

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).

Ravel

L'Enfant Et Les Sortilèges

Solists: Motet Choir Of Geneva

L'Orchestre De La Suisse Romande

Ansermet



Mastered in DSD256

Ernest Ansermet's approach to *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* highlights the perspective of the Child. The opening motif for two oboes, for example, is meandering and annoying, perfectly reflecting the Child's boredom and peevishness. The extreme eccentricities of the apparitions are heard in high relief, emphasizing the individuality of the vocal lines and the stunning clarity of the orchestral details. There is nothing pastel about Ansermet's reading; his ability to bring out the score's nightmarish qualities and to make the wild sections sound dangerously out of control is revelatory. All the singers excel, giving vividly characterized and vocally accomplished performances. This is altogether one of the most exciting recordings of the opera available.

Ravel's only other opera, *L'Heure Espagnole*, is less well known, but has many charms -- an amusing plot, vivacious music, and Ravel's characteristically brilliant orchestration. The libretto, however, doesn't seem to have inspired the composer as much as Colette's for *L'Enfant*, and much of the vocal writing is on the level of pleasant but unmemorable arioso. The characterizations of soloists Suzanne Danco, Paul Derenne, Michel Hamel, and Heinz Rehfuss are sharply and amusingly etched, and the singing is warm and idiomatic.

Debussy's incidental music for Gabriele d'Annunzio's play *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* is one of the composer's most substantial works, and the hour-long suite presented here consists of five excerpts assembled by André Caplet. The suite contains some of the composer's lushest and most highly perfumed music. If the listener can persevere through the sadistic pseudo-Christian mysticism of d'Annunzio's text, there is music of much delicacy, eloquence, and grandeur, and the vocal writing is especially evocative and expressive. The soloists don't convey the innocence and purity to be fully convincing, and at the end of an extended unaccompanied section notable for their perilous intonation, they face a dire tonal collision when the orchestra reenters. Ansermet's reading seems to plod when it should float, and generally fails to bring out the score's mystery and majesty. Ansermet's stolid interpretation, with the pallid orchestral playing and strained choral singing, make this performance seem very much out of place on an otherwise excellent set. The sound quality is generally good, with little tape noise, and the sound in *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* is notable for the clarity with which it captures the rich and varied orchestral timbres.

Maurice Ravel

L'Enfant Et Les Sortilèges

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Ernest Ansermet

1 Part 1. J'ai Pas Envie De Faire Ma Page 24:56
2 Conclusion. Oh! Ma Tête! Ma Tête 16:50
Total Time: 41:46

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