

Pierre Monteux (April 4, 1875 – July 1, 1964)

Monteux studied violin from an early age, entering the Paris Conservatoire at the age of nine. He became a proficient violinist, good enough to jointly win the Conservatoire's violin prize in 1896 with Jacques Thibaud. However, he later took up the viola and played at the Opéra-Comique, leading the viola section in the premiere of Claude Debussy's opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1902.

In 1911, with a little conducting experience in Dieppe behind him, Monteux became conductor of Sergei Diaghilev's ballet company, the Ballets Russes. In this capacity he gave the premieres of Igor Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (1911) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913) as well as Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*. This established the course of his career, and for the rest of his life he was noted particularly for his interpretations of Russian and French music.

With the outbreak of World War I, Monteux was called up for military service, but was discharged in 1916, and he travelled to the United States. There he took charge of the French repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City from 1917 to 1919, conducting the American premiere of Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The Golden Cockerel* while there.

Then he moved to the Boston Symphony Orchestra (1919–24). He had a big effect on the Boston ensemble's sound, and was able to fashion the orchestra as he pleased after a strike led to thirty of its members leaving. He also introduced a number of new works while there, particularly by French composers.

In 1924, Monteux began an association with the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam, working alongside Willem Mengelberg. In 1929, he founded the Orchestre Symphonique de Paris, which he conducted until 1935. In the year the orchestra was founded, he led them in the world premiere of Sergei Prokofiev's third symphony.

Monteux then returned to the United States, and worked with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra from 1935 to 1952. In 1943, he founded a conducting school in Hancock, Maine, the childhood home of his wife, Doris Hodgkins Monteux, where Monteux was now living. There he taught such future luminaries as Andre Previn and Neville Marriner. In 1946 he became a United States citizen.

Monteux made a number of records in his life, most of which are widely admired. He himself claimed to dislike them, however, saying they lacked the spontaneity of live performances. From 1961 to 1964 he was principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, before dying in Hancock, Maine in 1964. Pierre Monteux was the father of the flautist and conductor Claude Monteux.



LEO DELIBES

# SYLVIA - COPPELIA

Boston Symphony Orchestra

conducted by **PIERRE  
MONTEUX**



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No standard suite from Sylvia, with its richly scored and charming melodies, has quite fallen into place and today's recordings generally draw from complete traversals of the ballet. Most presentations, however, include the Prelude, the fanfare "Les Chasseresses," the "Valse lente," the pizzicato section of the Divertissement, and the "Cortège de Bacchus." Two other movements usually find their way into the suite: the "Danse des Ethiopiens" and the Act III March. The Prelude begins as a bombastic processional, but it pulls up almost in mid-phrase and becomes a nocturnal forest fantasy, with quiet, distant horn calls providing the basis of lyrical material for winds and strings. Next comes a playful, rustic episode featuring flutes and other woodwinds, with a tender sub-interlude inserted in the middle of the section. The Prelude, really just a potpourri of good tunes, concludes with a restatement of the opening processional. "Les Chasseresses," billed as a fanfare, opens with heroic horn calls over a throbbing string figure; despite the ballet's forest setting, this music could serve equally well in a nautical adventure. A second section offers a skipping little tune, with short string phrases answered by the winds. A more vigorous passage brings back the fanfare material. The "Valse lente" makes a charming 3/4 dance out of less-than-promising materials: a little noodling figure that rises and hesitates, repeating again and again over a pizzicato accompaniment. The central section is louder and more sweeping, but the entire piece relies more heavily on the strings than any other section of the orchestra. The "Danse (or Pas) des Ethiopiens" ostensibly concerns the denizens of Africa, but the pow-wow beat and chirpy descending tune more strongly evoke Native Americans, at least as they were interpreted by outsiders. The ballet's greatest hit is the segment of the Act III Divertissement known simply as "Pizzicati." It's a quiet, tip-toeing little dance for pizzicato strings, with a brief interlude for

woodwinds in the middle. The festive March that opens Act III has an irresistible toy-soldier character. This leads directly into the "Cortège de Bacchus," which begins with a flowing episode reminiscent of Meyerbeer, then a lighthearted, delicate return of the bombastic melody from the Prelude. More Meyerbeer material -- this could also work in the "Triumphal March" from Verdi's Aida -- leads into a section that dallies with fragments of the March and ends with a grand restatement of the Prelude's opening theme.

Coppélia, comic ballet by French composer Léo Delibes that premiered in Paris on May 2, 1870. It was an immediate success and soon reappeared in the form of excerpts scored for piano and as an orchestral suite.

Coppélia was based on German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann's story "Der Sandmann" (1816; "The Sandman"), a dark psychological fantasy concerning a man's destructive infatuation for a lifelike mechanical doll. The same tale was later featured in Jacques Offenbach's The Tales of Hoffmann, which preserved the tragic and surreal mood of the original. Delibes, however, presented French audiences with an amusing and sweet-tempered version of the story.

Of particular musical interest are a sequence of folk dances in Act 1, which features eastern European dances such as the mazurka and the czardas; and the mechanical doll's dance in Act 2, a steady waltz with clockwork precision befitting a dancing automaton.

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Boston Symphony Orchestra  
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## Sylvia

- 1 Prélude: Les Chasseresses 4:24
- 2 Intermezzo And Valse Lente 5:28
- 3 Pas Des Ethiopiens 1:49
- 4 Chant Bachique 2:44
- 5 Pizzicati And Violin Solo 5:55
- 6 Marche et Cortège de Bacchus 5:52

## Coppelia

- 7 Prelude And Mazurka 5:31
- 8 Scène And Valse 3:32
- 9 Czardas 3:38
- 10 Scène Et Valse De La Poupée 3:40
- 11 Ballade de l'Epi 2:46
- 12 Thème Slave, Varié: (Act 1, No. 6) 6:29
- Total Time: 51:48

Recorded by RCA in 1955  
This is a Monophonic Recording

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