

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.

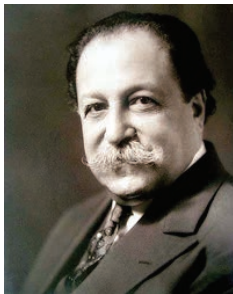
With the outbreak of World War I, Monteux was called up for military service, but was discharged in 1916, and he travelled to the United States. There he took charge of the French repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City from 1917 to 1919, conducting the American premiere of Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov's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



Pierre Monteux London Symphony Orchestra



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The genesis of the Second Symphony can be traced to Sibelius' trip to Italy in early 1901. The trip came about at the suggestion of his friend, the amateur musician Axel Carpelan, and it was there that he began contemplating several ambitious projects, including a four-movement tone poem based on the Don Juan story and a setting of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. While none of these plans ever came to fruition, some of the ideas sketched during this trip did find their way into the second movement of this symphony. Carpelan was also instrumental in raising money to allow Sibelius to relinquish his work at the Helsinki Conservatoire and devote himself to the composition of the Second Symphony. Despite his friend's help, Sibelius' return to Finland for the summer and autumn was not accompanied by any great burst of inspiration, and extensive revisions delayed the first performance, first to January 1902 and then to March 1903. But from then on, the symphony enjoyed unparalleled success in Finland and eventually led to the major breakthrough in Germany that was so craved by Scandinavian composers of this era (one which Nielsen, for instance, never achieved). The Second Symphony has retained an extraordinary popularity for its individualistic tonal language, dark wind coloring, muted string writing, simple folk-like themes, and distinctly "national" flavor that are all Sibelian to the core.

While the opening mood is pastoral, it leads to an air of instability, in which small, short gestures seem to arise at random and then trail off. Yet there is a subtle coherence to the work that counters its seemingly shapeless quality. All of the material of the first movement emerges from either the two

repeated-note subjects heard in the strings and winds at the opening, or from a brooding idea first presented in the winds and brass.

Unlike the first movement, in which the gentleness of the introduction is recaptured at the conclusion, the second movement is full of turbulence and ends without consolation. Two competing subjects seem to engage in a battle: First, a dirge-like bassoon melody in D minor, marked "lugubrious," builds to a towering culmination in winds and brass; then an ethereal, ruminative theme is played by divided strings in the key of F sharp major. The energetic scherzo, with its machine-gun figures in the strings, is built from a fragment of greatest simplicity: a repeated B flat followed by a turn around that note.

Following the precedent of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, the Scherzo is linked directly to the finale through a grand rhetorical bridge passage. The symphony at last achieves a flowing D major melodic line that heroically shakes off the D minor preparation, in the best sense of the Romantic tradition. Also like Beethoven, Sibelius brings back the transitional material a second time so that the victory of the major key can be savored anew, after which he concludes the work with a hymn-like peroration. That said, the Second Symphony marks the end of Sibelius' early Romantic period that paid homage to his predecessors. In subsequent works, his interest rested more in pursuing new formal methods based on fragmentation and recombination.

SIBELIUS SYMPHONY NO. 2

Pierre Monteux London Symphony Orchestra

- 1 Allegretto 10:06
 - 2 Andante Ma Rubato 14:27
 - 3 Vivacissimo 6:12
 - 4 Allegro Moderato 12:46
- Total Time: 43:31

Released by RCA 1959
Recorded by Decca 18-20 Jun 1958 at Kingsway Hall
Producer - John Culshaw Engineer - Kenneth Wilkinson
Transferred from a 15ips tape to DSD256



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