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FRANCK SYMPHONY
IN D MINOR

LEONARD BERNSTEIN
NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

ML 5391



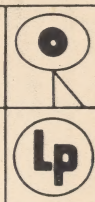
50-2051

FRANCK

SYMPHONY IN D MINOR

New York Philharmonic
Leonard Bernstein, Conductor

COLUMBIA
GUARANTEED HIGH-FIDELITY
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■ "The world of music," wrote Neville Cardus in an essay, "at times unfolds itself to the fancy in the shapes and altitudes of the physical universe. There, in the upper ether, reposes the mountain of Bach; farther away in a fiercer light the peak of Palestrina pierces the heavens like a spear; in a middle height the warmth of a more humane air makes fertile the slopes of the Handel range; the volcano of Beethoven smokes ominously yet, but there are wooded uplands enriched for ever by the lava of the first eruption. The enchanted lake of Debussy dreams in the distance; there are the courts and palaces and lawns of Mozart; there is the country estate of Haydn; there are rocks and crags and thunder to the right, where the Wagnerian surge is never still. And standing aloof, rising from a plateau, is the cathedral of Cesar Franck."

Although he inspired every musician in France who came into his presence, Franck was, in Cardus' view, a man apart even from the general musical culture of France, sharing few of the attributes for which French composers have been most consistently lauded. Franck is never merely picturesque or decorative; his inspiration is drawn from piety rather than aesthetic purpose. "He reflects nothing of the literary influence which at all times have more or less governed French composers. . . ." Without either arrogance or humor, he is, in Cardus' eyes, a kind of medievalist, Gothic rather than nineteenth-century French.

The cyclical method which served Franck so well in composition—the use of a few melodic units to serve many functions in a work and, heard repeatedly, to give it great unity—Cardus sees as an inevitable outgrowth of Franck's ritualistic mind. "There are few melodies of length or variety of phrase in Franck; mostly he composed in small chromatic figures. . . . The point to remember is that tones are symbols in Franck. . . . The music of Franck is ritual. . . . The same chromatic figure or much the same, rising or falling; the same ascents and descents. These motifs are the articles in a credo: they are Canticles, suffused by religious association. . . ."

■ There is much to support this feeling about Franck. It was as a church organist and teacher that he made his meager living and as an organist that he matured in his musical thinking. And his work was his life. For a time he entertained—or rather, his father did—the career of a virtuoso pianist, but this was put aside. He made a notable

César Franck born in Liège, Belgium, December 22, 1822; died in Paris, November 8, 1890.

Symphony in D Minor was begun in 1886, completed in 1888. It is dedicated to Henri Duparc and is in three movements:

- 17:52 — I—Lento; Allegro non troppo;
Allegro
10:15 — II—Allegretto
10:40 — III—Allegro non troppo

record in his studies at the Paris Conservatory but abandoned any attempt to go after the Prix de Rome. He married well but never took advantage of this entrée into the social world of Paris. An attempt to write a comic opera, in 1850, ended so unsatisfactorily that Franck wrote almost nothing for the next ten years.

Success, too, came to him first as an organist, with appointments to Notre Dame de Lorette and then at St. Clotilde, a position he kept to the end of his life. When he began to compose again he was in his fifties, a man content with the modest acclaim he had won, completely free of desire to "make a splash," free to work out with the sincerity that was his hallmark the major compositions he envisioned. The oratorio *The Beatitudes* was in preparation for ten years, 1869 to 1879, while he patiently taught classes at the Conservatory.

■ The final ten years of his life were the most fruitful. It had, in fact, taken him nearly a lifetime to invent a whole new symphonic style to express his thought, his own particular and distinctive manner. And it is exactly this that is the great achievement of the *Symphony in D Minor*. It could have been written by no one else. Every aspect, every element, is what it is because a mighty musical mind is being as nearly completely honest as it is possible to be. The sense of purpose of the composer is so strong as to give it the unity of a hymn. "It sounded well, just as I thought it would" he is said to have remarked contentedly after the first performance, February 17, 1889, although the work had met with general apathy and scorn. He did not mean, surely, that it had been merely a great artistic or aesthetic achievement, but that the music had rightly expressed his purpose. And of the rightness of his purpose there could be no doubt in his mind.

■ But perhaps Franck's character, as a man, prejudices us; perhaps we read into the fact of his indifference to fame, his naïveté and sincerity too conclusive a meaning. For the *Symphony in D Minor* would stand alone with complete security if there were no such religious associations brought to it out of the life of its composer. Millions of people have learned to love it without ever having heard a word of the nature of this mild-mannered and pious man. Is there, in fact, anything necessarily religious about this music?

Gabriel Fauré, in an article written in 1922, questioned this. "What music is religious? What music is not? To try to resolve the question is quite hazardous, since no matter how deeply sincere a musician's religious feeling may be, it is through his personal taste that he expresses it and not according to rules one can fix. Every classification in this field of ideas has always seemed arbitrary to me. Can one maintain, for example, that among those religious compositions of Cesar Franck which reach the loftiest heights (up to the very quiver of angels' wings), there might not be a few which because of their very smoothness, are not absolutely free of sensuality? On the other hand, doesn't that child voice which soars alone to sing *Gloria in excelsis Deo* in the *Messe Solenne* of Gounod create an effect of exquisite purity? . . . I cite these two musicians because the religious style of the one has so often been contrasted with the religious style of the other, and because I am trying to show that in the realm of truly musical and beautiful works, it is almost impossible to draw a line of demarcation between those which are religious and those that 'savor of heresy.'"

Though it may be impossible to draw such a line, there is perhaps a real difference nevertheless between a piece of music that creates "an effect of exquisite purity" and a work that grows out of sincere conviction deeply held. In the first category we are liable to be conscious of the "art" that is being practiced to achieve this purity. In the latter, sublimity is attained not without struggle but without artifice. Louis Biancolli put it this way: ". . . the *D minor Symphony*, whatever its structural faults, is the work of a supreme artist intent on absolute truth in revealing himself and his faith through an expressive medium. Few musical works come as close to saintliness. In shaping his rapture, technic and form merged and dissolved. The result was pure vision in

terms of music. In the last analysis, art becomes as irrelevant to the artist as religion to the saint."

For to the saint religion is as wide as the world, all-inclusive. Franck was a kind of saint in music. If we may also hear in the *D Minor Symphony* only human values, human aspirations, it is because these human feelings—all of them—are included.

Notes by CHARLES BURR

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■ LEONARD BERNSTEIN and the New York Philharmonic have added to their previously released catalog of Columbia Masterworks © records the following selections:

Rimsky-Korsakov: *Scheherazade*. ML 5387

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DEMONSTRATION
FRANCK
SYMPHONY IN D MINOR
NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
LEONARD BERNSTEIN, Conductor

TIMING: 17:52
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NOT FOR SALE
Side 1

I - Lento
Allegro non troppo
Allegro

M L 5391
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COLUMBIA MASTERWORKS

DEMONSTRATION
FRANCK
SYMPHONY IN D MINOR
NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
LEONARD BERNSTEIN, Conductor

TIMING: 20:40
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NOT FOR SALE
Side 2

- 1. II - Allegretto
- 2. III - Allegro non troppo

ML 5391
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