

effects. It has been said that the concertos of some great classical composers, far from being written for the piano, have been written against it. And I think this criticism is quite justified. In some ways my Concerto is not unlike my Violin Sonata; it uses certain effects borrowed from jazz, but only in moderation.”

The Concerto in G major follows out the composer’s intentions very closely. It is a virtuoso “divertissement,” brilliant, clear and light, with sharp contrasts which navigate with Mozartean ease the classic difficulties presented to free recapitulation by the formal sonata. The initial Allegro, with its astounding vigor, imposes a hard and energetic harmonic “climate” upon melodic lines which, in their delicacy and capacity for easy adjustment, are related not so much to the Sonata for Violin and Piano as to *Ma Mère l’Oye* and *Ondine*. Some critics have professed to find the contrast of the Adagio assai and the two movements which bound it incongruous. In a work free of “cyclic” writing, it is as legitimate a contrast as the precisely similar example in the Larghetto of Mozart’s Clarinet Quintet, which Ravel took as his model. The Adagio is really a Lied whose calm contemplation brings it unusually close to Fauré’s musings. The composer confessed to pianist Marguerite Long, when she praised the free development of the leisurely melody, which she felt came on naturally, that he had written it “two bars at a time, with frequent recourse to Mozart’s Clarinet Quintet.” But, once again, the original had become absorbed into the pastiche and entirely disappeared. The conclusion is heralded by a terse Presto, at once brilliant, brief and scintillating—a chase goaded by galloping fanfares and not to be halted by the nasal tattoo of jazz. It is a violent struggle between meter and rhythm—the apotheosis of tonality.



RAVEL CONCERTO IN G D'INDY SYMPHONY ON A FRENCH MOUNTAIN AIR

Nicole Henriot-Schweitzer, piano

Charles Munch Boston Symphony Orchestra

D'Indy (1851–1931) – Symphony on a French Mountain Song

Vincent D'Indy, a pupil and prominent disciple of César Franck, wrote orchestral music (including concertos and three numbered symphonies), substantial chamber, piano and vocal music, and no fewer than five operas, yet is remembered by only this one work of 1886. That it is both attractive and bold, innovative music makes us wonder why, especially when D'Indy's love of nature produced a number of opera that deal in a freshly original manner with natural subjects.

Bold and innovative? Yes, indeed! For a start, in D'Indy's day to use a piano (even obbligato) as a “mere” orchestral instrument, as opposed to concerto soloist, was really quite daring. Then, rather than a single set of variations, he fashioned a three-movement work. The theme is a folk tune from the Cevennes mountains, hence the work's alternative (and charming) title of *Symphonie Cevenole*. Apparently, these “mountain airs” have a character all their own. According to Julien Tiersnot, musical historian: “The high mountains give to folk [tunes] that become acclimated to their altitude something of the purity of their atmosphere. It seems as though there were in these mountain songs – they were generally songs of shepherds – something fluid, ethereal, a gentleness that is not found in folk songs of the plains.”

However, D'Indy called his work a “symphony,” presumably because it isn't a concerto. Yet the form is hardly symphonic, so the word implies the same sense as in Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* – the ancient one of “sounding together.” Although collateral themes are not excluded, they take relatively “walk-on” parts, and each movement is effectively a variation form. While the variations in each movement are fused into continuous, if necessarily episodic arguments, their separate existence is justified through a sort of thematic “character re-alignment,” in the manner of Cesar Franck's “cyclical” concept, almost as if we were following the theme down from the mountain

trails and into the city streets:

1. *Assez Lent*: sets off with the open, diatonic “mountain air” itself. Munch and his forces play with invigorating energy, a sense of open-air freshness. The main theme, announced immediately by the English horn, reappears periodically throughout the work, both as a complete statement of the song as well as in fragmentary forms resembling Wagnerian leitmotifs. Two other melodies also play prominent roles, both individually and in combination. The exposition, development and recapitulation of these themes reveal an almost Brahmsian ability to mold musical materials to a desired form – rather than adjust the formal structure to accommodate the ideas.

2. *Assez modere mais sans lenteur*: by way of contrast takes a distinctly chromatic-sounding, rather more urbane view, while

3. *Anime*: presents a far more vigorous perspective – what happened to that gentleness? Here it becomes, rather appositely, the repetitive opening phrase that crescendos and diminuendos reminiscent of the last movement from Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* in D Minor.

Thus: the *Symphony on a French Mountain Air* is a hybrid work. It is based on folk songs collected in the mountainous Ardeche region of southern France. Its structure is more related to a Romantic-era symphony than a traditional concerto. The piano part is showy and virtuosic, but thoroughly integrated into the complete work, rather than the clear focal element. This brilliant showpiece represents his masterwork.

Ravel: *Piano Concerto in G Major* (1929–1931) Maurice Ravel composed his two piano concertos virtually simultaneously. Ravel notes: “It was an interesting experience to conceive and realize the two concertos at the same time. The first [the G major], which I propose to play myself, is a concerto in the strict sense, written in the spirit of Mozart and Saint-Saëns. I believe that a concerto can be both gay and brilliant without necessarily being profound or aiming at dramatic

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Ravel Piano Concerto in G

1 I. Allegramente 8:12

2 II. Adagio assai 8:48

3 III. Presto 4:12

d'Indy Symphony on a French Mountain Air

4 I. Assez lent 10:51

5 II. Assez modéré, mais sans lenteur 6:48

6 III. Animé 7:33

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