Paul Dukas – Symphony in C Major (2011)

1. Allegro
2. Andante
3. Allegro
  State of Mexico Symphony Orchestra Guillermo Villarreal – conductor   Live, Mexico, 16 september 2011

In la belle époque, very few French composers wrote symphonies and, aside from Saint-Saëns, fewer still wrote more than one. There was Lalo's Symphony in G minor (1886), Franck's Symphony in D minor (1888), Chausson's Symphony in B flat major (1889), and Dukas' Symphony in C major (1896). All except the Franck symphony are hardly known outside of France, but the Dukas symphony is probably the least known of them all. Only his fourth published work, Dukas completed his symphony the year after he finished his tone poem The Sorcerer's Apprentice, that is, after he considered that he had reached maturity as a composer. Like Franck and Chausson's symphonies, Dukas' symphony is in three movements. Unlike them, it does not use a single motif, an idée fixe, to unify the work, but, like them, it does use Wagnerian chromatic harmonies as the basis of its musical language. Nevertheless, Dukas' symphony is a powerful and distinctive work whose tone of exuberant optimism is a welcome tonic after the heavy late-Romanticism of Franck and Chausson. The opening Allegro non troppo vivace, ma con fuoco has three themes: an agitated first theme in C major, a lyrical theme in A minor, and a fanfare theme in F major. After a quiet return of the first theme, the development deliberately moves toward the recapitulation of the three themes, the first two in C major, the third in F major. The coda begins calmly, but rises to a magnificent climax. The central Andante espressivo e sostenuto also has three themes: an expansive first theme in E minor, a tender second theme in E major, and a lyrical third theme that winds its way through many modulations back to the first two themes' recapitulation. The closing Allegro spiritoso is a rondo with two episodes: a vigorous rondo theme followed by a chromatic episode and a gentler, more lyrical episode. After the third statement of the rondo theme, Dukas combines all three themes in a Presto coda that takes the movement and the symphony to its exultant close.
---James Leonard, Rovi

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