

MARTIN HELMCHEN – PIANO  
ORCHESTRE DE LA SUISSE ROMANDE  
MAREK JANOWSKI



D'INDY SYMPHONIE SUR UN CHANT MONTAGNARD FRANÇAIS  
SAINT-SAËNS SYMPHONIE NO.2  
CHAUSSON SOIR DE FÊTE



VINCENT D'INDY (1851-1931)

Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français

"Symphonie cévenole" Op. 25 (1886)

(Symphony on a French Mountain Air)

1 Assez lent – Modérément animé 10. 46

2 Assez modéré, mais sans lentueur 6. 33

3 Animé 7. 32

Martin Helmchen, piano

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835-1921)

Symphony No. 2 in A minor Op. 55 (1859)

4 Allegro marcato –

Allegro appassionato 7. 24

5 Adagio 3. 14

6 Scherzo – Presto 4. 58

7 Prestissimo 7. 09

ERNEST CHAUSSON (1855-1899)

8 Soir de fête 14. 42

Symphonic poem Op. 32 (1897-1898)

Total playing time: 62.36

Recording venue: Victoria Hall, Geneva, Switzerland, July 2010

Executive producer: Job Maarse

Recording producer: Job Maarse

Balance engineer: Erdo Groot

Recording engineer: Roger de Schot

Editing: Roger de Schot

Design: Netherlads

*Not a single millionaire among the many in Paris is even thinking about doing something for classical music. No, any composer outside of theatrical scene attempting to write a substantial work in Paris is left completely to his own resources."*

Thus wrote a bitter Hector Berlioz in 1854. About 30 years later, the music world in France had a completely different appearance. The defeat suffered in the French-Prussian war in 1870 had resulted in an upsurge of nationalism, of which music had reaped the benefits. In the concert hall, the reign of the German composers was slowly being usurped by the French composers. An important contributing factor was the founding of the Société Nationale de Musique in 1871. Proudly announcing its slogan 'Ars Gallica', this institute stimulated the composition and performance of French (instrumental) music. The Société brought about the first performances of new compositions by Chabrier, Debussy, Dukas, Ravel, Fauré, Franck and Lalo, to mention but a few. Furthermore, composers such as Jules Pachelbel, Edouard Colonne (Concerts Colonne) and Charles Lamoureux (Concerts Lamoureux) played a major role.

Vincent d'Indy was one of the composers who was urged by, among others, Camille Saint-Saëns – with whom he was often engaged in a polemic – to carry out research into the musical inheritance of France. He became a member of the Société Nationale de Musique from the very start. Subsequently, he came into contact with German music, thanks to his teacher César Franck. He fell completely under the spell of Richard Wagner's music, which resulted in the opera *Fervaal*; a work that is often referred to as the "French Parsifal". But he was also interested in French folk music, and in 1886 he began to collect folk melodies from the Ardèche, on which he subsequently based a number of compositions. For instance, his *Symphonie cévenole* – better known as the *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français* – is based on a folk song from the Cévennes mountain range. Although d'Indy deliberately named the work a "symphony", it is actually a synthesis of piano concerto and symphony. Despite the piano part being written in a virtuoso style, it is nevertheless entirely embedded in the symphonic structure. During the same period, various other French composers were also experimenting with hybrid forms, of which the best-known example is undoubtedly César Franck's *Variations symphoniques*.

D'Indy clearly idolized César Franck, as is proven by the reverential biography he wrote in 1906. Many works by d'Indy also contain Franck's "germ-cell" technique, in which the composer developed the musical material from small motivic cells. In his *Symphonie sur un chant français Montagnard*, d'Indy also uses the cyclic principle. This technique – also

learned from Franck – bases all the movements of a composition on the same thematic material. Of course, Franck did not invent this technology: rather, he distilled it from compositions written by Beethoven, among others. Perhaps this explains why d'Indy began his *Symphonie sur un chant Montagnard français* with a quote from the first bar of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata, transposed into major.

The name Camille Saint-Saëns has already been mentioned. How could it not be? Saint-Saëns was undoubtedly one of the most influential figures in the French musical world during the second half of the nineteenth century. He was a child prodigy: at the age of two, he was already reading music; and just a year later, he started to write his first short musical pieces. His other studies included Latin, astronomy, astrology, geometry and archaeology. While still a child, he would climb down into the quarry in Meudon, chisel in hand, to chip out fossils for his collection; and later on, he used the money he had earned with a series of compositions for the harmonium to buy a telescope. And then, of course, there's the music. Saint-Saëns was only 10 years old when he first appeared as piano soloist with orchestra. Not surprisingly, he soon acquired great standing as a pianist, teacher and composer. Furthermore, his role as co-founder of the above-mentioned Société Nationale de Musique and his commitment to the music of younger French colleagues was of great significance. But he was not exclusively interested in contemporary music: for instance, he also published an edition of works by Jean Philippe Rameau (a 'hobby' which he happened to share with d'Indy, who later published editions of works by Rameau, Gluck and Monteverdi).

Therefore, it is all the more amazing that nowadays only a handful of works by this all-rounder – who in his own words produced compositions "the same way an apple tree produces apples" – are to be seen with any regularity on the music stands. As far as symphonies are concerned, it is almost exclusively his Symphony No. 3 (*Organ* Symphony) dating from 1886 that is performed. Most music fans probably do not even know that Saint-Saëns composed as many as five symphonies, of which only three are numbered. He wrote his first symphony, in A major, as early as 1850: it forms part of a group of works written by the 15-year-old boy between his enrolment at the Paris Conservatoire and the actual start of his composition lessons with Fromental Halévy. In 1856, he entered his Symphony in F (*Urbs Roma*) in a composition competition organized by the Société Sainte-Cécile in Bordeaux: however, although he won first prize in the competition, he withdrew the work after its performance.

Saint-Saëns had already written his first numbered symphony three years previously, in 1853. This composition showed such exceptional maturity and possessed such a unique sound, that upon first hearing the work, it never even occurred to Berlioz and Gounod – who had no

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idea at the time who had written it – that the talented young student was the composer. He wrote his Symphony No. 2 in 1859, and here we hear a truly mature composer at work. Yet the work is still imbued with the spirit of Beethoven and Mendelssohn. Beethoven is present in the dominance of the form – not without reason was Saint-Saëns known as the French Classicist ‘par excellence’ – and the light touch of the Finale is reminiscent of Mendelssohn. After a dramatic slow introduction, the entire first movement is dominated by the first fugue theme, which is written in 6/8 time. The slow movement could have served as a model for the slow movement of the Symphony by César Franck. The Scherzo merges into a trio, after which, surprisingly, the Scherzo is not repeated: according to the traditional theory of musical form, this should have been the case. The Finale is formed by a whirling tarantella.

Like Saint-Saëns, Ernest Chausson was also introduced at a young age into the main cultural circles in Paris. He was born into a “high-society” family, and thus came into contact with major artists such as Odilon Redon and Vincent d’Indy in the salons of Mme. Jobert and Mme. Saint-Cyr de Rayssac. But despite Chausson’s obvious musical talents, his parents had destined him for a different career, and in October 1875, he began to read law. Upon graduation however – and with the encouragement of Mme. de Rayssac – he went on to study music with Jules Massenet and César Franck. In 1881, he quit his official studies, and began to discover for himself the intricacies of composition. However, driven by perfectionism and the fear of being considered an ‘amateur’, he continued to refine his scores incessantly. Arthur Hoérée Chausson was once referred to as “the link between two innovators”. On the one hand, the influence of his teacher César Franck is omnipresent in almost all his compositions. On the other, traces of music by his friend Claude Debussy are also discernible. Furthermore, the music of Richard Wagner – like d’Indy, Chausson also made several trips to Germany to attend performances of the composer’s music dramas – left an indelible stamp on his style, in particular on his opera *Le Roi Arthur* (1886-1895).

In 1886, Chausson was appointed secretary of the Société Nationale de Musique; and three years later, he completed a symphony, styled after that of his teacher, César Franck. An assignment from the conductor Edouard Colonne in 1897 resulted in the symphonic poem *Soir de fête*. At the time, the composer was fascinated by symbolist writers, such as Maurice Maeterlinck (whose poems he set to music in the song cycle *Serres chaudes*, 1893 – 1896), and Russian authors, such as Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Turgenev (who provided the literary basis for his famous *Poème* for violin and orchestra in 1896). Yet the work Chausson wrote for the conductor Colonne – and likewise, his symphonic poem *Solitude dans les bois*, which he completed in 1886, but

destroyed immediately – is not based on a specific literary source. For the free form of the genre – unlike the strict symphonic form – gave him the liberty to follow his own path, composing sound impressions to his heart’s content. And indeed, the term ‘impressionism’ can be most suitably applied to the *Soir de fête*, in which Chausson appears to subject all musical elements to the orchestral colours. The mainstay of the work is based on original ideas for the orchestration as well as surprising twists and turns in the harmony, more indicative of Debussy than of Franck. Paul Dukas characterized this music aptly as “not a purely musical work, since it bears a title, nor a programmatic fantasy, as no programme is involved: rather, it is a kind of character sketch.”

Ronald Vermeulen

English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

## Martin Helmchen

Martin Helmchen was born in Berlin in 1982. He received his first piano lessons at the age of six. From 1993 until graduating from school in 2000 he was a student of Galina Iwanzowa at the Hanns Eisler Academy in Berlin. After 2001, he studied with Arie Vardi at the “Hochschule für Musik und Theater” in Hannover. His career received its first major impulse after winning the Clara Haskil Competition in 2001.

Orchestras with which Martin Helmchen has performed include: the Deutsche Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin, RSO Stuttgart, Bamberg Symphoniker, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Royal Flemish Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the chamber orchestras of Zurich, Amsterdam, Vienna, Lausanne, Cologne and Munich. He has worked with conductors such as Marek Janowski, Philippe Herreweghe, Marc Albrecht, Vladimir Jurowski, Jiri Kout, Bernhard Klee, and Lawrence Foster.

Martin Helmchen has been a guest at the Ruhr Piano Festival, Kissinger Summer Festival, the Festivals in Lockenhaus, Jerusalem, Spoleto (Italy), the Rheingau Music Festival, the Spannungen Chamber-Music Festival in Heimbach, the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival, the Schwetzingen Festival, the Schleswig-Holstein Festival, as well as the Marlboro Festival in Vermont (USA).

Chamber music is a highly valued part of Martin Helmchen’s life, which he always includes in his performance programme. For years now, he has collaborated closely with Boris Pergamenschikow till his decease in 2004; at present, he regularly gives concerts and recitals with Heinrich Schiff and Danjulo Ishizaka. Furthermore, he has partnered Gidon Kremer, Christian Tetzlaff, Isabelle Faust, Daniel Hope, Antje Weithaas, Tabea Zimmermann, Sharon Kam and Lars Vogt.

The young pianist Martin Helmchen has already been awarded two of the most important prizes in the music scene: the Crédit Suisse Young Artist Award and the ECHO Klassik. He received the Crédit Suisse Award in September 2006. The prize included his début with the Vienna Philharmonic under Valery Gergiev, performing Schumann’s Piano Concerto during the Lucerne Festival. He was awarded the ECHO prize jointly with cellist Danjulo Ishizaka, as “Nachwuchskünstler des Jahres” (= up-and-coming artist of the year).

Martin Helmchen has signed an exclusive contract with the PentaTone Classics label.

## Marek Janowski

Marek Janowski has been Artistic Director of the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin since 2002 and in 2005 he was also appointed Musical Director of the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande in Geneva. He is in demand as a guest conductor throughout the world, working on a regular basis in the USA with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (where he holds the Otto Klemperer Guest Conducting Chair), the Boston and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and in Europe with the Orchestre de Paris, the Orchester der Tonhalle Zürich, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra in Copenhagen and the NDR-Sinfonieorchester Hamburg. Born in 1939 in Warsaw and educated in Germany, Marek Janowski’s artistic path led him from Assistant positions in Aachen, Cologne, Düsseldorf and Hamburg to his appointment as General Music Director in Freiburg im Breisgau (1973-75) and Dortmund (1975-79). Whilst in Dortmund, his reputation grew rapidly and he became greatly involved in the international opera scene. There is not one world-renowned opera house where he has not been a regular guest since the late ‘70s, from the Metropolitan Opera New York to the Bayerischer Staatsoper Munich; from Chicago and San Francisco to Hamburg; from Vienna and Berlin to Paris. Marek Janowski stepped back from the opera scene in the 1990’s in order to concentrate on orchestral work and was thus able to continue the great German conducting tradition in the symphonic repertoire. He now enjoys an outstanding reputation amongst the great orchestras of Europe and North America. He is recognised for his ability to create orchestras of international standing as well as for his innovative programmes and for bringing a fresh and individual interpretation to familiar repertoire. Between 1984 and 2000, as Musical Director of the Orchestre Philharmonique

## Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande was founded in 1918 by Ernest Ansermet, who remained principal conductor until 1967. The orchestra employs 112 permanent musicians and performs a series of subscription concerts in Geneva and Lausanne, the symphony concerts of the city of Geneva, the annual concert for the United Nations as well as playing for opera performances at the Grand Théâtre de Genève.

Marek Janowski has been the orchestra's artistic and music director since 1 September 2005.

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande achieved world renown under its founding conductor and under its successive music directors: Paul Kletzki (1967-1970), Wolfgang Sawallisch (1970-1980), Horst Stein (1980-1985), Armin Jordan (1985-1997), Fabio Luisi (1997-2002), Pinchas Steinberg (2002-2005) and continues to make an active contribution to music history by discovering or supporting contemporary composers of prime importance whose works were first performed in Geneva. These include Benjamin Britten, Claude Debussy, Peter Eötvös, Heinz Holliger, Arthur Honegger, Michael

Jarrell, Frank Martin, Darius Milhaud, Igor Stravinsky and others. Since the year 2000 the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande has given the world premieres of about twenty works in cooperation with Radio Suisse Romande. The orchestra also supports contemporary music in Switzerland by regularly commissioning works from the composers William Blank and Michael Jarrell.

Working closely with Radio-Télévision Suisse Romande, music performed by the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande was very soon broadcast on radio and on short wave and was thus received by millions of listeners throughout the world. Thanks to the partnership with Decca, which gave rise to several legendary recordings, the orchestra's renown continued to grow. The OSR has also recorded for A&Eon, Cascavelle, Denon, EMI, Erato, Harmonia Mundi, PentaTone and Philips and many of these recordings have been awarded major prizes.

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande has undertaken international tours and performed in prestigious concert halls in Asia (Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing), in Europe (Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Vienna, Salzburg, Madrid, Barcelona, Brussels, Amsterdam, Budapest, Istanbul, London, Paris etc.) as well as in major American cities (Boston, New York, San Francisco, Washington etc.). During the 2009/2010 season the OSR will perform in Montreux, Gstaad, Zurich, Bucharest, Prague, Turin, Zagreb and Budapest.

The orchestra has also performed at various festivals, for instance, since 2000 the Budapest Spring Festival, the Chorégies d'Orange, the

Festival de Musica de Canarias, the Lucerne Festival At Easter, the Festival of Radio France and of Montpellier, the Menuhin Festival in Gstaad, the Robeco Zomerconcerten, at the Septembre Musical Festival in Montreux, at the Bucharest Festival.

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande is supported by the canton and the city of Geneva, by Radio-Télévision Suisse Romande, friends associations as well as by several sponsors and donors. For the concerts performed in Lausanne the orchestra also benefits from support by the canton de Vaud.



