesser ones, too. He left an extensive series of radio tapes with the Hamburg NDR in the final years of his never remitting musical activity.

Monteux's accessibility extended to his persona: he was the most approachable of men, almost universally loved by his musicians and his audience. He had a delectable (and sometimes earthy) sense of humor. While he occasionally ended rehearsals early, at other times, he could be arduously meticulous and exacting, and it must be noted that he was one of those conductors whose control of balances, pacing and articulation was achieved through eye contact and stick technique. Thus, it was often unnecessary for him to have to waste time talking through his interpretive agenda. His authority was limitless.

He had, perhaps, the most catholic repertoire of any conductor, and he excelled in all of it; from Bach to Bartok, from Beethoven to the French Impressionists, in every style he was a supreme master.

Monteux was also a superb teacher. From 1941, when he became an American citizen, until his death in 1964, he resided in Hancock, Maine, establishing a school for conductors there. He was, incidentally, also an honorary member of Hancock's Fire Department!

The renowned English pianist and composer John Ogdon (1937-1989) had, as a student at the Royal Manchester College of Music, given premieres of works by Maxwell Davies and others. Later he studied with Denis Matthews and Egon Petri. His London Proms debut in 1958 and recital debut in 1959 astounded audiences and critics alike. In 1961 he won the Liszt Prize in Budapest, and in 1962, a year before this recording, he tied with Vladimir Ashkenazy for highest honors at the Second Moscow Tchaikovsky Competition. He was noted especially for presenting unfamiliar works by 20th century composers. He performed often in a piano duo with his wife, the distinguished pianist Brenda Lucas Ogdon.

Monteux had been a young man of eighteen at the time of Tchaikovsky's death, and his approach to conducting Tchaikovsky is a synthesis of old and new schools. This broadly paced, incisively muscular and darkly eloquent recreation of *Romeo and Juliet* rekindles the smoldering passion of Shakespeare's immortal

love story and Tchaikovsky's equally immortal music with an inspiration all its own.

Insofar as I know, the present performance of the *First Piano Concerto* is the only surviving document of Monteux leading the work (although John Ogdon recorded an effective account with Sir John Barbiroli and the Philharmonia for EMI). Monteux's spacious and considerate accompaniment boasts one curious detail which used to be commonplace in renditions of the work: Monteux has the solo flute change a written F to B-flat at the beginning of the slow movement, thereby making the melody conform to all its later reincarnations. But, as we now know, the divergent F is in fact the correct note and it strengthens a more subtle structural relationship between this second movement melody and the one heard in the first movement's introductory measures. Ogdon plays throughout with powerful technique and admirable commitment.

Monteux's reading of the *Fifth Symphony* is wonderfully transparent in texture, incisive of rhythm and accent. It is an interpretation that strikes a middle ground between the fiery temperament of Koussevitzky and the almost Mozartean strictness of such "revisionist" anti-sentimentalists as Igor Markevitch and Guido Cantelli. Monteux, in this work, has plenty of heart but he never wears it on his sleeve. To be sure, there are a few rhetorical idiosyncrasies and tempo fluctuations, but these devices, as he employs them, are basically conservative and never of a disruptive nature. What, in my opinion, makes this live performance so much more effective than his two earlier recordings of the work, with Boston and Hamburg, is the almost tangible concentration of this one. One senses an unmistakable rapport between Maestro and orchestra (resulting in spot-on attacks and perfect instrumental balances); and the electricity also extends to an audience obviously mesmerized to attentive silence.

The symphony concluded one of the great concerts of the post World War II era. The performance melded together a Russian program, an English orchestra and soloist, and a Paris-born and worldly conductor, all in the highly elegant and prestigious setting of the Vienna Festival. It is most fortunate that this piece of musical history, with its spirit of electricity and inspiration, has been rediscovered. In the words of Brenda Ogdon, "I was present at that very exciting event. It was an unforgettable evening, simply staggering, to see Monteux conduct with such power. I am thrilled that these compact discs are being made available at last."

—Harris Goldsmith

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## NOTES ON THE MUSIC

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Tchaikovsky's Overture-Fantasy, *Romeo and Juliet*, is one of only a few recreations of a Shakespearean theme that has become an established musical classic. It was written in 1869, re-written in 1870, published in 1871, then revised into its present form and published in 1880. The clarinets and bassoons in the introductory measures both prefigure a tragedy and suggest Shakespeare's Friar Laurence with their hint of ecclesiastical harmonies. The following *Allegro giusto* in B minor is music of clash and storm, evoking the swordplay of the Montagues and Capulets and the struggle of the lovers; it is their yearning which makes this music of depth, not merely depiction. Then comes the love scene itself, with poignant melodies and muted strings. A symphonic development section follows, contrasting the motifs of struggle, the monastery, and love. It reaches a dramatic climax, followed by a moment of silence. The love themes conclude the work, but they are touchingly transformed into a lament for the dead lovers.

The *Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 23*, composed in Moscow in the winter of 1874, is one of the most popular of all concertos. Its original ideas are presented in masterly fashion. Its renown, however, stems from its majestic introduction and the scope the concerto offers for pianistic display. Curiously, the material of this introduction plays no further part in the work. Tchaikovsky evolved the first theme from Ukrainian folk music. In 1879, he wrote to his patroness Mme. von Meck, "I heard blind people singing a lyre song. . . although this has nothing in common with the lyre of ancient times. . . I have used part of this melody in the first movement of my Piano Concerto."

The second movement, in D-flat major, follows an A-B-A' pattern. The A sections are slow and lyrical; the B section is like a scherzo. The string melody in the *molto cantabile e grazioso* section, against accompanying figures in the piano, is identified by the composer's brother, Modest: "It is the little chanson 'Il faut s'amuser, danser et rire' which my brother Anatol and I constantly sang during the early '70's" (*The Life of P.I. Tchaikovsky*). Tchaikovsky employs another Ukrainian folk song, "Come out, Ivanku," as the second theme of the Finale. The two principal themes in the Finale alternate as in a rondo, rather a sonata form. The concerto concludes with a *stretta*, a passage accelerating into a climax.

The composer originally intended to dedicate this concerto to the pianist and conductor Nikolai Rubinstein. He criticized the work so harshly, however, that Tchaikovsky instead turned it over to the conductor and pianist Hans von Bülow, who received it saying ". . . in a word: it is a real pearl, and you deserve the gratitude of all pianists." Von Bülow premiered the work with great success in the United States, in the Music Hall in Boston in October 1875.

Tchaikovsky conducted the premiere of his *Symphony No. 5* in St. Petersburg on November 17th, 1888. He had begun collecting material for it in the spring of 1888 and wrote it that summer. As in the Fourth Symphony, a recurring motif here represents Fate. "The gloomy, mysterious opening theme suggests the leaden, deliberate tread of fate" (Ernest Newman).

The first movement opens with an *Andante*, followed by the *Allegro con anima* which introduces the main theme in the woodwinds. The strings announce the second subject, a yearning melody, which increases in poignancy as it closes the exposition. The development section is relatively short, making highly dramatic use of a dotted-rhythm theme introduced earlier by the woodwinds. After the recapitulation, the movement concludes with a lengthy coda. In the second movement, two passionate themes alternate. The celebrated first theme is introduced by the horn, the second by the oboe; the mood builds to a climax and is followed by melancholy before the Fate motif returns. Thereupon both melodies evolve into another climax and the movement closes peacefully. The third movement *Valse* recalls the grace of Tchaikovsky's ballet scores. The main dance theme is introduced by the strings and returns after a middle section. In this dance reprise, the mood is changed by the underlying Fate motif. The fourth movement transforms the Fate motif from its original form, through a major key and military-like tempo, into a final and exultant close.

## THE PIERRE MONTEUX SCHOOL

During the summers in Hancock, Maine, Pierre Monteux established a school for orchestral conducting as he had in Paris and in the south of France. He originally called the institution the Domaine School, saying that the school was in the domain of the towering pine trees nearby. The promising young musicians whom he attracted were not only aspiring conductors but also instrumentalists eager to serve in an orchestra and gain experience in orchestral playing.

At the time of the maestro's death, the Pierre Monteux Memorial Foundation, with Mme. Monteux as president, was incorporated. Continuation of the school, which had meant so much to Monteux, was considered the most fitting memorial to him. Following his death, the name of the school became The Pierre Monteux School for Advanced Conductors and Orchestral Players. His first conducting student from his Paris days, Charles Bruck, has been the conducting teacher at the school for the last twenty years.

Among Monteux's former students are some of the great conductors of today, including Neville Marriner, David Zinman, Erich Kunzel, George Cleve, John Crosby, and Hugh Wolff. His daughter, Nancie Monteux-Barendse, recalls that her father once said, "Conducting is not enough. I must create something. I'm not a composer, so I'll create fine young musicians."

—Katherine H. Allen