

This release brings together all of the French and Swiss music conducted by Ernest Ansermet during his eleven appearances as guest conductor of the NBC Symphony Orchestra between 1948 and 1950 (he should have appeared 12 times, but his 1949 New Year's Day concert was replaced by coverage of a football game). It includes the American premiere of a work by the Swiss composer, Frank Martin, his *Petite Symphonie concertante* for piano, harpsichord, harp and orchestra of 1945, as well as works - often with a Spanish theme - by Debussy, Ravel, Chabrier and Honegger. The following article, entitled "Nationalist Trend - Ansermet Says It Has Faded in Many Lands", was published the day after Ansermet concluded his first run of four concerts at the NBC:

"We have Swiss cheese, Swiss chocolate and Swiss watches, but there is no such thing as Swiss music," said Ernest Ansermet, founder and conductor of the Orchestra de la Suisse Romande of Geneva. He made his point in an interview the other day before an afternoon rehearsal of the NBC Symphony, of which he has been guest conductor for the past month.

"There is really no such thing as American music either" he added. "To attempt composition of 'truly national' music implies creative impoverishment. Nationalist thought in any field is caused by routine thinking, and that is dangerous for social as well as musical thinking." The eminent musician spoke with a twinkle in his bright eyes, but his good humor did not conceal the seriousness of his thought, which veered into broad social channels as often as it concentrated on music.

European music has lost most traces of nationalist style in the last thirty years, he believes. Paris has been listening to Schoenberg's atonalities, and all of France is absorbing the Viennese twelve-tone technique, historically an unprecedented turn of events. Honegger, a German-Swiss, who dedicated his "Pacific 231" to Ansermet, writes what may be called French music, and Frank Martin, a French Swiss, whose "Petite Symphonie Concertante" Ansermet introduced with the NBC Symphony last month, writes German music.

America and Europe American nationalism is not healthy, to Ansermet's mind. "You are less distant from Europe than you think." He has noticed more likenesses between the two musical societies since the last time he was here in 1936. "Not that Americans have become Europeanized or Europeans Americanized, but simply that problems of both peoples are similar, today. We in Europe, for instance, have problems of the rights of performers in recorded music such as your Mr. Petrillo is dealing with, though our situation is complicated by the fact that we have more unions."

He is astonished at the abundance of composers in America, and has a stack of unread scores in his hotel room. He mentioned Marc Blitzstein's "The Cradle Will Rock" and David Diamond's "Rounds" as two works he has enjoyed so far. Copland, Sessions and Hindemith are played in Europe "about as much as any other young composers." Smiling at our surprised look, he added, "You see, to us they are young in art even if they are mature in years."

He refuses to rest on his laurels as a champion of new music, earned more than thirty years ago when he was conductor for the Diaghaleff ballet. He introduced Stravinsky's "Petrouchka" to this country in 1916 and Martin's Symphony No. 5 in 1948. He lamented the fact that his own orchestra, with its opera and radio commitments, has time to prepare only twelve concerts per season, which it takes on tour of French Switzerland. "Naturally I have to devote most of our programs to the classical repertoire. I should like to do more new music. As things are, I have time for only one new work on each program."

From his enormous experience with contemporary music, Ansermet has noted an almost universal failure to match the new vocabulary of melody and sonorities with suitable large forms. Most present-day composers sooner or later write a "symphony" in lieu of a more appropriate pattern. But few of them achieve more than a superficial resemblance to that form. "New composers fail to see the bithematic character of the classical sonata form as two aspects of a single musical idea. It should be the way man and woman are the two aspects of the human race" he added.

With the exception of Debussy, Stravinsky gets Ansermet's only vote as a formal innovator, because he "presented facts while others contented themselves with speculation and theory." The first to give homage to Stravinsky, Ansermet is not blind to that composer's shortcomings.

"He never engages himself with musical motives," he said. "His invention is for its own sake rather than for the sake of the work as a whole. He exhausts the possibilities of one idea, then drops it and proceeds to the next."

Article by Carter Harman, *The New York Times*, 8 February 1948



ansermet

conducts the nbc symphony

PRISTINE
AUDIO

PASC 685

ANSERMET AT THE NBC: DEBUSSY, RAVEL, CHABRIER, MARTIN, HONEGGER
ANSERMET, NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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PRISTINE
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disc one (75:41)

RAVEL Daphnis et Chloé Suite No. 2

1. 1. Lever de jour (6:42)
2. 2. Pantomime (5:18)

3. 3. Danse générale (5:12)

Broadcast concert of January 17, 1948

FRANK MARTIN Petite Symphonie concertante

4. 1. Adagio - Allegro con moto (12:28)

5. 2. Adagio (4:15)

6. 3. Allegro alla marcia (3:50)

Edward Vito, harp

Sylvia Marlowe, harpsichord

Milton Kaye, piano

Broadcast concert of January 17, 1948

7. DEBUSSY Jeux (17:12)

Broadcast concert of January 24, 1948

8. RAVEL La Valse (13:05)

Broadcast concert of January 31, 1948

9. DEBUSSY Images pour orchestre - 1. Gigue (7:37)

Broadcast concert of February 7, 1948

disc two (77:15)

1. HONEGGER Horace Victorieux (20:17)

Broadcast concert of December 18, 1948

RAVEL Rapsodie Espagnole

2. 1. Prélude à la nuit (4:33)

3. 2. Malagueña (2:05)

4. 3. Habanera (2:21)

5. 4. Feria (6:45)

Broadcast concert of December 18, 1948

6. CHABRIER España (7:05)

Broadcast concert of January 21, 1950

DEBUSSY (arr. Ansermet) - Six épigraphes antiques

7. 1. Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été (2:27)

8. 2. Pour un tombeau sans nom (3:12)

9. 3. Pour que la nuit soit propice (2:35)

10. 4. Pour la danseuse aux crotales (2:03)

11. 5. Pour l'égyptienne (2:55)

12. 6. Pour remercier la pluie au matin (2:24)

Broadcast concert of January 28, 1950

DEBUSSY Images pour orchestre - 2. Ibéria

13. I. Par les rues et par les chemins (7:00)

14. II. Les parfums de la nuit (6:52)

15. III. Le matin d'un jour de fête (4:41)

Broadcast concert of February 4, 1950

NBC Symphony Orchestra

conducted by Ernest Ansermet

XR remastering by
Andrew Rose

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photograph of
Ernest Ansermet

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2hr 32:56

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