

The Swiss conductor, Ernest Ansermet, came from a musical family; he successively studied the clarinet, violin and brass instruments, which he used in fanfares; later he wrote military marches for the Swiss army which he did not consider important. Besides Music, he studied Mathematics in Lausanne and graduated with a Diploma in 1903; until 1906 he taught at the Lausanne Grammar School, then he decided to continue his studies at the Sorbonne and, at the same time, to attend courses at the Paris Conservatory. After his return to Lausanne, he taught Mathematics for one more year before devoting himself entirely to music.

Ansermet was a particular advocate of the Swiss composers Arthur Honegger and Frank Martin. He conducted the first performances of the following works of A. Honegger: Horace victorieux (1921), Chant de joie (1923), Rugby (1928) and Pacific 231 (1923), which was dedicated to him, and of the following works of Frank Martin: Symphonie (1938), In terra pax (1945), Der Sturm (1956), Le mystère de la Nativité (1959), Monsieur de Pourceaugnac (1963) and Les Quatre Éléments, which were dedicated to him. Also important were the first performances of Benjamin Britten's The Rape of Lucretia (1946) and Cantata misericordium (1963).



Facts about this Recording

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César Franck

Symphony in D

Ernest Ansermet

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande



HIGH DEFINITION TAPE TRANSFERS

The *Symphony in D minor* is the most famous orchestral work and the only mature symphony written by the 19th-century Belgian composer César Franck (1822-1890). After two years of work, the symphony was completed 22 August 1888. It was premiered at the Paris Conservatory on 17 February 1889 under the direction of Jules Garcin. Franck dedicated it to his pupil Henri Duparc. Franck's musical idols were Bach, Beethoven, and Liszt. It was his reverence for Beethoven that inspired him to write a symphony—a form French composers of the 19th century rarely attempted. Berlioz's symphonies had been highly unconventional programmatic works, but Franck determined to write a "traditional" symphony, based on thematic development and following, though very freely, the established German symphonic forms. But it is Liszt's influence we hear most. Franck prominently uses Liszt's and Berlioz's principle of a motto or "idée fixe": a theme that recurs in different guises throughout the work, what Schoenberg would call "grund-gestalt." In Franck's hands, several motives and themes return in later movements to unify the "cyclic" work. The first of these—a three-note questioning motive in the low strings—launches the opening movement. This question generates a lengthy slow introduction, brooding but also expectant. The questioning idea then erupts into a bold Allegro, but Franck immediately short circuits that and reprises the slow introduction in a higher key. After this, the Allegro finally takes wing and soon introduces us to the second of the symphony's motto themes: an optimistic tune rocking around the note A, which is introduced fortissimo by the full orchestra. After developing his materials, Franck recapitulates the slow introduction, its original brooding quality now transformed into a blaze of brass. A short but powerful coda decisively changes the question into a ringing affirmation in D major.

By contrast, the second movement is all French subtlety and delicate scoring, a combination of slow movement and scherzo. Harp and plucked strings outline the theme, then the English horn sings it in full: a grave and melancholy melody with an old-fashioned modal flavor. The remainder of the movement is devoted to variations on this theme. An extended section of rapid, fluttering string patterns contribute a scherzo lightness while retaining the theme's outline. The finale opens boldly with an exultant tune that sounds oddly familiar. We find out why later in

the movement when the first movement's optimistic second theme returns and proves to be a close cousin. Reminiscences of earlier music keep reappearing, led off by the return of the second movement's grave dance. The closing coda reprises the opening question motive, now combined with the optimistic theme and elevated by harps. But it is the finale's own exultant theme that finally sweeps aside nostalgia for a joyous conclusion.

Ernest Ansermet (1883-1969) still reigns prominent among Swiss conductors as the builder of his own ensemble, L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande (1918). His extensive work as a mathematician permitted Ansermet to address complicated modern works by Debussy, Ravel, Martin, and Stravinsky that other interpreters found daunting. Ansermet championed jazz as an important musical idiom, well ahead of his contemporaries' opinions.

After World War II, Ansermet and his orchestra rose to international prominence through a long-term contract with Decca Records. From that time until his death, he recorded most of his repertoire, often two or three times. His interpretations were widely regarded as admirably clear and authoritative, though the orchestral playing did not always reach the highest international standards, and they differed notably from those of other famous 20th-century specialists, notably Pierre Monteux and Stravinsky himself. Ansermet disapproved of Stravinsky's practice of revising his works, and always played the original versions. Although famous for performing much modern music by other composers such as Arthur Honegger and Frank Martin, he avoided altogether the music of Arnold Schoenberg and his associates, even criticizing Stravinsky when he began to use twelve-tone techniques in his compositions. In Ansermet's book, *Les fondements de la musique dans la conscience humaine* (1961), he sought to prove, using Husserlian phenomenology and partly his own mathematical studies, that Schoenberg's idiom was false and irrational. In his last years, he and his ensemble surprised many by issuing discs devoted to Haydn, Beethoven and Brahms. These performances were not at all conventionally Germanic, and were much criticized at the time of their appearance, but during recent years their vivacity has come to be appreciated more.

César Franck Symphony in D

Ernest Ansermet Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

- 1) Lento Allegro Non Troppo**
- 2) Allegretto**
- 3) Allegro Non Troppo**

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