

GOUNOD FAUST

When the French branch of the Gramophone Company recorded Charles Gounod's *Faust* in Paris during 1930, it preserved far more than a celebrated opera. Conducted by Henri Büsser with the orchestra and chorus of the Paris Opéra, this recording captures an entire performing tradition at its height: the supple diction, conversational elegance and stylistic poise of French opera between the wars. Nearly a century later, it remains one of the most idiomatic and compelling recorded accounts of *Faust*.

Recorded between February and November 1930, the original issue occupied forty sides of 78 rpm discs. Although not absolutely complete, it presented a remarkably substantial version of the opera for its time, including the Walpurgis Night music and ballet, and was described by a contemporary reviewer as "practically complete." At a time when the limitations of the 78 rpm disc usually demanded extensive cuts, this was an ambitious undertaking that preserved not only Gounod's score but also a performing tradition already beginning to disappear.

Henri Büsser (1872–1973) brought unique authority to the project. A pupil of both Charles Gounod and Jules Massenet, he belonged to the last generation with direct personal links to the composer. Throughout a long career as conductor, composer and teacher, Büsser became one of the foremost custodians of the French operatic tradition.

His conducting avoids heaviness and theatrical excess, favouring clarity, flexibility and close attention to the natural accents of the French language. The result is a performance of remarkable continuity, despite having been assembled over many recording sessions. Büsser's spacious pacing favours the long-spun melody while allowing Gounod's orchestral colours to emerge with unusual transparency.

Mireille Berthon (1889–1955) sings Marguerite with refinement and emotional restraint rather than overt sentimentality. Her poised phrasing, clear diction and finely focused tone exemplify the distinctive virtues of French singing between the wars. From the sparkling innocence of the church scene and the serenity of the final redemption, Berthon creates a Marguerite whose character develops naturally through the drama rather than serving simply as a showcase for vocal display.

Marcel Journet (1868–1933) dominates the stage as Méphistophélès. By 1930 he was already celebrated at Covent Garden, La Scala, the Metropolitan Opera and the Paris Opéra. His Devil is urbane rather than grotesque, seductive rather than merely sinister. In *Le veau d'or*, temptation is conveyed through elegance and intelligence rather than brute force, while throughout the opera his superb command of both voice and language creates one of the most compelling assumptions of the role ever preserved on disc.

The supporting cast, together with the orchestra and chorus of the Paris Opéra, contribute immeasurably to the performance's authenticity. Modern listeners may initially be surprised by its elegance and intimacy, yet these very qualities give the recording its enduring value.

Far from being merely a historical document, this 1930 *Faust* remains a vivid window into a vanished French operatic tradition, preserved with extraordinary vitality by artists who understood its language and style from within. Its historical importance is matched by its enduring musical conviction, qualities that continue to make it one of the finest French opera recordings of the 78 rpm era.

Gounod FAUST

César Vezzani
Faust

Mireille Berthon
Marguerite

Marcel Journet
Méphistophélès

Orchestra and Chorus
of the Paris Opéra

Henri Büsser

Studio Recording • 1930

Obert-Thorn

PRISTINE
AUDIO

PACO 240



GOUNOD FAUST

CD 1 (77:20)

ACT ONE

1. Introduction 4:29
2. Rien! En vain j'interroge 4:46
3. Ah! Paresseuse fille qui sommeille! 1:33
4. Aux champs l'aurore nous rappelle 1:09
5. Mais, ce Dieu, que peut-il pour moi? 3:37
6. À moi les plaisirs 5:31

ACT TWO

7. Vin ou bière, bière ou vin 4:46
8. O sainte médaille 1:35
9. Avant de quitter ces lieux 4:35
10. Le veau d'or est toujours debout 1:55
11. Merci de ta chanson! 2:33
12. De l'enfer qui vient ému nos armes... 2:05
13. Nous nous retrouverons, mes amis! 1:27
14. Ainsi que la brise légère 2:40
15. Ne permettez-vous pas ma belle demoiselle. 3:55

ACT THREE

16. Faites-lui mes aveux 2:55
17. C'est ici? 2:02
18. Quel trouble inconnu 4:35
19. Alerte! La voilà 0:39
20. Je voudrais bien savoir 4:44
21. Un bouquet! 5:27
22. Seigneur Dieu, que vois-je! 3:00
23. Prenez mon bras un moment 6:02
24. Il était temps! 1:17

CD 2 (78:56)

ACT THREE – continued

1. Il se fait tard, adieu! 3:44
2. O nuit d'amour, ciel radieux 5:03
3. Tête folle! . . . Il m'aime! 3:13

ACT FOUR

4. Seigneur, daignez permettre 4:49
5. Quand du Seigneur le jour luira 4:12
6. Déposons les armes! 3:03
7. Gloire immortelle de nos aïeux 3:06
8. Allons, Sièbel! Entrons dans la maison... 0:49
9. Qu'attendez-vous encore? 1:09
10. Vous qui faites l'endormie 2:45
11. Que voulez-vous, messieurs? 3:55
12. Par ici, par ici, mes amis! 2:00
13. Écoute-moi bien, Marguerite 4:16

ACT FIVE

14. Dans les bruyères 3:06
15. Jusqu'aux premiers feux du matin 3:23
16. Les Nubiennes 2:06
17. Adagio 3:37
18. Danse antique 1:27
19. Variation de Cléopâtre 1:20
20. Les Troyennes 2:09
21. Variation du miroir 1:27
22. Danse de Phryné 2:36
23. Que ton ivresse, ô volupté 1:52
24. Va-t'en! 3:56
25. Mon cœur est pénétré d'épouvante! 5:25
26. Alerte, alerte, ou vous êtes perdus 2:50
27. Sauvée! Christ est ressuscité! 1:38



CAST

- Faust César Vezzani (tenor)
Marguerite Mireille Berthon (soprano)
Méphistophélès Marcel Journet (bass)
Valentin Louis Musy (baritone)
Dame Martha Schwertlein Jeanne Montfort (mezzo)
Wagner Michel Cozette (baritone)

ORCHESTRA AND CHORUS OF THE PARIS OPÉRA

Conductor: Henri Büsser

RECORDING

Studio recording, Paris, 1930

PRODUCER AND AUDIO RESTORATION

Mark Obert-Thorn

COVER IMAGE

Marcel Journet as Méphistophélès

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