



PIERRE



MONTEUX

EDITION
15 DISC SET



At San Francisco Symphony farewell party,
1952/1952 bei der Abschiedsfeier des San
Francisco Symphony/à la soirée d'adieu du
San Francisco Symphony en 1952

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A Conductor for All Repertoire

by John Canarina

Composers may not consciously write for posterity, but posterity ultimately judges their worth, and the great ones—even the merely good ones—survive. The performing arts are, unfortunately, more transitory. While recordings may be permanent, public demand for them gradually decreases as the deceased artists who made them recede into history. New artists, new versions of the same repertoire, new recording and playback techniques replace the old. It is only natural, then, that people buy records of performers whom they can see and hear in the flesh—or at least on television—which are engineered with the latest advances in sound technology.

In my student years the conductors I could see and hear in the flesh (and occasionally on television) and whose records I bought were: Arturo Toscanini, Pierre Monteux, Bruno Walter, Leopold Stokowski, Serge Koussevitzky, Fritz Reiner, George Szell, Thomas Beecham, Charles Munch, Dimitri Mitropoulos, Ernest Ansermet, Guido Cantelli, Artur Rodzinski, Paul Paray, William Steinberg, Igor Markevitch, and Eugene Ormandy. From a younger generation of conductors, I collected the recordings of Leonard Bernstein, Herbert von Karajan, Erich Leinsdorf, Rafael Kubelik, Antal Dorati and Georg Solti. I did not feel compelled to purchase recordings by Willem Mengelberg and Felix Weingartner, who had by then already passed from the scene, or by Wilhelm Furtwängler and Otto Klemperer, who did not perform in New York while I was growing up. (Since then I have rectified those omissions to some extent.)

Notwithstanding the individual merits of the others, one maestro whose unique position is secure is Pierre Monteux.

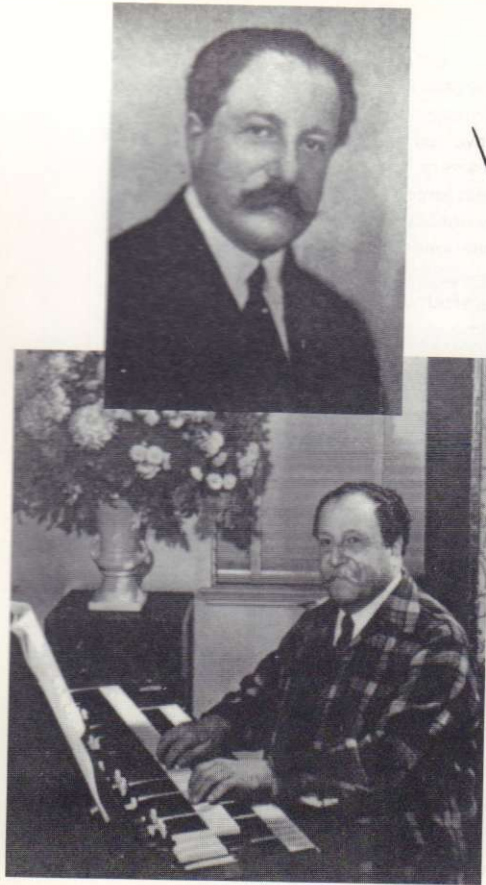
Born in 1875, Monteux first achieved international recognition as the unflappable conductor of the riot-torn world premiere of *The Rite of Spring* in his home city of Paris in 1913. As conductor of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, he was also in the pit for the first nights of *Petrushka*, *Daphnis et Chloé*, *Le rossignol*, and *Jeux*. In addition, he gave the first concert performances of *Petrushka*, *The Rite of Spring*, and the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. So, while many of his contemporary colleagues—especially the Middle Europeans and the Italians—learned their

craft in the opera house, Monteux made his first mark as a ballet conductor. (Ansermet, Dorati, and Efrem Kurtz are others whose careers began in that fashion.) Whether opera or ballet, the important thing is that most of the major conductors of our century began their careers conducting in a theater where one is concerned with elements of performance beyond the orchestra. It was—and still is—the ideal route to take, though few follow it today.

Incidentally, the audience at the *Rite of Spring* stage premiere should not be unduly chastised for its behavior. Monteux himself (who conducted the famous premiere) said that when he first heard Stravinsky pound out the score on a battered upright piano in a very small room, "I did not understand one note ... My one desire was to flee that room and find a quiet corner in which to rest my aching head." Of course, after working closely with the composer (and with 17 orchestral rehearsals) Monteux came to understand the music very well and performed it regularly for the rest of his life.

After two seasons at the Metropolitan Opera, Monteux conducted the Boston Symphony for five years (1919–24), a particularly difficult period in that organization's history. As the orchestra was just beginning to recover from the loss of its many German members during World War I, it was torn apart by ugly internal strife caused by the failure of efforts to unionize. (It was not until well into the Koussevitzky era that the Boston Symphony unionized, the last major orchestra to do so.) About half the musicians left; Monteux virtually had to form a new orchestra. The fact that from all reports he achieved distinguished results in spite of such obstacles speaks well for his great skill as an orchestra builder and trainer, a talent which would manifest itself again during his long career.

The next 12 years saw Monteux's career shift to Europe. At Mengelberg's invitation, Monteux shared with him the conductorship of Amsterdam's Concertgebouw Orchestra from 1924 to 1934. For several seasons beginning in 1929, he also took the helm of the newly formed Orchestre Symphonique de Paris, an ensemble he considered one of the finest he ever conducted, and with which he made his first recordings. These were for His Master's Voice, and some were issued in this country by RCA Victor. High points of the series were the 1929 *Rite of Spring* and the 1930 *Symphonie fantastique*. Those who have heard the latter regard it as the finest recording of Berlioz's score ever made. I can only concur with Samuel Lipman who, in his perceptive and sympathetic article on Monteux ("A Conductor in History,"



Caricature: Harry Pollack

Commentary, January 1984), made the case for the continued value of these recordings.

To older American music lovers, the name Monteux is synonymous with the San Francisco Symphony, the orchestra he directed for 17 seasons (1936–52; the first season did not begin until January 1936). This post once again involved orchestra building; the orchestra had almost ceased to exist and was playing only a very limited concert schedule prior to Monteux's arrival. Faced with union restrictions that forced him to engage mostly local musicians, he forged an ensemble which, while it may not have attained the highest rank in the orchestral hierarchy, definitely transcended its limitations and produced a distinctive sonority that could not be confused with that of any other orchestra. As heard on records, this was a bright and open sound which had an appealing sweetness to the strings and woodwinds, an arresting bite to the brass.

Of the many recordings for RCA Victor, several stand out to this day as my favorite versions of the particular work. Pride of place goes to the ubiquitous *Symphonie fantastique*, recorded twice in San Francisco (1945 and 1950). Monteux was one of the very few conductors in my experience who played the work on its own terms, in the full spirit of its title. (Under so many well-meaning but uninspired interpreters, it might as well be called *Symphony No. 1* in C, Op. 14.) Monteux was able to preserve order and proportion, while still projecting both the fantastic and the exciting elements of the work. This process was aided greatly by the San Francisco Symphony's sonority, uniquely appropriate for this piece.

Another favorite recording offered a type of coupling rarely presented today: just about the most unbuttoned, ebullient Beethoven Eighth Symphony you'd ever want to hear, in tandem with a strong and characterful Berlioz *Benvenuto Cellini* Overture and (perish the thought in today's authenticity-conscious world) Respighi's orchestral transcription of the Bach Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor. Well, this is an authentic performance of the Respighi score. (Today's couplings tend to be too predictable. One of my favorite pairings in days of yore was Dorati's Minneapolis Symphony record on RCA of Bartók's *Divertimento* and Mozart's "Paris" Symphony.)

It is somewhat ironic that, although Monteux was known for incomparable performances of French music, his first love was the great German repertoire; Brahms and Wagner were his special favorites. (It should be mentioned that Monteux came to resent those who engaged

him as a guest conductor expecting him to perform mostly French works.) While still a young man, he had played viola in a French string quartet for Brahms. According to Monteux, the master told them, "It takes the French to play my music properly. The Germans all play it much too heavily." Considering the great feeling and insight he brought to Brahms, it is ironic that, instead of creating a single set of the four symphonies, Monteux recorded the Second Symphony four times: twice with the San Francisco Symphony (1945 and 1951), and once each with the Vienna Philharmonic and the London Symphony. (I am indebted to David Schneider's interesting book, *The San Francisco Symphony*, for these recording dates.)

Both of the San Francisco Brahms Seconds are remarkably lithe and fleet, with none of the turgidity often encountered even in the most amiable and radiant of Brahms's works. That feeling carried over to the later recordings as well, though both lack the special San Francisco ambience. While Monteux did not observe the first-movement repeat in San Francisco, he did in Vienna and London, and became, in fact, one of the first conductors to do so on records.

(Basically, Monteux's rule about observing repeats was: if the composer had taken the trouble to write a lengthy first ending—as is the case in the first movements of the Beethoven Fourth, Brahms Second, and Mendelssohn "Italian" symphonies—then one must perform the repeat. This is especially true in the Mendelssohn, where the first ending contains a coda theme played by the woodwinds [m. 157] which, if not heard at that point would receive its first and only presentation in the coda of the recapitulation [m. 554]. Monteux treated each movement having a short first ending or simple repeat signs, on its own merits; nevertheless, I would say that he observed first-movement repeats more often than not. Occasionally he would contradict himself. For example, he would tell his students that they *must* observe the repeat in the first movement of the Brahms Third, and then he would not do so himself in performances with the New York Philharmonic. In such a situation his decision was undoubtedly based on practical considerations, such as the overall length of the program and the timing of the broadcast.)

Other high points from the West Coast are two superb readings of the Franck Symphony in D Minor (1941 and 1950; these were later surpassed in Chicago) and one recording of its companion opus, the Chausson Symphony in B-flat (today considered a thoroughly un-

fashionable work). The latter is, admittedly, an acquired taste—or a non-acquired distaste. ("Old ladies like this symphony," Alfred Wallenstein once told me, quickly adding, "My wife can't stand it!") Monteux's is the most glowing and noble account I know.

When Monteux returned to San Francisco as a guest in 1960, he recorded an overpowering performance of Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration*, again without the hysteria others often bring to it, but with a depth of passion rarely encountered, superbly controlled, and with the work's one true climax magnificently realized. (A 1958 concert performance with the Boston Symphony in Carnegie Hall was even more overwhelming.)

Toscanini's 17-year tenure with the NBC Symphony (1937–54) paralleled Monteux's in San Francisco. Today, one might forget that Toscanini did not conduct the NBC's first concerts. The orchestra had been trained by Rodzinski prior to the Maestro's arrival, and the first three concerts were conducted by Monteux, a demonstration of his senior colleague's high regard for him. After that first NBC season—except for a single broadcast in the 1950 summer series—Monteux did not again appear with the orchestra until the fall of 1953 when, substituting for the indisposed "Maestro," he led the first two broadcasts of what proved to be Toscanini's—and the orchestra's—final season. The Italian firm of Longanesi Periodici, in its series *I grandi concerti*, has issued Monteux's Beethoven Seventh Symphony from the 1953 NBC broadcast—a marvelously taut and vital account, superior in playing and control to his commercial London Symphony rendition (fine though that is), with a particularly dynamic finale.

In his second season as music director of the Boston Symphony, Munch invited Monteux to return as guest conductor of the orchestra he had headed more than a quarter-century before. The 1951 concerts inaugurated a series of annual visits that continued until his death in 1964. The initial program ended fittingly with *The Rite of Spring*, recorded for RCA shortly thereafter. The third of Monteux's four commercial recordings of the score—preceded by the early Paris and the remarkable San Francisco versions and succeeded by a surprisingly ineffective Paris Conservatoire account—is, along with the composer's own renditions, surely among the touchstone readings of this landmark of 20th-century music. While other versions (Markevitch, Bernstein, Solti) may surpass it in terms of visceral energy or personalized interpretation, Monteux's remains the classic account in terms of projecting what is

written in the score in such a way that all the disparate elements—savage, mysterious, sensuous, rhythmic, lyrical—are presented in proper proportion. As in all Monteux performances, everything unfolds naturally with no lack of excitement.

A number of other fine discs resulted from the Boston association. My favorites are wonderfully lucid accounts of Debussy's *La mer* and *Nocturnes*, an exciting and passionate Tchaikovsky "Pathétique" (Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5 also received fine performances), the aforementioned authoritative *Petrushka*, and—as if to show that Monteux's prowess as a ballet conductor did not rest solely in the great 20th-century scores—delightfully buoyant readings of the suites from Delibes's *Coppélia* and *Sylvia*.

Unlike the situations in Boston and San Francisco (and later in London), Monteux did not always work with orchestras with which he had enjoyed long associations and great rapport. Lipman has written of the difficulties Monteux encountered with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra, which explains why his Stravinsky recordings with it are so disappointing—lacking the authority and thrust of other versions. (Monteux almost always played Stravinsky's original 1911 orchestration of the *Firebird Suite* in preference to the more frequently heard 1919 and rarely performed 1945 versions. He said, "Each time 'e change it 'e make it worse." Leinsdorf and Pierre Boulez are other conductors who have preferred the original version. It goes without saying that Monteux also preferred the first editions of *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*.) Similarly, while he did not have difficulty with the Vienna Philharmonic, the collaborative chemistry was missing. Still, a lovely Beethoven "Pastoral" resulted from its union, as well as a fine coupling of the Beethoven First and Eighth Symphonies. Their *Fantastique*, however, perhaps outside the orchestra's normal repertoire at the time, finds them definitely in alien territory.

Thanks to Rudolf Bing, Monteux returned to the Metropolitan Opera in the mid-'50s; for several seasons, he was in charge of the French repertoire. During the same years, he made his only complete opera recordings: in Rome, *Orfeo ed Euridice* with Risë Stevens and *La traviata* with Roseanne Carteri and Cesare Valletti (both for RCA); and in Paris, Massenet's *Manon* with the incomparable Victoria de los Angeles in the title role.

No account of Pierre Monteux's life and work would be complete without mention of the activity that was perhaps closest to his heart: the school for conductors. Begun in Paris,



it was transferred—once Monteux resumed his American career—to Hancock, Maine. This was not as unlikely a spot as it might seem: Hancock had become his home; his wife Doris hailed from that tiny hamlet on Frenchman Bay. Madame Monteux ("Mum" to the students), who died in 1984, deserves an article of her own. Her husband fondly referred to her, his third wife, as the "Eroica."

L'Ecole Monteux (now the Domaine School for Conductors and Orchestral Musicians) held its sessions during August of each year. (It still flourishes, presided over by Monteux's very first Parisian pupil, Charles Bruck.) It is characteristic of Monteux's unselfishness that, until his death at age 89, he was willing to devote his attention to the training of conductors during the one month of the year when he could have enjoyed some rest and relaxation.

Virgil Thomson once wrote that every town in America could boast two things, a five-and-ten-cent store and a student of Nadia Boulanger. To that could probably be added a student of Pierre Monteux. They came from all over the country, and from abroad: conductors young and old, inexperienced and experienced, students and professionals, at least 50 each year. I was privileged to be one of those for seven summers. All the conductors were expected to play an instrument, and together they made up the school's orchestra. Their playing ability was as varied as the categories of conductors. (Once, at a question-and-answer session, a student asked Monteux which of the Beethoven symphonies he thought to be the greatest. He replied, "Whichever one I play!" Later he was asked which Requiem he thought was greater, Verdi's or Berlioz's. He patiently responded, "Eef I conduct ze Verdi, I think zat one; eef I conduct ze Berlioz, I think zat one." Whereupon someone asked, "Do you feel the same way about orchestras you conduct? And Monteux asked, "You want me to say zat ze one we have here is ze one I prefer?"")

Actually, Monteux almost never conducted the workshop orchestra. During rehearsals, the students conducted in turn and "Maître"—as we called him—sat on the shallow stage, in the last row of woodwinds, facing the conductor, his keen eyes on every move that was made. He never had a score in front of him and made all his observations and corrections without reference to one. He knew intimately every detail of every score that was studied, knew every orchestral part from memory and knew which instrument had failed to play in a complex chord or passage (unlike the helpless student, who *had* the score). "Something

eez missing," one frequently heard while on the podium. (It was said that Monteux still knew from memory all the French solfège exercises he had studied at the Paris Conservatory.)

Although Monteux had one of the clearest baton techniques of any conductor, one studied with him not so much to improve technical expertise—though that was certainly a factor—as for musical reasons, to gain access to his interpretive insights and his vast storehouse of knowledge. Basically, his philosophy was captured in the title of Doris Monteux's biography of him, *It's All in the Music*, that is, all a conductor needed to know about performing a work could be found right there in the score. This did not preclude, however, the espousal of certain traditions, particularly in the French repertoire. For example, toward the end of the finale of the Franck Symphony in D Minor—where the themes from the first movement are recalled—the restated themes should be played as much as possible in their original tempos, even though no such indication appears in the score. Also, in the finale, when the second-movement theme returns for the last time, *fortissimo*, the missing upbeat should be inserted in the trumpet part. (When one student was having difficulty getting through the Franck, Monteux, usually not one to promote his own recordings, asked in desperation, "'Ave you heard my record?" "No, Maître," came the timid reply. "Go and buy my record!" he shouted; then, in an aside, "I weel get five cents.")

Some of the points Monteux would make in his lessons were: the development section in a Beethoven symphony should be played a fraction slower than the rest of the movement; the trio in a Classical work should be somewhat slower than the minuet or scherzo proper; all trills in Beethoven should end with a turn—whether written so or not—as espoused in Leopold Mozart's method of violin playing, a work which Beethoven knew and used as a reference. As with all respected teachers, their devoted students did as they were told at the time. Later, one could sift everything through one's own personality and mental processes, and do as one felt. I do think, though, that I will always perform the Franck symphony as I learned it from Monteux. His magnificent Chicago Symphony performance—his only recording with that orchestra—is *the* one to have.

One attended the school in Hancock to learn from Monteux, not to impress him. Occasionally he would be impressed, but he gave short shrift to anyone who paraded his knowledge, and he certainly didn't like conductors who talked a lot. One such verbally hyperactive stu-

dent was pretentiously expounding the meaning of the "Pastoral" Symphony to the orchestra: the brook, the flowers, the trees, etc. His sermonette was interrupted by the noise of a double-bass player's bow clattering to the floor. "Ah," said Monteux, "one of ze branches has fallen."

Among contemporary conductors who attended the Domaine School are Neville Marriner, David Zinman, Erich Kunzel, Werner Torkanowsky, George Cleve, Michael Charry, Gordon B. Peters, John Covelli, and José Serebrier. While attending the school, Marriner was the principal second violinist of the London Symphony. Monteux had begun conducting that orchestra regularly in the mid-50s, and—reflecting both the players' professional esteem and personal affection for him—was named its principal conductor in 1961. ("Zat mean I conduct five concerts a year instead of four.") Since he was only 86, he accepted a 25-year contract, with an option to renew for another 25.

Of his many recordings with the London Symphony, several rank high in my allegiance and affection. Normally, French conductors are not noted for their Dvořák, but Monteux's Seventh Symphony is a real winner, my favorite version. It's a vibrant and exciting performance that flows naturally from start to finish, with just the right touch of geniality where needed. Nor are the French noted for their Elgar. For me, Monteux's *Enigma Variations* joins Toscanini's and Beecham's versions at the top of the list.

The complete *Daphnis et Chloé* is simply ravishing in the lyrical and majestic portions, though others have brought greater energy and drive to the "Danse guerrière" and "Danse générale." Here Monteux's tempos are slower than usual, but of course, having conducted the premiere, he attempted to preserve the spirit of the work's balletic origin by adopting tempos that were danceable. Similarly, his recordings of excerpts from *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty* show sensible tempos, partnered with an irresistible rhythmic vitality. Debussy's *Images* and the *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* excerpts are models of transparency and lucidity; Monteux's final version of the Brahms Second Symphony—while in some ways lacking the energy of San Francisco—is beautiful and effortless, a fitting finale to his happy association with the work.

An incongruous collaboration with the less than topflight North German Radio Symphony of Hamburg produced a final series of recordings which were rather strangely engineered. Although the Hamburg recordings of repertoire already in Monteux's discography were clearly

inferior to their predecessors, a Mozart coupling (Nos. 35 and 39—his only Mozart symphony recordings) and a Wagner disc containing music from *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan*, and *The Flying Dutchman* offer performances that (shades of San Francisco) transcend the orchestra's limitations.

Monteux shared with Toscanini a reverence for the composer above self. But while Toscanini would sometimes depart from the letter of the score in order to preserve its spirit—making slight changes of instrumentation, for example, to strengthen a melodic line—Monteux rarely did so. He was one of the few conductors *not* to have the trumpets continue the theme at the end of the first movement of the "Eroica." (His two recordings of the work, in Vienna and Amsterdam, are disappointing in light of Boston performances.)

What Toscanini and Monteux did have in common, then, was a basic integrity of approach to the score, a selflessness and humility in the service of the composer that allowed the music to unfold with a natural feeling of inevitability. Toscanini was, of course, the stronger and more volatile personality, making headlines in spite of himself, achieving performances of greater intensity. Monteux was more easygoing, his music-making more relaxed, but exciting all the same. Toscanini often terrorized orchestras; Monteux cajoled them, although he was not always the "benevolent Papa" he became in later years, a time when orchestras loved to play for him and audiences loved to hear and see him, perhaps as much for his distinctive portly figure and walrus mustache as for anything else.

Monteux was virtually unique among the great conductors of his era in that, while most tended to specialize—showing greater sympathy toward certain areas of the repertoire than toward others—he had no specialized fields. His repertoire and sympathies were very broad—Classic, Romantic, contemporary, German, French, Russian, American. Just name it, and the chances are that it was in Monteux's repertoire, and that he knew it from memory. (Two major composers whose music did not find its way onto Monteux's programs were Mahler and Bruckner. Even at that, he did record the *Kindertotenlieder* with Marian Anderson.)

To all his work Monteux brought not only his profound musical understanding and flawless conducting technique, but also his personal warmth, geniality, and humanity. To have studied with and enjoyed the friendship of this beloved "maître" will always remain one of the most cherished experiences of my life.

adapted from material that appeared previously in Opus

Papa Pierre

by Herb Caen

The city looks the same as it always did. The fog still ducks its head under the Golden Gate Bridge and slithers into the Bay on its flat gray belly. The setting sun still paints the hills a golden red before it vanishes into the Pacific, and the afterglow lives for long, hushed minutes along the shaded paths of Golden Gate Park.

But the city is a little older, a little less gay. For, after 17 triumphant years as conductor of the San Francisco Symphony, Pierre Monteux has gone away. In 1952, at the age of 77, the chubby little man known throughout the world as "Frisco's Frenchman" ("Frisco" in this case being acceptable) resigned his baton and moved East to find new challenges—and, indubitably, conquer them.

Pierre Monteux was the closest thing to a musical idol that San Francisco had known since the child prodigy days of violinist Yehudi Menuhin.

When he came to the city in 1935, the once-proud orchestra was in the last stages of decay. A succession of guest conductors had broken the morale of the musicians, forced the best men to seek jobs elsewhere, and bored the audience into setting new non-attendance records.

In an amazingly short time, Pierre Monteux changed all that. He proved to be a brilliant, scholarly conductor who was deeply respected by his orchestra—and yet he had universal appeal, too. He was a tireless worker who could put in longer hours than musicians half his age, and never lose the bubbling personality that kept the orchestra from feeling rebellious about his occasional slave-driving.

And best of all, as far as San Francisco at large was concerned, he fit in. Short and roly-poly, with apple-red cheeks, a constant Gallic glint in his eyes and an endearing French accent, he filled the popular concept of the symphony maestro to perfection. People who never in their lives attended a concert beamed with proprietary pride as they watched him walking his beloved poodle, Fifi, along the streets of Nob Hill.

"Hey, Pierre," they'd shout from a passing cable car, "kommaw sa va, Papa Pierre? And how's Fifi?"

And Papa Pierre, bundled up in his black overcoat, would smile from behind his startling white moustache and shake his long black hair in friendly amusement.

"Fifi, zay 'allo to za nize pippils," he'd say, picking up the tiny dog and holding her over his head. And the cable car gripman would clang his gong and everybody would wave back and forth and feel happy and proud that Pierre Monteux, the big-league conductor, the Joe DiMaggio of his particular field, was "their" maestro.

Like all genuine idols, Pierre Monteux in San Francisco was blissfully unaware of his own importance—or the importance of other celebrities.

On his 75th birthday, he received a long, warm letter from Al Jolson; after reading it, he turned to his wife, Doris, with a puzzled look on his face and asked: "Who izz ziss Ah! Jolsaw?" At a fashionable cocktail party, he was introduced to Hildegard, the noted supper room entertainer, and after a long conversation he bowed and beamed: "Verree hoppee to hov met you, Miss Garde."

And when he returned to San Francisco to begin his last season as conductor, the city's fireboats advanced across the Bay to meet his ferryboat, filling the air with glittering streams of water. The maestro watched them in fascination, and then sudden fear. "Mon Dieu," he exploded to Doris, "you dawn't suppose our boat is on fire?"

The warmhearted city showered him with affection. Keys from the Mayor, proclamations from the Board of Supervisors, thousands of letters from well-wishers on his birthdays, and standing ovations from his audiences; this was Pierre Monteux's golden life in San Francisco.

"Eet ees too much," he wept one day in his dressing room, surrounded by flowers and telegrams, "eet ees too much for a poor viola player from France."

But nothing was too much—and besides, he wasn't a poor viola player. He was excellent. When he wasn't busy with his orchestra, he performed with various string quartets at private recitals. And now and then he'd walk to the piano and play—rather badly—the single jazz selection he had mastered: "Crazy Rhythm."

Popular music he had little ear for, but his grasp of the classics was astounding, even to the most seasoned critics. He almost always conducted from memory. His conception of the standard classics was as sound as his interpretations of the most modern works. And he seemed never to lose his enthusiasm for either.

A whole generation of symphony-lovers will remember the tingling thrill of Monteux dashing out of the wings at the back of the Opera House stage, half-running swiftly around the orchestra, making a wide sweeping turn at the front of the stage—like a racing car at Indianapolis—and hopping nimbly onto the high podium.

For years, the audiences marveled at his whirlwind entrances. And there was a sadness and much headshaking when Monteux finally confessed that he wasn't quite as young as he used to be, and agreed to let the Opera House carpenters add a step to the podium.

"However," he added, referring shyly to the speed with which he steamed onto the stage, "I refuse to let zem bank ze turn!"

The Monteux sense of humor always flashed through at the right time, the right place.

In 1950, after an exhausting guest-conducting tour of Europe, the maestro and his wife returned to New York and, hard on the heels of a 22-hour flight, boarded a train to San Francisco.

Shortly after, they were stalled for seven hours behind a brokendown freight train. "You know," sighed fiftyish Doris Monteux as they waited irritably for the track to be cleared, "I'm too old for all this traipsing around."

"Eet's funny you should say that," twinkled the then 75-year-old Monteux. "I was just zinking zat I ought to get myself a youngaire wife!"

At a dinner party one night, the conductor found himself seated next to an attractive and ambitious young singer who wanted desperately to appear with the Symphony. She used all her feminine wiles on the maestro and, at one point, leaned over and cooed in his ear: "What would you say if somebody whispered to you, 'Darling, I love you?'"

"I would say," shrugged Monteux, "that eet ees too late."

One time at Trader Vic's restaurant, a mutual friend of the Monteuxs rushed over to their table and planted a big kiss on Mme. Monteux's cheek.

"Don't evaire do zat again," raged Monteux in mock anger, and when his friend looked surprised, he smilingly explained:

"You see, I am a Frrrranchman. Eet ees okay eef you kees ME, but not my wife!"

At the conclusion of Monteux's final season as conductor of the San Francisco Symphony, the members of the orchestra gave a farewell party for him at the Fairmont Hotel—and,

during an impromptu show, the women members of the orchestra trooped out in daring costumes and danced a can-can.

"Amaaaazing," chuckled Monteux from behind his white moustache. "I have conducted here for seventeen years, and zis is ze first time I knew ze ladies in ze orchestra had legs!"

When word of his resignation became public, he was flooded with farewell gifts, none of which touched him more than an elaborate painting. It showed various San Francisco landmarks, surrounding a wonderful likeness of Papa Pierre—and it was painted by a famous local artist named John Paul Chase.

It's possible that you never heard of Artist Chase. He was a Gangster Era pal of "Baby Face" Nelson's, a close associate of the late John Dillinger, and the convicted slayer of an FBI agent. Chase, who took up painting a few years ago to pass the time, has plenty of time to pass. He's in Alcatraz—for life.

"Dear Mr. Monteux," read the note accompanying the painting, "This is a going-away present, from a guy who isn't going anywhere. (Signed) John Paul Chase."

from the book Don't Call It Frisco

REMINISCENCES

Leon Fleisher

Pierre Monteux: Twinkle-eyed, mustache-nibbling maître, truly one of the greatest masters of the metier. Under-heralded, under-sung, under-appreciated except by those who knew; most beloved by that toughest category of cognoscenti, the orchestral musician; and about whom nary a single negative word have I ever heard uttered. Ever proud of his black hair and white mustache (natural, in contrast to that other Mediterranean master of the same era), Pierre Monteux was a seminal influence in my life. I first met and played for him when I was 8 years old. There began a relationship that lasted the rest of his days. It was Monteux who insisted that I study with Artur Schnabel. He was Schnabel's favorite conductor. I still have in my mind's eye the vision of a most charming vignette. Mid-1940s, summertime, both Monteux and Schnabel with the New York Philharmonic in Carnegie Hall. White jacket, black pants. Except that Monteux always sported the opposite, black jacket and white pants. As



With Leon Fleisher

they were both of somewhat similar height and girth, it looked for all the world as though they had exchanged jackets just prior to walking on stage. In the 70 or so times we performed together, we encompassed most of my active repertoire, including some 19 performances of the D Minor Brahms, with such orchestras as the San Francisco, the Montreal, the Boston, the New York Philharmonic and the Concertgebouw of Amsterdam. The name of Monteux elicits, on all sides, a level of affection and respect unequalled, to my knowledge, by any other maestro of his time.

Erich Kunzel

It is because of Pierre Monteux that I am a conductor today. When I first met him, in 1956 at his Conducting School in Maine, I was between my junior and senior years at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, quite undecided in what field of music I should pursue. Being with this great man that summer produced an answer for me: I wanted more than anything to become a orchestra conductor. Later, when I became his personal assistant for 1963–64, just before he passed away, I enjoyed perhaps the greatest year of my life: to be so close to a genius. I watched him in rehearsal, in concerts, in recording sessions; we studied so many scores; we had so much fun together. And wherever we went, he was adored by everybody. The orchestra members, managers, and audiences loved him.

He certainly was not a flamboyant conductor, nor was he of the Richard Strauss school of minimal motion. He wasn't an academician. Once asked in an interview to characterize his style, he responded: "Damned professional!" And that it was. Efficient in rehearsal, ever so efficient in recording sessions. But always entirely musical. His concerts brought absolute joy to everyone—simply because he brought out the beauty of the music. That same characteristic held true of his recordings sessions: he always made *music*. The record producers loved him. Monteux's recordings give the music clear, almost transparent, lines. He always strove in recording sessions to bring out the very best from his players—as if their playing would be absolutely the finest performance that they could possibly ever give. Moreover, his entire professional standards were always characterized by great dignity: in his association with the orchestra, with the audience, and with the music itself.

I am personally so grateful that these great RCA Victor recordings have now become

available again, particularly so that the younger generation of symphony lovers will experience the music of one of the greatest conductors of all time. Music was his world, but also the world was his music.

Marcel Landowski

Pierre Monteux: the long white mustache, the black hair, with a look of great beneficence and perpetual cheerfulness, comfortably rotund and serene. This was my predominant image of Pierre Monteux.

In 1936, his surroundings: Les Baux-de-Provence, the Salle Pleyel with the Paris Symphony Orchestra (which was completely out of money) and the practice sessions at 189 rue Ordener, the artistic household: his irrepressible wife Doris, his daughter Nancie, the intelligent and graceful dancer.

His teaching methods were unpretentious. The student arrived at Monteux's with scores in hand. Every student had to be able to sing the various parts pretty much by heart, in the absence of orchestra or even piano. Monteux followed attentively, and he readily interrupted when a point of difficulty arose for conductor or instrumentalist. He prepared the musical terrain note for note.

His instruction began with memory exercises, as a step to thorough knowledge of the score. A second run-through would then analyze its structures and scrutinize its layout. As his sacred maxim went: "One must have the score in one's head, not one's head in the score."

This method encouraged a critical approach to works and discouraged any ambition for showy effects (such as "here come the trombones"). We students were ready to face an orchestra only after having worked out each nuance of the score, and not until we were able to reconstitute its structure mentally.

Monteux had an extraordinary musical memory. Each of his directions took the totality of the score into account. Every direction, however small it might have been, had a purpose. He was at ease with the present because he had the wisdom and the humility to explore the past.

Whether at rue Ordener or, after the war, in Hancock, Maine, Monteux always strove to create by means of music a familiar place where he, surrounded by his students, could find his soul.

I never saw him teach without endeavoring to inspire his students. If he no longer believed in something, he simply said so.

Monteux was like a monk whose order was music.

Emotion or intellect: which most befits a conductor?

André Previn

I met Pierre Monteux in San Francisco. It was 1950 and Maître Monteux was the Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony while I was stationed at the Presidio, marking time during my compulsory army service. I was introduced to him by Leonard Bernstein, who had come through town on a tour, and Monteux made it possible for me to see him whenever his schedule (and my guard duty) allowed. Of course I was in awe of him. He was one of the very greatest conductors of the century and his knowledge was incredible. It seemed to me that there was absolutely nothing pertaining to music that he didn't know. On the other hand, he was relatively unaware of the more worldly happenings around him. I don't believe he ever took in the fact that I was in uniform. This was emphasized one day when I told him that I would probably be put on the next posting to Japan. Maître was instantly solicitous.

"Listen, my dear," he said, "you are making a mistake. Oh, I know that the orchestra in Tokyo is meant to be good, but believe me, I have heard them, and the winds and brass are very undernourished. You can do as well without travelling such a distance."

What he taught is impossible to describe. Technically, he was a walking encyclopedia. As a human being he had strength and grace, and he imparted knowledge without impatience. I have remembered and used every word of advice he ever gave me, and I will always be grateful for the privilege of having known him.

David Zinman

"Now listen! When we do zat again, we must hear zat cymbal. Hit zat wiz your pen knife a litt'le hardair."

Pierre Monteux, surrounded by a predatory clutch of microphones, sits perched on a stool and peers peevishly down at his score of Debussy's Trois Nocturnes. The 88-year-old French conductor is tired and unhappy. Monteux and the members of

the London Symphony Orchestra have been trying to record the hushed last bars of "Fêtes" for some ten minutes or so, only to be thwarted time and time again by the seismic rumbling of rush hour trains as they pass underneath Kingsway Hall on their way to the tube station at the end of the street. It's almost the end of the day's second and final recording session and everyone is praying that a large enough window of silence will appear and enable them to finish the recording without the necessity of overtime.

As Monteux and the orchestra patiently sit and wait; in the little rabbit warren that serves as a recording cabin, producer Erik Smith and engineer Kenneth Wilkenson hold their breath while keenly monitoring the noise from outside. The orchestra's manager, Ernest Fleischmann, keeps his eyes glued to the clock and mutters soft curses. Doris Monteux sits hunched like a chipmunk in a corner of the room knitting a sweater, impervious to the tension being generated, and I, Monteux's pupil and assistant, seated in the other corner sweatily clutching my score, think that this is how it must be in a submarine at the bottom of the ocean waiting for a depth-charge to explode.

I had penned these words in 1962, in a journal that I kept at a time when being at a recording session was a new and wildly exciting experience for me. Although I had attended countless Monteux rehearsals and concerts, and had even rehearsed for the great man himself, this was my initial glimpse into the select world of what the English referred to as Gramophone Production. Monteux, on the other hand, had been making recordings since the mid-1920s; eventually branching out from France to record with his orchestras in Boston and San Francisco, with Chicago, Vienna, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and a series of wonderful collaborations with his latest love: the London Symphony Orchestra.

In recording sessions Monteux was the same man he was at rehearsals; patient, polite, and all business. He was a man of few words and little rhetoric; concerned with speeding things along, and above all avoiding boredom. He hated talkers on the podium. (Several recording companies have issued what they call Monteux "rehearsals.") I remember Monteux listening to one of them and becoming quite incensed when he heard himself droning on for most of the recording. They had spliced all his comments together to run consecutively! "Zat is not me!" he complained, "Zey make me sound as eef I talk ze whole time!")

Once a recording was finished Monteux washed his hands of it. And he could be genuinely surprised when he chanced to hear one of his own recordings. I remember an evening at his camp in Hancock, Maine, when we, his pupils, gathered to listen to one of the legendary San Francisco discs that Madame Monteux had dragged out for our edification. Monteux, decked out in his summer costume of checked wool shirt, grey gabardines, and canvas boating shoes, sat dozing, like a seated Santa, as we oohed and aahed our way through the delights of the performance. Suddenly he came to. "Zat is not ze San Francisco Symphony" he chortled. "Eef it was, zen ze horn would miss zat high note zere, an' ze trompette zat place zere as usual!"

Monteux was unfailingly kind to the orchestra players, usually giving them the benefit of the doubt if things went wrong. After listening to a "take" he would return to the stage to deliver his verdict. "Now listen," he would say, "out here we sound togezzer ... but in zere ..." (here he would point in the direction of the recording booth) "on zoze machine ... its a big mess!" (And, with a big grin:) "Now let's try and make zoze machine happy!"

I once asked a musician in the L.S.O. why the orchestra invariably played so well for him. "It's because he makes us feel so secure" was the answer. And I believe he made others feel secure, because he was comfortable with himself and comfortable with the music he played.

Monteux made music, not career. He left a legacy of wonderful recordings, but I will always treasure the humanity of the man, the wondrous generosity of his teaching, and the unparalleled beauty and spontaneity of his concerts.

Ein Dirigent für allen Repertoire

von John Canarina

Komponisten mögen zwar nicht bewußt für die Nachwelt schreiben, doch es ist die Nachwelt, die letztlich ihre Leistungen beurteilt, und die wirklich großen unter ihnen—und auch diejenigen, die lediglich gut sind—haben Bestand. Im Vergleich dazu sind die darbietenden Künste weitaus vergänglicher. Auch wenn Aufnahmen dauerhaft sind, so geraten die Künstler, die sie machten, nach ihrem Tod allmählich in Vergessenheit. Die Nachfrage nach den alten Einspielungen geht zurück, wenn neue Künstler und neue Versionen des gleichen Repertoires



Boston Symphony Orchestra maestri:
Pierre Monteux, Serge Koussevitzky,
Charles Munch

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*Sofern nicht anders angegeben, wurden alle Werke mit der San Francisco Symphony
im War Memorial Opera House aufgenommen.*

*Tous les enregistrements sont fait (sauf indication contraire)
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BMG Classics gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Nancie Monteux-Barendse in the preparation of the Pierre Monteux Edition.

BMG Classics dankt Nancie Monteux-Barendse für ihre wertvolle Unterstützung bei der Vorbereitung der Pierre Monteux Edition.

BMG Classics tient à remercier Nancie Monteux-Barendse pour son aide précieuse à l'élaboration de la Pierre Monteux Edition.

Quatuor Geloso with Edvard Grieg
(Monteux second from right)

BMG
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negatives Wort fallen hörte. Voll Stolz auf seine schwarzen Haare und seinen weißen Schnurrbart (echt, im Gegensatz zu jenem anderen südländischen Meister der gleichen Ära), war Pierre Monteux ein bleibender Einfluß in meinem Leben. Ich war acht, als ich ihm zum ersten Mal begegnete und für ihn spielte, und an dem Tag begann eine Verbindung, die bis an sein Lebensende währte. Es war Monteux, der darauf bestand, daß ich bei Artur Schnabel lernen sollte. Er war Schnabels Lieblingsdirigent. Noch immer sehe ich vor meinem geistigen Auge eine wunderbare Episode, die sich in einem Sommer Mitte der vierziger Jahre abspielte. Monteux und Schnabel waren mit dem New York Philharmonic in der Carnegie Hall. Weißes Jackett, schwarze Hose. Nur trug Monteux es immer umgekehrt, schwarzes Jackett und weiße Hose. Da beide Dirigenten etwa ähnlich groß und ähnlich kräftig gebaut waren, sah es aus, als hätten sie kurz vor Betreten der Bühne schnell noch die Jacketts ausgetauscht. Bei den rund 70 Aufführungen, die wir gemeinsam bestritten, erschöpften wir den Großteil meines aktiven Repertoires, darunter rund 19 Aufführungen der d-moll von Brahms, mit Orchestern wie dem San Francisco, dem Montreal, dem Boston, dem New York Philharmonic und dem Concertgebouw von Amsterdam. Der Name Monteux' ruft auf allen Seiten einen Grad von Zuneigung und Respekt hervor wie meines Wissens kein zweiter Maestro seiner Zeit.

Erich Kunzel

Pierre Monteux habe ich es zu verdanken, daß ich heute Dirigent bin. Als ich ihm 1956 an seiner Dirigentenschule in Maine zum ersten Mal begegnete, stand ich vor dem Abschlußjahr am Dartmouth College in New Hampshire und war noch unentschlossen, für welches Gebiet der Musik ich mich entscheiden sollte. Das Zusammensein mit diesem großen Menschen ließ mich eine Antwort finden: Mehr als alles andere wollte ich Orchesterdirigent werden. Als ich später, kurz vor seinem Tod, 1963–64 sein persönlicher Assistent wurde, verbrachte ich das vielleicht schönste Jahr meines Lebens: in der Nähe eines Genies. Ich beobachtete ihn bei Proben, bei Konzerten, bei Aufnahmesitzungen; gemeinsam studierten wir zahlreiche Partituren; gemeinsam hatten wir unendlich Spaß. Und wo immer wir auch hingingen, überall wurde er vergöttert. Die Orchestermmitglieder, die Organisatoren, das Publikum liebte ihn.

Sicherlich war er kein überschwenglicher Dirigent, gehörte aber auch nicht zur Schule Richard Strauss' mit ihren minimalen Bewegungen. Er war auch kein ausgesprochen



Raising the flag/
beim Hochziehen der Fahne/
haussant le drapeau
(Hancock, Maine)



Caricature: Olga Koussevitzky

men, der in seinem scharfsichtigen und einfühlsamen Artikel über Monteux ("A Conductor in History", *Commentary*, Januar 1984) einen dauerhaften Platz für diese Einspielungen forderte.

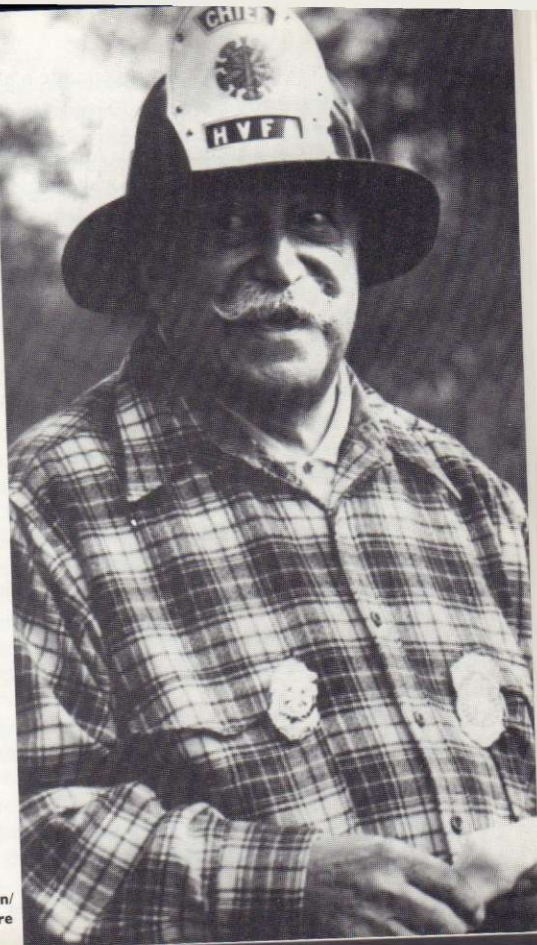
Für ältere Musikliebhaber in Amerika ist der Name Monteux gleichbedeutend mit dem San Francisco Symphony, dem Orchester, das er siebzehn Spielzeiten lang leitete (von 1936 bis 1952, wobei die erste Spielzeit im Januar 1936 begann). Dort stand er wiederum vor der Aufgabe, ein Orchester zusammenzustellen, denn bevor Monteux die Stelle antrat, hatte sich das Orchester fast aufgelöst und gab nur noch sehr begrenzt Konzerte. Aufgrund gewerkschaftlicher Vorschriften war er dazu verpflichtet, vorwiegend örtliche Musiker zu engagieren; dennoch gelang es ihm, ein Ensemble zusammenzuschweißen, das zwar nicht unbedingt zu den allerbesten gehörte, aber dennoch weit über seine Begrenzungen hinausging und einen unverkennbaren Klang erzeugte, der es von jedem anderen Orchester unterschied. Auf den Aufnahmen fällt der helle, offene Klang auf, der in den Streichern und Holzbläsern durch eine reizvolle Lieblichkeit, in den Blechbläsern durch eine eindrucksvolle Schärfe gekennzeichnet ist.

Von den zahlreichen Einspielungen für RCA Victor zählen einige bis heute zu meinen Lieblingsversionen des jeweiligen Werks. An erster Stelle rangiert dabei die *Symphonie fantastique*, die in San Francisco zweimal (1945 und 1950) aufgenommen wurde. Monteux ist meiner Erfahrung nach einer der wenigen Dirigenten, der das Werk seinem Wesen entsprechend spielt und dem Geist des Titels gerecht wird. (Bei vielen wohlmeinenden, aber phantasielosen Interpreten könnte das Stück ebenso gut Symphonie Nr. I in C-dur, op. 14 heißen.) Monteux gelang es, ein Gefühl für Ordnung und Proportionen beizubehalten und gleichzeitig die fantastischen und mitreißenden Elemente des Werks zu vermitteln. Bei diesem Bemühen erwies sich die Klanglichkeit des San Francisco Symphony als extrem passend.

Auf einer weiteren meiner Lieblingseinspielungen ist eine Verbindung zu hören, die heute nur sehr selten dargeboten wird: die ungehemmteste, überschwenglichste Darbietung von Beethovens Achter Symphonie, die man sich nur vorstellen kann, und dazu eine starke, eigenwillige *Benvenuto Cellini* Ouvertüre von Berlioz sowie (ein Fauxpas par excellence in der heutigen, von Authentizität besessenen Welt) Respighis Orchestertranskription von Bachs Passacaglia und Fuge in c-moll. Nun, dies ist eine authentische Darbietung von Respighis Par-



Volunteer fireman/Freiwilliger Feuerwehrmann/
un pompier volontaire





With Isaac Stern

l'admiration et la compréhension qu'il éprouvait pour Brahms, il est curieux que Monteux, au lieu de réaliser une seule série des quatre symphonies, ait enregistré la Deuxième Symphonie quatre fois: deux fois avec le San Francisco Symphony (1945 et 1951), et une fois avec le Philharmonique de Vienne et une fois avec le London Symphony. (C'est au livre intéressant de David Schneider, *The San Francisco Symphony*, que je dois ces dates d'enregistrement.)

Les deux enregistrements de San Francisco de la Deuxième Symphonie de Brahms sont remarquablement légers et rapides, sans le caractère ampoulé que l'on rencontre souvent, même dans les oeuvres les plus aimables et épanouies de Brahms. On trouve de nouveau cette atmosphère dans les enregistrements suivants, mais il leur manque l'ambiance particulière de San Francisco. Monteux ne respectait pas la reprise du premier mouvement à San Francisco, mais il le fit à Vienne et à Londres et fut même l'un des premiers chefs d'orchestre à la jouer sur disque.

(La règle fondamentale de Monteux au sujet des reprises était: si le compositeur a pris la peine d'écrire une longue première conclusion—comme c'est le cas dans les premiers mouvements de la Quatrième Symphonie de Beethoven, la Deuxième de Brahms et l'"Italienne" de Mendelssohn—il faut jouer la reprise. C'est particulièrement vrai pour la symphonie de Mendelssohn, où la première conclusion renferme un thème de coda joué par les bois [m.157] qui, si on ne l'entendait pas à cet endroit, serait entendu pour la première et unique fois dans la coda de la récapitulation [m.554]. Monteux traitait chaque mouvement comportant une première conclusion brève ou de simples signes de reprise, selon ses mérites; cependant, je dirais qu'il observait généralement les reprises des premiers mouvements. De temps en temps, il se contredisait. Par exemple, il disait à ses étudiants qu'ils devaient absolument respecter la reprise du premier mouvement de la Troisième Symphonie de Brahms, mais il n'en tint pas compte lui-même dans ses exécutions avec le New York Philharmonic. Dans ce genre de situation, sa décision était certainement basée sur des considérations pratiques, comme la longueur totale du programme et la durée de la transmission radiophonique.)

D'autres points culminants de son séjour en Californie sont deux magnifiques interprétations de la Symphonie en ré mineur de Franck (1941 et 1950; il les surpassa encore à Chicago plus tard) et un enregistrement de l'oeuvre qui l'accompagne, la Symphonie en si bémol de Chausson (considérée démodée de nos jours). Il faut reconnaître que cette dernière est un