

Great Conductors of the 20th Century Vol.06 - Andre Cluytens



CD1 1. Bizet: *Symphony in C Major: I. Allegro vivo* 2. Bizet: *Symphony in C Major: II. Adagio*
3. Bizet: *Symphony in C Major: III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace* 4. Bizet: *Symphony in C Major: IV. Finale. Allegro vivace* 5. Debussy: *Images pour orchestre: No 1: Giges* 6. Debussy: *Images pour orchestre: No 2: Iberia: I. Par les rues et par les chemins* 7. Debussy: *Images pour orchestre: No 2: Iberia: II. Les parfums de la nuit* 8. Debussy: *Images pour orchestre: No 2: Iberia: III. Le matin d'un jour de fete* 9. Debussy: *Images pour orchestre: No 3: Rondes de printemps* 10. Ravel: *La Valse* CD2 1. Bizet: *Symphony in C Major: I. Allegro vivo* 2. Bizet: *Symphony in C Major: II. Adagio* 3. Bizet: *Symphony in C Major: III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace* 4. Bizet: *Symphony in C Major: IV. Finale. Allegro vivace* 5. Debussy: *Images pour orchestre: No 1: Giges* 6. Debussy: *Images pour orchestre: No 2: Iberia: I. Par les rues et par les chemins* 7. Debussy: *Images pour orchestre: No 2: Iberia: II. Les parfums de la nuit* 8. Debussy: *Images pour orchestre: No 2: Iberia: III. Le matin d'un jour de fete* 9. Debussy: *Images pour orchestre: No 3: Rondes de printemps* 10. Ravel: *La Valse*

Boris Christoff - bass Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Chorus of the National Opera of Sofia Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire Orchestre du Théâtre National de l'Opéra Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française Philharmonia Orchestra André Cluytens - conductor

In his heyday, the 1950s and '60s, André Cluytens never quite enjoyed the international stature of Munch, Paray, Ansermet, and Monteux, to name just some of his rivals in the Gallic repertory. By and large that contemporary judgement appears to have been correct, but the current spate of reissues of Cluytens' recordings by Testament and the persistence of some of his best in an EMI catalog notorious for its swift deletions indicate that the gap, if there was one, was narrow. So it's gratifying to find this Belgian-born staple of the French orchestral and operatic scene included in EMI's Great Conductors series. The selections aim at providing a comprehensive overview of his specialties, always difficult with one whose career was weighted toward opera and whose repertoire spanned the French, German, and Russian schools. So Cluytens' much-admired Beethoven goes unrepresented here, while only the brief Act 3 Prelude from Lohengrin serves as a reminder of his stint at Bayreuth, and some 10 minutes of the Coronation Scene from Boris Godunov remains as evidence of his work in the Russian

repertoire where his gift for color served him so well. This latter excerpt, by the way, offers a sampling of Boris Christoff's unforgettable czar. The lengthiest non-French item is Schumann's Manfred Overture with the Berlin Philharmonic, where Cluytens demonstrates his affinity for German Romanticism, a feeling for the dramatic thrust the piece needs, and a preference for lighter textures, which the piece also needs.

But you can't fault the producers for their ultimate repertoire choices since the bulk of Cluytens' recording career was devoted to French music, of which he was an outstanding exponent. Bizet's Symphony in C is the same performance recently reissued on Testament and reviewed here (type Q5489 in Search Reviews). The excellence of the performance still shines through, although EMI's transfer adds reverberation, slightly exaggerates the nasality of winds and horns, places the instruments in a more distant perspective, and introduces a tubbier bass along with some congestion, none of which was apparent in Testament's transfer.

With Cluytens' 1963 Debussy Images with the Paris Conservatory Orchestra we're back to stereo and stay there for the remainder of the set. In the Debussy, as in the Ravel La Valse with the Philharmonia from 1958 that follows it, Cluytens generates a riot of orchestral color that extends from the neatly projected pianissimos all the way to the massive climaxes. Balances are well-judged and there's a fine rhythmic thrust to both performances, with Cluytens especially alive to La Valse's portrait of a disintegrating Old World culture.

EMI offers Berlioz's Symphonie fantastique in a live 1964 concert performance from Tokyo with the Paris Conservatory Orchestra. His first recording of the work, from 1955, is available on another recent Testament release (type Q5508 in Search Reviews) and his 1958 studio remake on EMI has been intermittently available. This one differs from the others only in small details. Compared with the Testament version, three of the five movements share virtually identical timings; the "Scene in the Country" is slightly more flowing in 1964, and there's more zip to the "Witches' Sabbath" finale. The stereo sonics reveal greater detail, especially in the percussion, and the strings display a ravishing sheen in the first movement. While the "March to the Scaffold" generates more tension in 1964, the brass, perhaps fatigued toward the end of a concert, lack weight and ideal precision. As with its predecessors, this live Symphonie is a good performance that doesn't erase memories of the best rivals on disc, among which Munch (RCA) and Bernstein (Sony) reign supreme. All in all, a fine tribute to a conductor worthy of renewed interest. ---Dan Davis, Classics Today.com

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