

In 1914, when war broke out, he was called to military service. He received a discharge in 1916 and travelled to the United States, where he obtained a conducting post at the Metropolitan Opera that lasted until 1919. At that point he was engaged to conduct the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Taking up the post in 1920, he walked into a labor dispute, with his musicians on strike; by the time the strike was settled, the concertmaster and 30 other musicians had left. Monteux had to rebuild the orchestra -- a difficult task, but an opportunity for Monteux to mold the orchestra according to his own taste; ever since then, the Boston Symphony Orchestra has been known for its French sound and its expertise in French and Russian repertoire. He remained in Boston through 1924, gaining a reputation as a supporter of modern music. He brought to America not only Stravinsky and the French composers, but such others as Respighi, Vaughan Williams, and Honegger.

In 1924 he began a ten year association with the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. He was a good fit with the orchestra's other conductor, Willem Mengelberg, who had a Romantic-era style, and who specialized in traditional repertoire and Dutch composers. In addition, Monteux founded the Orchestre Symphonique de Paris in 1929, and the Ecole Monteaux, a coaching school for young conductors in 1932.

In 1936 he returned to the United States as conductor of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, staying in that position through the 1952 season. During World War II he obtained American citizenship and transferred his Ecole Monteux to his new hometown of Hancock, Maine, where Erich Kunzel, Neville Marriner, and André Previn were among his students. He guest conducted and recorded extensively, and in 1961, at the age of eighty-six, accepted the musical directorship of the London Symphony Orchestra.

RCA Victor recorded him extensively in stereo, not only in Debussy, Ravel, Milhaud, Stravinsky, and the like, but also in Beethoven and Brahms; Monteux was especially noted for his performances of these composers' music, to which he brought an unusual charm and lyrical quality.

# BEETHOVEN

## Symphony No. 2

### Overtures: Fidelio & King Stephen

**Pierre Monteux / London Symphony Orchestra**



In the summer of 1801, while composing his Second Symphony, Beethoven revealed the secret of his deteriorating hearing in a long and passionate letter to his childhood friend Franz Wegeler. After recounting assorted professional successes, he goes on to disclose that "that jealous demon, my wretched health, has put a nasty spoke in my wheel; and it amounts to this, that for the past three years my hearing has become weaker and weaker." As his friend was a physician, still living in the composer's native Bonn, Beethoven provides a detailed account of his symptoms and laments the constraints his increasing deafness places on his social life ("I have ceased to attend any social functions just because I find it impossible to say to people: I am deaf") and professional situation ("... if my enemies, of whom I have a fair number, were to hear about it, what would they say?").

A little more than a year later, and just as he was completing the Second Symphony, Beethoven penned his "Heiligenstadt Testament," the famous unsent letter to his brothers in which he expressed utter despair over his loss of hearing. In this revealing confession he alludes to suicidal thoughts and states that on account of all of his torments "I would have ended my life. Only my art held me back. It seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had produced all that I felt was within me." What if Beethoven had killed himself in the fall of 1802, at age 31? What had he accomplished at this point in his career and how would he have been remembered? The question assumes a special poignancy when one considers that Schubert died at the same point in his life, almost to the very day. Mozart had not lived much longer.

Beethoven first ventured to write a symphony during his teenage years in his native Bonn, but did not get very far. A later attempt in Vienna, during the mid-1790s, likewise proved unsuccessful, although some of its musical ideas eventually made their way into his First Symphony at the end of the century. He began sketching the Second Symphony as early as 1800, but most of the

work took place during the summer and early fall of 1802—exactly at the time of the crisis confronted in the Heiligenstadt Testament.

The boundless humor and vitality of the Second Symphony—Hector Berlioz remarked that "this Symphony is smiling throughout"—challenge the simplistic connections so often made between the immediate events at a given time in Beethoven's life and the music he created. Indeed, as with his witty Eighth Symphony, also written at a period of considerable personal distress in the aftermath of his affair with the "Immortal Beloved" in 1812, Beethoven may have sought refuge in musical "comedy" at times of personal "tragedy." (Mahler did the opposite in his "Tragic" Sixth Symphony, which he composed at a time of great happiness.)

Pierre Monteux had one of the longest musical careers in memory, exceeded perhaps only by Pablo Casals and Leopold Stokowski. He retained a youthful appearance (and a full head of black hair!) well into old age, and he was well loved by colleagues and audiences alike.

He started violin studies at the age of six and then entered the Paris Conservatoire at the age of 9. He made his conducting debut in Paris at the age of 12. He was a co-winner of the first prize for violin in 1896, with the great violinist Jacques Thibaud. He served as principal violist in the Opera-Comique, and was also assistant conductor and concertmaster of the Concerts Colonne.

In 1894 he joined the Quatuor Geloso as a violist and was privileged to participate in the performance of a Brahms quartet in the composer's presence. In 1908 he became conductor of the Orchestre du Casino in Dieppe and in 1911 founded a series called the Concerts Berlioz. In the same year, he began a historic association when he was hired by Diaghilev to conduct his Ballets Russes. He led the premieres of Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe*, Debussy's *Jeux*, and Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and *Rite of Spring*, the last of which caused a notorious audience riot.



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**Pierre Monteux / London Symphony Orchestra**

Symphony Nr. 2 D-Dur, Op. 36

1 Adagio Molto. Allegro Con Brio 9:47

2 Larghetto 10:50

3 Scherzo - Allegro 3:22

4 Allegro Moderato 6:25

5 "Fidelio"-Overture, Op. 72b 6:25

6 "King Stephen"- Overture, Op. 117 7:10

Recorded by Decca 9-10 May 1960 at Walthamstow Assembly Hall

Producer: John Culshaw

Engineer: Kenneth Wilkinson

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