

Chausson POEM OF LOVE AND THE SEA
and
FRENCH ART SONGS

SIDE 1

POEM OF LOVE AND THE SEA

(Poème de l'amour et de la mer)

(Chausson—Words by Maurice Boucher)

GLADYS SWARTHOUT, *Mezzo-soprano*

PIERRE MONTEUX conducting the

RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra

[illegible]

In his fashion, Chausson showed considerable courage in thus answering his innermost impulses. True, he was not a poor man; the bold new direction posed no financial problem whatever. Just the same it was surely a sizable proposition for this son of the landed gentry, already married to a woman of his own rank, to devote his life to the adventures of his class. Nor did he renege, once under way. From the *Conservatoire* he went into private tutoring under Franck and stayed there for three years. Edward Burlingame Hill has referred to Chausson's "mystic sense of duty," and it is the simple truth that the belatedly arrived component of his nature was not a mere fancy. He was a man of four, but what he accomplished in less than two decades was neither too little nor too late to earn posterity's affection. As a catalyst, his tactful subsidy of co-professionals exerted the happiest influence on the contemporary musical scene. As an unashamed promoter of his craft and his fellow-artists, he was a man of the world, as only a knowledgeable man of affairs effectively could be.

As to the anatomy of Chausson's personal aestheticism, it may be said at once that of all the disciples in the French entourage there was none who enjoyed such a spontaneous melodic gift. First and last he was a lyricist; he might be called a latter-day and only slightly less prolific Schubert. There is a certain sadness in all of his music, doubtless a mirror of his own secret melancholy. But his fey sentiment nowhere sank to mere sentimentality, and his steadily gathering assurance had about routed any vestiges of morbid self-abnegation before that tragic day in June of 1899

Gladys Swarthout
Pierre Monteux

when, bicycling near Limay, he apparently lost control of his machine on a steep downgrade. He was found smashed to death against a stone wall.

Six years bore this ignominious end, to be precise on the 21st of February, 1893, Chausson took part in the *première* of his *Poème de l'Amour et de la mer* at Brussels, playing the piano reduction of the orchestral score. The performance was a success, and the work long since has joined the *Poème* for violin and orchestra and the *Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Quartet* (RCA Victor LCT-1113) as the most enduring of Chausson's efforts in the several genres.

An analysis of the *Poème de l'Amour et de la mer* must needs be a study in poetics. The music is a setting, in two sections separated by an interlude, of verses by Maurice Boucher. The parts are entitled, respectively, *Le Fleuve des eaux* and *La Mort de l'Amour*. Candor impels an admission that the texts are, for all of their poignant loveliness, not notable for their clarity. On this point the composer himself wrote, in a letter to his Belgian sponsor: "I have just read the verses of Boucher. Well, it's true, they are hermetic. But what shall we do about it? The idea of printing the words is excellent, and it's the only solution I see."

Accordingly, herewith a paraphrase in English: *The Flower on the Water*—The air is filled with the scent of lilacs. Sunlight glimmers on the sea, and glittering waves rise to the shore. The waves carry the fragrance of lilacs to me, as if my beloved again, who is the incarnation of youth, the hour of parting approaches and yet the ocean rolls on unrelenting. Birds pass in open wing, and I suffer from the pain of parting. The waves are like my heart, my heart is torn from me, but the sea sings and the winds mock my heart's distress. *The Death of Love*—Soon I will be both happy and sad at the memory. The winds blow the dead leaves of love, and the waves wash away the memory of the thousands of golden roses shene so softly in the black sea. The leaves waft in terror, making a sound almost metallic, and sometimes growling, so they tell of my heart's distress. That the waves are like my heart, I have never by the moon, seemed like ghosts, and my blood torn to see my love smile so strangely. Looking into those eyes, I have seen the sun, and the moon, and the stars. The lilacs and roses return to this spring. The wind has changed and the skies now are gray. The spring is sad because it will not bloom again. Nor will its career bring my love back to me. The lilacs and the roses, with my love, are gone forever.

SIDE 2

HART SONGS

GLADYS SWARTHOUT, *Mezzo-soprano*

with George Trovillo at the Piano

Band 2 — Bernard Greenhouse, 'Cells'

Gloria Agostini, *Harp*

The so-called French art song began with Berlioz. It was he who invented it, as James Hunt Hall has suggested. In "his penetration of the text, the justness of his declamation, the suppleness of his melody, and the expressiveness of his lyrics," all these qualities are available in the French repertoire that is sampled in this recorded recital. Despite this genealogy the term *lied artistique* is relatively new. It seems to have been used first less than three decades ago by Alfred Bertelin, in his *Traité de Composition Musicale*. In reality the adjective *artistique* is unnecessary because the French *lied* is by definition *artistique*. The term *lied* in French and English is not identical, and in fact the term does not enjoy currency in France today. In that country, such a song as any of these is more often called simply *melodie*. In the United States we continue to call the German model a *Lied* and a *lied artistique*, more specifically, a French art song. The term *lied* is a useful one, but it is also an indication of special national character that gives this miniature masterpieces their distinctivity.

Miss Swarthout's audience will need no introduction to the program of songs assembled here. To review briefly the composers represented: Berlioz, himself, in his *Memoirs* expressed the opinion that the best of his music was notable for its "passionate expression, inward warmth, rhythmical animation, and unexpected turns." The appraisal is particularly appropriate as applied to the lovely aria *Premiera transports que nul n'oublier!* (Band 1) from his dramatic symphony *Romeo and Juliet*.

Reynaldo Hahn's song, *Si vers vers avaient des ailes* (If My Songs Had Wings) (Band 2) is set to a poem by Victor Hugo. Debussy's *Mandoline* (Band 3) was the first of 18 poems by Verlaine; it depicts nothing more profound than the sweet nothings exchanged by serenaders and their lovely companions underneath murmuring trees.

Henri Duparc, who died in 1933, wrote only a handful of songs, but each of them is a jewel. The *Chanson Triste*, or *Song of Sorrow* (Band 4), is one of the most affecting. It was written around 1868 to a text by Lahor and stands as one of Duparc's earliest works. Hillemacher's *Séparation* (Band 5) is in the same contemplative mood as the Duparc song and features a lovely lyrical line. In distinct contrast is Clergue's *Carmen* (Band 6), an amusingly satiric song, and the three Poulenc selections which conclude the program.

Poulenc is undoubtedly a master of contemporary song writing, and his deft talent is well exemplified in *Hôtel* (Band 7) and *Voyage à Paris* (Band 8), both from his song cycle, *Banalités*. More old-fashioned in its appeal is his *Les Chemins de l'Amour* (Band 9). First popularized by Yvonne Printemps, it seems to be an early forerunner of such current popular hits as *Feuilles Mortes* and *La Vie en rose*.

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Miss Swarthout and Mr. Montoux recorded the Chausson
POÈME DE L'AMOUR ET DE LA MER in December, 1952, in

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the seventh-floor ballroom of Manhattan Center, New York. An RCA ultra-directional microphone, the newest acoustical development of the David Sarnoff Research Center, was used on the orchestra to secure a warmly atmospheric sound and to lend clarity and presence to solo instruments. The French song recital was made by Miss Swarthout in December, 1953, at RCA Victor's New York studios, and the ultra-directional microphone was again used.

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