

ML 4024

FRANCK: Symphony in D Minor



**COLUMBIA**  
MASTERWORKS  
RECORDS



**LONG PLAYING**  
MICROGROOVE

FRANCK:  
SYMPHONY  
IN D MINOR

THE  
PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA  
EUGENE ORMANDY

Conductor

ML 4024

NONBREAKABLE VINYLITE

# FRANCK: Symphony in D Minor

THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA, EUGENE ORMANDY, Conductor

ML 4024

César Franck completed the composition of his only symphony on August 22, 1888, when he was nearly sixty-six years old. He was a professor of organ at the Paris Conservatory, and a respected figure in the musical world. What, then, is the explanation of the fact that the majestic and solemn creation of so venerable a *viellard* should have been attacked in the press? Franck's Symphony was not a work by a bold modernist; its form, its construction, its orchestration had elements of novelty, but all entirely within the compass for a generation that heard Berlioz and Wagner. After its initial performance on February 17, 1889, Arthur Pougin, and Hanslick of the Paris press, allergic not only to all that was new, but to all that was unusual in the old, wrote a vicious account in *Méneſtreſel*, the influential Paris weekly, finding "a lack of fire of genius, lack of inspiration, lack of freshness." He found the orchestration "without verve and color," the harmonic progressions "drab and enwrapped in fog." He granted that the work was "estimable," but said it did not excite the listener.

Even posthumous fame was not bestowed upon Franck ungrudgingly. Another critic in *Méneſtreſel* wrote about another performance in 1893: "This music is morose and generates tedium. The master had very little to say here, but he proclaimed it with the conviction of a pontiff defining a dogma." The sentiment thus expressed comes close to the much-quoted phrase allegedly used by Gounod at the first performance of the Symphony, and reported by Franck's faithful disciple, Vincent d'Indy, as being to the effect that the symphony was "an affirmation of impotence carried to a dogma" (affirmation de l'impuissancé pousse jusqu'au dogme, mistranslated by Rosa Newmarch, and usually quoted in that mistranslation, as "the affir-

mation of incompetence pushed to dogmatic lengths"). Vincent d'Indy says that Gounod will probably expiate this phrase in some musical Purgatory but it is possible that, writing from memory and by report, Vincent d'Indy merely paraphrased the *Méneſtreſel* review, in a form so literary that it seems improbable that Gounod, or any other, could have delivered himself of it extemporaneously. However that may be, the written appraisals were curiously vehement, considering Franck's age and position.

Vincent d'Indy (and, after him, all commentators, in French and in English), being partisan to Franck's cause, tells other improbable stories. For instance, he tells that Ambroise Thomas, composer and director of the Paris Conservatory, deliberately went to bed and feigned an illness when a member of the Franck family came to invite him to attend Franck's funeral, and that other Conservatory professors declared themselves similarly indisposed, to avoid paying the last homage to their colleague. Vincent d'Indy explains these defections by the fear which Conservatory officials entertained for Franck's theories—an explanation which makes his story even more baffling, for Franck's theories were anything but revolutionary or even upsetting.

On the other hand, Gustave Derepas, Franck's early biographer, tells us that Franck's Symphony has been compared to an algebraic equation, scientifically contrived and solved. He is willing to grant science of structure, but proposes another formula, geometric rather than algebraic, determining the dimensions and proportions of component parts. He sees in the Symphony a Cologne Cathedral, whose dimensions are ideally proportioned.

Philip Hale, who was one of the most Francophile critics of the golden era of American music criticism, greeted Franck's Symphony with tempered enthusiasm at its first Boston performance. "There are several singular features about the Symphony to which I should like to call attention: its modernity, the reduction of the form to three movements, the return in the finale to preceding themes, the abandonment of the reprise . . . I find that the orchestration as a whole is too monochromatic and drab."

Taking stock of the half century of Franck's Symphony, we find that it ranks among the most popular symphonies in the orchestral repertoire the world over. The criticism of its orchestration seems puzzling. Franck's orchestra is, if anything, too luscious for modern ears. The Conservatory professor, who, according to the report of Vincent d'Indy, was shocked by the employment of the English horn in the second movement (for it was "unsymphonic"), would now find unexpected allies among modernists. But even by a statistical measure of orchestral variety, Franck's Symphony is far ahead of his romantic contemporaries. From the harmonic standpoint, the moderns will demur to Franck's chromaticism and his fluid use of tonality. The inspiration of Franck's Symphony may seem too lofty, with too narrow a margin between loftiness and pompousness. Be that as it may César Franck's Symphony is a distinctive form affiliated with Schumann and Wagner, but with differences of treatment so unmistakable that there can be no confusing Franck's style with any other musician. And that is the thing that secures musical immortality.

Notes by NICOLAS SLONIMSK

This Columbia Long Playing **LP** Microgroove Record is a modern high quality musical reproduction worthy of your special care: Always keep it away from heat and in this protective envelope.

ML 4024

**FRANCK: Symphony in D Minor**

21

**COLUMBIA**  
**MASTERWORKS\***

FRANCK  
SYMPHONY IN D MINOR  
THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA  
EUGENE ORMANDY, Conductor

ML 4024

SIDE 1

NONBREAKABLE

Center

11-24-48-045

First Movement: Lento; Allegro non troppo;

Allegro

(XLP 206)



**LONG PLAYING**  
**MICROGROOVE**



\*Trade Marks Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. Marcos Registrados  
Made in U.S.A. Pat. Pending

XLP 206

2a

**COLUMBIA**  
**MASTERWORKS\***

FRANCK  
SYMPHONY IN D MINOR  
THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA  
EUGENE ORMANDY, Conductor

ML 4024  
NONBREAKABLE

SIDE 2

Band No. 1: Second Movement: Allegretto  
Band No. 2: Third Movement: Allegro  
non troppo

(XLP 207)



**LONG PLAYING**  
**MICROGROOVE**



\*Trade Marks Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. Merces Registered  
Made in U.S.A. Pat. Pending \*Trade Mark

XLP 207