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HISTORIC SOUND

Darius Milhaud:
Orchestral & Chamber Music

Paul Badura-Skoda (piano) Vienna Symphony Orchestra/Swoboda
San Francisco Symphony Orchestra/Monteux
Parrenin, Delecluse, Haas-Hamburger Trio

original recordings 1936-53 digitally remastered

Darius Milhaud

Suite pour Violin, Clarinet et Piano,
Op. 157b (1936)

01	*Ouverture*	[1.35]
02	*Divertissement*	[2.50]
03	*Jeu*	[1.28]
04	*Introduction & Final*	[5.40]

Suite Symphonique No. 2 ("Protée"),
Op. 57 (1919)

05	*Ouverture*	[3.52]
06	*Prélude et Fugue*	[3.27]
07	*Pastorale*	[5.18]
08	*Nocturne*	[2.26]
09	*Final*	[4.13]

Troisième Symphonie pour petite orchestre
("Sérénade"), Op. 71 (1921)

10	*Vivement*	[1.05]
11	*Calme*	[1.11]
12	*Rondement*	[0.54]

Sérénade pour orchestre,
Op.62 (1920/1)

13	*Vif*	[2.53]
14	*Tranquille*	[6.24]
15	*Vif*	[4.42]

Cinq Études pour piano et orchestre,
Op. 63 (1920)

16	*Vif*	[1.07]
17	*Doucement*	[2.41]
18	*Fugues: vif et rythme*	[1.06]
19	*Sombre*	[2.43]
20	*Romantique: tres animé*	[2.20]

Suite de l'opéra "Maximilien",
Op.110b (arr .1950)

21	*Movement de marche*	[1.27]
22	*Interlude 1*	[2.23]
23	*Interlude 2*	[1.20]
24	*Interlude 3*	[1.37]
25	*Interlude 4*	[3.01]
26	*Interlude 5*	[2.15]
27	*Interlude 6 (Final)*	[2.35]

Trois Rag Caprices,
Op. 78 (1922)

28	*Sec et musclé*	[2.21]
29	*Romance: tendrement*	[2.17]
30	*Précis et nerveux*	[2.18]

total CD duration **[79.30]**

Darius Milhaud was born in Aix-en-Provence, France, in 1892. The influences on his life and compositional career were many and varied, permitting him to produce an output both copious and highly individual. Provence was his first inspiration: both its landscapes and its people informed his early development, and he heard every day the songs of the workers in his father's almond dealership, and the comic songs of the local café-concerts. He was also raised in a strongly Jewish area, and though never an orthodox Jew, he retained deep religious beliefs. The Jews of Aix have their own liturgy which he must have heard often. His opera *Esther de Carpentras* and the *Poèmes juifs*, among other works, are direct results of these early influences.

He was a precociously talented child, playing duets with his father (a fine amateur pianist) from the age of three, and taking violin lessons aged seven. He had already begun to compose by 1905, and realised that this was to be his chosen field. At the age of 17 he entered the Conservatoire in Paris, studying under Dukas, Leroux, Widor and Gédalge, and forming friendships with Auric and Honegger amongst others. Of equal importance were his friendships with poet Francis Jammes, and Paul Claudel. The latter provided many texts for the young composer to set, and became very close to Milhaud. The novelist André Gide too, was an important early influence, impressing the composer with Christian themes of purity, suffering and sacrifice which led to several works of specifically Christian inspiration, such as the *Cantate de la croix de charité,* the song-cycle *Alissa*, and many settings of Claudel's texts, including perhaps his most famous work, *Christophe Colomb*.

Being excluded for military service for medical reasons, Milhaud spent much of the 1914-18 war helping refugees, until in 1916 he obtained a job in the French foreign ministry. The war and its repercussions on humanity caused him much pain, especially with the death in war service of his close friend Léo Latil. Paul Claudel had been appointed as ambassador to Brazil, and in 1917 Milhaud was invited to join the embassy staff as the attaché in charge of propaganda. His short stay (just under two years) saw him organizing concerts to aid the Red Cross, as well as his official duties. The exotic sounds and rhythms of Brazil had an impact on Milhaud and found its way into a number of works thereafter.

Returning to Paris, Milhaud found a new type of society, the era of cabaret, café-bars, and

bohemian lifestyles in which poets, artists and musicians thrived. It was at this time that Milhaud became a member of the group of composers known as "Les Six" under the mentorship of Jean Cocteau. He held soirées in his flat at which many of the creative talents discussed their new work, renewing friendships with Honegger and Poulenc, and meeting Satie. During the 1920s he also travelled extensively, including trips to London, where he discovered the then new and exciting world of jazz, with extremely fruitful results, and also Vienna, where he met Schoenberg, Berg and Webern.

He was also involved in concert tours to the USA and the USSR, giving many performances as a pianist and conductor. His composition continued unabated; by this time he had fully developed the polytonality which had begun to underpin all of his music from an early age. He so well mastered the technique that though his compositions are thoroughly "modern", the transparency of his scoring and the sheer brilliance of his interweaving of different keys within a piece always produce music which is approachable and enjoyable at any level. Despite the technical complexity of his writing (compared to the relative simplicity of Poulenc's compositions, for example), his music has, for its period, a unique blend of avant-garde experimentalism and sheer tunefulness.

During the 1920s Milhaud wrote several articles on compositional techniques, and regular music criticism, and by 1930 with the immense success of his opera *Christophe Colomb* (premièred in Berlin under Erich Kleiber) he was well established as a major musical figure. He started to compose much film and incidental music, continuing his activities in music journalism; he began to suffer from rheumatoid arthritis, which would eventually confine him to a wheelchair.

As a Jewish artist, Milhaud was a natural target of the Nazi authorities, and after the German occupation of France, he emigrated to the USA, where he took up several teaching posts, including one at Mills College, Oakland. He retained this position even after his return to France in 1947 (giving it up only in 1971), and for many years travelled back and forth between the two countries. Despite his illness, he found enormous satisfaction in his hectic life, continuing to compose, teach and perform almost until his death in 1974.

The music presented on this CD was composed between 1919 and 1936, a period in which Milhaud experienced many life-

changing events, and was constantly developing and refining his style. It should be pointed out that, unusually, though his music is seen to be inspired by many factors as has been briefly mentioned, there are no real individual composers who can be seen as forerunners; Milhaud truly stands apart as a unique and fascinating musical voice.

The *Suite for Violin, Clarinet and Piano*, Op. 157b, was composed in 1936, and represents the most mature work presented here. It is (for Milhaud) relatively straightforward. It derives from incidental music written for a production at the Théatre des Mathurins, Paris, of Anouilh's play *Le Voyageur sans Bagages*. Very typical of Milhaud is the bouncy, animated *Ouverture* **[1]**. The writing is more challenging stylistically than technically, requiring a light touch and perfect intonation in the many octaves between clarinet and violin. The second movement **[2]**, titled *Divertissement*, is a lullaby which begins with violin and clarinet only, the latter having to play tricky low repeated *legato* octaves, the piano joining in to recapitulate the opening theme. The *Jeu* **[3]** is lively fun, and the piano is excluded. Rhythms are overlaid in a sparkling cascade of notes. The final movement **[4]** is in two parts: a rather sombre *Introduction* being followed by a joyful, swinging 6/8 *Final*, whose theme with its syncopated rhythm could well be a cabaret song. The piece ends in subdued mood.

Milhaud wrote two *Symphonic Suites* derived from his large corpus of incidental music. His great friend Paul Claudel wrote the satirical drama "Protée" in 1913; Milhaud described the work as "a strong mixture of truculent gaiety and poetry". After a meeting with Claudel, Milhaud composed a few pieces, designated Op.17, for chorus and orchestra; they were rescored for small orchestra in 1916, then in 1919 he was asked to develop the music, add some more pieces, and use a large orchestra.

Thus was produced the *Symphonic Suite No. 2*, Op.57. The music was quite revolutionary and at the first performance, police had to be called to calm down the over-excited audience. (Similar stories are attributed to other Milhaud premières in this period). The curiosity about the music was so great that the conductor Pierné repeated the Suite the following week and it soon became a regular feature in Paris concerts. Although based on Greek mythology, Milhaud used many Latin American figures in the piece, garnered from his time in Brazil. The *Ouverture* **[5]** is a tango-habañera, which is followed by a furious

Prelude and Fugue **[6]** for the brass section in which the rest of the orchestra provides a backdrop. This section depicts a scene in the play in which seals throw themselves into the water with "braying, trumpeting and thumping of tails and fins". There follows a *Pastorale* **[7],** beautifully flowing and rocking, using Latin syncopated rhythms very effectively. The subsequent *Nocturne* **[8]**, though related to a Bacchanale in the play, is gentle and smoothly calm, not the wild orgy which might be expected. The music of the *Final* **[9]** is rousing, rumbustious and bright, a fitting climax to this fine work.

Although Milhaud wrote 13 full-scale symphonies (including the un-numbered choral symphony *Pacem in Terris*), his first works with the title are tiny, compact pieces, matching the work of Webern in conciseness. Of the three *Little Symphonies for Chamber Orchestra,* the third, subtitled *Sérénade*, (Op. 71, dating from 1921) is perhaps the best-known, due in part to its inclusion (in the version we hear here) in the Columbia History of Music by Ear and Eye. In its total duration of just over three minutes, it presents three full yet miniscule movements, each a model of musical miniaturisation.

The first **[10]** corresponds to the opening sonata-form movement of a classical symphony, marked *Vivement*, with a lively tune for flute forming its basis. The central section, *Calme*, **[11]** sees the strings present a smooth melody over a bubbling background, while the final movement **[12]** is a lively *Presto*. Equivalent to a full scale Rondo, though marked *Rondement,* its short span drags the polytonal writing into a definitively tonal final chord.

It is fascinating to compare this little piece with the similarly titled *Serenade for Orchestra*, Op. 62, also dating from 1920/1, which also has three movements, of like character. It could almost be described as the "grown-up" version, using a full-sized orchestra. The same brilliant writing, allowed more time to develop, marks the piece as unmistakeably Milhaud. Here, polytonality is not the mere superimposition of chords, but forms the basis of contrapuntal writing in which scales and melodies in different keys are masterfully interwoven – creating sounds which while thoroughly modern, create an overall sense of tonality, as Milhaud himself said.

The first movement **[13]** includes, according to the composer, "a *fugato* based on the opposition of F and B tonalities". Marked *Vif,* it starts with a simple march in B flat. After a

brief calm episode a lilting waltz is played by the flute, before the march returns on the trumpet, with syncopated strings behind. That B/F *fugato* ensues. As the two keys are extremely remote, sharing only one note, the bitonal aspect is clear to the ear. Two further keys appear, creating a quadritonal section of complexity yet which is never difficult on the ear, before the march returns and the movement ends where it started, in B flat major.

The second movement **[14]** is a gently swaying barcarolle, marked *Tranquillo*. Pastoral in mood, with little variation in expression, the music is relatively tonal with only the flute providing a chromatic melody as contrast. In the third movement **[15]**, also marked *Vif*, the tonality is also on the whole very restrained, with various contrapuntal elements, many employing fourths in their lines, straying off into remote keys, in something akin to a *rondo*.

Also from the same period come the *Cinq Études*, Op.63. The five studies, for piano and orchestra, were written during the summer of 1920. Milhaud describes each of the *Études* as "a study of sound balance with polytonality". In the first, **[16]**, only two keys are used, though additional notes dotted around the main themes give the impression of a more robust polychromaticism. Marked *Vif* (one of Milhaud's favourite expressions), the movement provides clarity to each of the two main keys simultaneously. Brazilian influence is once again heard in the second movement **[17]**. The piano part is intricate, as is the flute's line, heard mostly in the upper register, while the muted trombone sings a crude street song behind. Marked *Doucement*, the music evokes a tropical evening, slow, languorous and exotic. A marked contrast is heard in the third movement **[18]**, titled *Fugues: Vif et rythme*. The plural is explained by the composer's description: "a superimposition of a four-part fugue in A in the woodwinds, a three-part fugue in D flat in the brass, a four-part fugue in F in the strings, and a fugue with a subject combining the notes of these three tonalities in the piano." Remarkably, the genius of the writing still prevents this structure from becoming a mere cacophony, and each of the fugues is simultaneously audible with clarity.

The fourth movement **[19]** is a musical palindrome, where after twenty bars, the music is written backwards, note for note, and using the same instrumentation (though a brief piano arpeggio, timpani roll and a concluding triangle note are added). Known as a "crab",

this device was described by Milhaud as a "justification of the word *Étude*". The music here is also more tonally complex throughout. We return to simpler more open structures in the final movement **[20]**, which though titled *Romantique* is marked *trés animé*. The piano sets things moving and the trumpet responds, with a syncopated chromatic melody. The cello chips in, and the music becomes more animated and richly-textured. The strings enter with gentle arpeggios in four different keys, leading to a series of diminished-seventh "blues" chords, and the sudden *fortissimo* end.

Milhaud's opera *Maximilien* was first performed in 1932 at the Paris Opera, and carries the opus number 110. It is the story of the Spanish Emperor of Mexico, a proud man doomed to failure, removed from power by the hero Juarez, who is lauded by the people as their saviour from colonialism. The music is rich in harmonic complexity, and is perhaps more than any other work uncompromising in its use of multiple tonalities which create suitable dramatic tension to suit the opera's story. The critics of the time were merciless: the most accommodating, Henri Prunieres, did say that he felt the presence of a genius of undeniable power, and that he had rarely encountered an opera "so overflow with music". However he was still so uncomfortable with the harmonic novelty of the music that he was moved also to say that "Each voice moves about in its own sweet way. If by chance the voices meet on their way out, so much the better." Milhaud's true genius, in creating polytonal writing, which was in fact totally removed from any sense of "randomness", was not be truly recognised for some time.

The *Suite* of seven movements **[21-27]**, completed in 1950, consists of the opera's symphonic interludes, each depicting and summarising the scenes and action. As mentioned, the music is quite severe in its dissonance, keys clashing constantly, but this is not at all unsuitable for music which describes an armed popular uprising. This is particularly the case in the *final* which is taken from the Overture to the opera and in the main represents the figure of Juarez.

We have described how Milhaud came across early Jazz music in London where he heard the Billy Arnold Jazz Band. It hit Paris with a bang in the 1920s and Milhaud, on his return from South America, was fascinated by it, as were many composers. In fact he adored the new genre, and wrote of "this new school of rhythm which shakes us", referring to how "these syncopations in the rhythms and in

the melodies superpose on a bass of austere regularity, as essential as the circulation of the blood, the heartbeat and the pulse."

One of the more overt expressions of this love of jazz was the piano work *Trois Rag Caprices*,Op.78, written in 1922, just after a brief trip to the USA where he heard the Paul Whiteman Band, and which he orchestrated a few years later. Whilst the work is inspired by American popular tunes and rhythms, it interprets these in a symphonic manner, and is not a blatantly "jazzy" piece in the way that Martinu's *Trois Esquisses* are. It led the way to his jazz-inspired masterpiece *La création du Monde*, written in 1923.

The first *Caprice* **[28]** is titled *Sec et musclé* ("dry and robust"). It starts tonally, then combines three keys in polytonal passages, with solo bassoon and trombone adding hints of humour and romance respectively. In the orchestra, the texture is passed alternately between strings and wind.

In the second movement **[29]**, which is titled *Romance*, we are presented with sensuous chromatic passages, at first embodying also a slight *frisson* which resolves into a relaxed *pianissimo.* There is no tempo marking, only the word *tendrement* ("tenderly"). A complete contrast is found in the last piece **[30]** which Milhaud marks *Précis et nerveux*. Pizzicato strings skip around in wide intervals, while the music embodies subtle (and not-so-subtle) hints of ragtime and also a sentimental waltz figure. A single key suffices at first; then additional keys and rhythms are introduced, creating a whirling kaleidoscope of sounds in "polyrhythmic polytonality". The music settles down into a gentler chromaticism, and is brought to a halt by the drums' repeated insistent strokes.

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References:
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Grove Music Online,accessed 27.01.06
http://www.grovemusic.com

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SUITE FOR VIOLIN, CLARINET AND PIANO, Op. 157b
Performed by Jacques Parrenin (violin), Ulysse Delécluse (clarinet) and Annette Haas-Hamburger (piano). Recorded c. 1952. Originally released in 1953 in the UK (Felsted RL89006) and in the USA on Period SPL 563.

LITTLE CHAMBER SYMPHONY No. 3, Op. 71
Performed by Jean Pougnet (violin), Anthony Pini (cello), Reginald Kell (clarinet), Paul Draper (bassoon), and George Eskdale (trumpet) conducted by Walter Goehr. Recorded on 30 September 1936, EMI matrix number CA15948. Originally released on Columbia DB1788.

SYMPHONIC SUITE No.2, Op. 57
Performed by the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Pierre Monteux. Recorded 14 April 1945, originally released in the USA on RCA Victor 11-8977, 11-8978 and 11-8979.

SERENADE FOR ORCHESTRA, Op. 62
FIVE STUDIES FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA, op. 63 *
SUITE "MAXIMILIEN", Op. 110b
TROIS RAG CAPRICES, Op. 78
Performed by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Henry Swoboda, (* with Paul Badura-Skoda, piano). Recorded in 1950. Originally released in the USA on Westminster WL5051.

Technical note by Andrew Rose:

"Working with both vinyl and shellac together for a single CD is always a challenge - however good the 78s are, they're unlikely to be a match for vinyl in terms of frequency range, dynamic range or surface noise. And yet, as I think this CD shows, they can come remarkably close - close enough that you don't feel a major sonic gear-change going on as we move from one to the other.

I was extremely fortunate to have unearthed a set of US-pressed Victor 78s of the Protée Suite in superb condition. These were recorded only a few short years before the earliest vinyl material, and as such at least a part of the recording equipment must have been comparable to those later recordings. Even so, the sound I found on these discs surprised me by its quality, and set the bar really high for the Little Symphony, a much earlier British recording.

Still, Protée gave me something to aim for with the Symphony, and I think I was able to do it justice. In fact, the recording which gave the greatest trouble was the Trio Suite, where intermodulation distortion, particularly between clarinet and violin at the lower end of their registers, caused a lot of trouble and may remain just audible in some sections - though not, I hope, at a level which will spoil the listener's enjoyment of this fabulous collection."

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