

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.

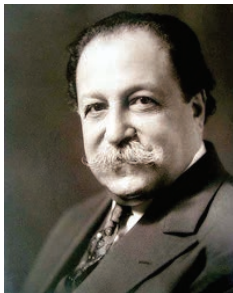
With the outbreak of World War I, Monteux was called up for military service, but was discharged in 1916, and he travelled to the United States. There he took charge of the French repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City from 1917 to 1919, conducting the American premiere of Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov's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



DVORAK

SYMPHONY N° 7

The London Symphony Orchestra

PIERRE MONTEUX

Muj Domov Overture, Op.62 (My Country)
István Kertész - The London Symphony Orchestra



Mastered in DSD256

Dvorak's seventh symphony in succession, written in D minor, enjoys a special status in the composer's series of nine symphonies. Its gloomy atmosphere is in direct contrast not only to its two neighbouring symphonies (Nos. 6 and 8), but also to the large majority of Dvorak's oeuvre as a whole. It is characteristic for its dramatic expression and sombre atmosphere of grave uncertainty and obstinate defiance. It is distinguished for its absence of any Slav-inspired melodies which were characteristic for the composer's preceding Slavic period and with which his compositional style is usually associated. In spite of its dramatic impact, this is also a profoundly intimate work where the composer examines the meanderings of his soul and the answers to elementary issues of human existence. While it cannot compete in popularity with Dvorak's New World Symphony, in terms of its overall conception, the gravity of its testimony and its masterful formal treatment, this is a supreme example of symphonic writing which ranks alongside some of the most important works in the post-Beethoven development of the symphonic genre; a number of experts even place it above the symphonies of Brahms.

Dvorak completed the symphony on 17 March 1885 and, by 22 April of that same year, during his third visit to England, he conducted its premiere at London's St. James's Hall. The work was given an enthusiastic reception, which Dvorak described two days later in a letter to his friend Vaclav Juda Novotny: "My dear friend! Before you receive this letter, you will probably already have heard of the outcome and of my reception here in London. The symphony was well liked and the audience acknowledged me and welcomed me in the most ostentatious fashion. There was pandemonium after every movement, rousing to the very end, just like at home, in fact. But this is, as always, a minor concern for me. What is important is that the symphony, even with only two rehearsals, went superbly. It was such a shame that you could not witness so wonderful a performance!" A number of major English newspapers (The Times, Daily News, Sunday Times, Morning Post, Daily Telegraph, Athenaeum etc.) printed extensive reviews, for the most part effusive in their praise (see below). One music critic for the London Times was less enthusiastic, however, according to whom "the entire work is painted gris-en-gris: it lacks sweetness of melody and lightness of style: it is lugubrious without the pathos of sadness which is more elevating than joy itself". On 29 November that same year the symphony was performed for the first time in Prague's Rudolfinum, again conducted by Dvorak himself.

The symphony was also performed in German concert venues, thanks to the efforts of two leading conductors of their day: Hans Richter and Hans von Bulow. Richter first conducted the symphony with the Vienna Philharmonic on 16 January 1887, but the reception of the work was rather luke-warm. Richter, a great admirer of Dvorak's music, was himself surprised at this and expressed as much in a letter to the composer: "Your Scherzo capriccioso went down well in Vienna; unfortunately, the symphony was not appreciated as much as I had hoped, or anticipated, given the flawless performance from the Philharmonic: our Philharmonic audiences are often, well, peculiar, to say the least! But this won't distract me." Nevertheless, the symphony was a triumph at two performances in Berlin given by Hans von Bulow. Dvorak was present at both concerts (27 and 28 October 1889) and, overjoyed at the reception of his work, he attached a photograph of Bulow onto the title page of the autograph score, adding the note: "Hurrah! You brought this work to life!" That the work successfully travelled overseas was to a large extent due to celebrated Hungarian-German conductor Arthur Nikisch, who presented the symphony on several occasions during his tour of the United States in 1891.

The overture My Home is part of a programme of incidental music which Dvorak wrote at the request of the management of the Provisional Theatre to accompany the play by Frantisek Ferdinand Samberk, Josef Kajetan Tyl. Samberk's play, depicting the beginnings of Czech theatre and the life of dramatist Josef Kajetan Tyl, is intensely patriotic, a fact also reflected in the stage music: It was Samberk's wish that, towards the end of each act, the audience would hear music derived from the themes of the song "Where is my home?" (today the Czech national anthem), whose text was the work of Tyl himself. In addition to several passages of melodramatic music and two intermezzos, Dvorak also wrote an overture to the play, the only one still occasionally performed as a separate concert piece. The overture was published independently by the Berlin-based firm Simrock under the title Mein Heim (My Home).

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- 1 Allegro maestoso 10:40
- 2 Poco adagio 10:35
- 3 Scherzo vivace-poco meno mosso 7:20
- 4 Allegro 8:40
- 5 Muj Domov Overture, Op.62 (My Country) 9:38
- Total Time: 46:53

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admin@highdeftapetransfers.com
or visit our website:
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