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Albéric
MAGNARD
Orchestral Works

Ouverture • Chant funèbre • Hymne à la justice
Hymne à Vénus • Suite d'orchestre dans le style ancien

Philharmonisches Orchester Freiburg
Fabrice Bollon

Albéric Magnard (1865–1914)

Orchestral Works

Albéric Magnard was born into an affluent middle-class family in 1865. His father Francis had risen from humble origins to become editor of the daily newspaper *Le Figaro*. He gave his son the financial security that later enabled him to compose in response to his inner drive rather than in order to earn a living, but the young Albéric also came to admire him for his 'fine, high-flown intelligence' and 'honest, proud and independent character'.

Magnard's childhood was overshadowed by the tragedy of his mother's suicide. He was only four when she died and the solitude of his life in the wake of her death probably explains his tendency to appear rather withdrawn.

At 20, after hearing Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in Bayreuth, Magnard abandoned his law studies to devote himself to composition, which became the sole focus of his energy thereafter. He was constantly in search of perfection, rejecting any form of compromise, despite the fact that this often harmed the chances of his works being more widely disseminated.

In 1904, on the birth of their second daughter, he and his wife decided to leave Paris and move to the countryside, in the Oise department, north of the capital. Devoted to his wife and children, Magnard enjoyed a very happy family life there, but was isolated from the French music scene.

He died in 1914, defending his home against invading German soldiers. Fifteen years earlier he had written, 'I believe that the victory of certain ideas is well worth the suppression of our tranquillity and even our lives.' This statement gives an idea of how he saw his responsibilities, both personal and artistic.

Although he wrote a relatively small number of works, Magnard's catalogue is full of expansive, complex and beautifully crafted music.

When Magnard interrupted his studies at the Paris Conservatoire and chose as his teacher Vincent d'Indy rather than César Franck, it was largely because of the former's understanding of the orchestra. For Magnard,

this was of prime importance, as can be seen from an analysis of his own output: of his 21 published works, nine are for orchestra alone (including four symphonies) – and we should also take into account here his three operas.

A symphonist at heart, Magnard took an early interest in orchestral writing: his first two symphonies are the fourth and sixth works in his catalogue. When commentators attempt to compare him with other composers, it is the names of Mahler and, above all, Bruckner that come to mind – both inextricably linked to their nine official symphonies, as was Beethoven, to whom Magnard often looked as a model.

While his premature death did not allow him to reach this symbolic number, Magnard's four symphonies nevertheless represent a very significant body of work within his production, and allow us to trace the development of his music over the years. He also wrote a number of smaller-scale orchestral compositions which can be divided into two categories: those based on the traditional forms that were more or less mandatory testing grounds for many aspiring composers (*Suite d'orchestre dans le style ancien*, *Ouverture*), and those that resemble tone poems and were inspired by more personal preoccupations (*Chant funèbre*, *Hymne à la justice*, *Hymne à Vénus*).

Magnard had barely started his studies with Vincent d'Indy when he began writing the *Suite d'orchestre dans le style ancien* (1888). Given that up to that point he had only composed three piano pieces and one song, this was a way of immediately trying his hand at orchestral writing. He submitted a first attempt to his teacher, as he later reported to his friend Guy Ropartz: 'I showed the score of my suite to D'Indy; I have to start all over again. I was trying to show off by using the cor anglais throughout; hence the terrible, ridiculous effects.' He therefore went back to the drawing board and entirely reworked the orchestration.

Written for relatively small forces (strings, pairs of woodwind, two horns, one trumpet and percussion), the

work is modelled on the 18th-century dance suite and its tonal unity: its five short movements are all in G minor. Traditionally, these suites began with an *Allemande* but – at a time when the Franco-Prussian War was anything but a distant memory – Magnard chose to begin with a *Française* instead, although there was no such dance! Was this resolute, monothematic piece, which sounds solemn and joyful all at once, a gesture of patriotic pride on his part? There is a melancholy lyricism to the *Sarabande* that follows, in which the cor anglais plays a prominent role. After the elegant chordal opening of the *Gavotte*, the central section is written predominantly for woodwind, making particular use of the pastoral sound of the flute. The opening theme then returns, this time played by the whole orchestra. The *Menuet* is the longest movement in the work and also the most symphonic, the most complex ... and the most personal – we are a long way here from the spirit of the pre-Classical suite. The final movement is a fugal *Gigue* in which elements from the previous movements resurface. It brings to an energetic and good-humoured end what is undeniably a work born of inexperience, but also one of such elegance and variety that it deserves better than the virtual oblivion into which it has fallen.

Some commentators see the *Chant funèbre* (1895), dedicated 'to the memory of my father', as Magnard's first true masterpiece. The relationship between the two had been complicated, and virtually non-existent during Albéric's childhood, since he held his father responsible for the death of his mother. As a young man, he refused to take advantage of the influence his father could have wielded as editor of *Le Figaro*. He may of course have had noble ideas about artistic independence, but it seems likely that he was motivated by far more personal reasons in not asking for help from that particular source. Nevertheless, Magnard was very shaken by his father's death: 'I had to lose him to understand how much he meant to me.' (letter to Émile Cordonnier). He interrupted work on another piece to write this 15-minute tribute: a slow, expansive movement of touching simplicity and sincerity.

The only real problem with the *Ouverture* in A major (1895) is its rather uninspiring title. Other than that, this is

a work of undeniable quality, in which Magnard's distinctive style is clearly visible, especially in the lively, upbeat opening. Although the energy level dips soon thereafter, we are treated instead to a calm, dreamy episode, full of sensitivity. These contrasting elements reappear throughout the *Ouverture*, which is written in sonata form.

In a way, the things that mattered most to Magnard were justice and love. It is telling that he wrote an orchestral 'hymn' to each of them.

The composer was an outspoken supporter of Alfred Dreyfus in the political scandal that divided France in the 1890s. He responded to Zola's famous 'J'accuse' article of 13 January 1898 with a letter (written the following day) which begins 'Well done, sir, you are a brave man! Indeed you are as great a man as you are an artist ...' and ends, 'March on, you are not alone. We will die for the cause.' – words that show just how highly he valued justice. A few years later, he reflected his views in the *Hymne à la justice* (1902), a work that is quite unique in the history of music. By the time he wrote it, Dreyfus had been pardoned, and Magnard was therefore able to consider the events more dispassionately and write a work of universal significance, honouring a moral principle as well as the justice eventually received by one individual.

Gaston Carraud, Magnard's friend and first biographer, described this masterpiece as follows: 'In the first idea we hear, in turn, the oppressive nature of injustice and a sorrowing call for justice. Brutally cast down, the victim lifts his eyes towards the unattainable ideal. With a lamenting cry that leads to greater persecution, he sees the soft light fading away; but just as violence returns more powerfully than ever, justice bursts out in a triumphant blaze of glory.'

And then there was love, especially the love of women, as celebrated in the *Hymne à Vénus* (1904). Magnard had lost his mother at a very young age, but his two daughters were a true source of joy for him, as was his wife, Julia Creton, to whom this work is dedicated. It's all too easy to cast Magnard as a socially isolated misanthrope, but that image of him fails to take into account not only the close friendships he enjoyed

throughout his life (notably with Ropartz), but also his deeply felt love for his wife, a young woman from a very modest background whose son he adopted and brought up as his own. Magnard found genuine happiness with her, and treated her with nothing but love and respect, proving the absolute sincerity of his feminism – a radical

cause to espouse at this point in history. All aspects of love are reflected in this compelling work, from tenderness to passion, serenity to elation.

Pierre Carrive
English translation: Susannah Howe

Albéric Magnard (1865–1914)

Œuvres orchestrales

Albéric Magnard est né en 1865 dans une famille bourgeoise, son père Francis, de condition très modeste au départ, étant le puissant directeur du journal Le Figaro. S'il est certain qu'il a transmis à son fils l'aisance financière qui lui permit par la suite de ne composer que par nécessité intérieure, et non pour gagner sa vie, il a aussi été, pour le jeune Albéric et selon ses propres termes, « une haute et belle intelligence » et « un caractère honnête, fier et indépendant. »

Malheureusement un drame vient bousculer cette enfance : le suicide de sa mère, quand il avait quatre ans. Albéric est alors confronté à la solitude, ce qui explique probablement un certain côté renfermé de son caractère. À vingt ans, après avoir entendu Tristan und Isolde de Wagner à Bayreuth, il abandonne ses études de droit pour se consacrer à la composition. Dès lors, il y met toute son énergie, recherchant inlassablement la perfection, fuyant toute forme de concession, au risque, souvent, de nuire à la diffusion de sa musique.

En 1904, à la naissance de leur deuxième fille, il décide avec sa femme de quitter Paris, et de vivre à la campagne, dans l'Oise. Très dévoué envers elles trois, il y mènera une vie familiale heureuse, mais à l'écart de la vie musicale.

Il y meurt en 1914, dans des circonstances bien connues : en défendant sa maison contre l'arrivée de l'armée allemande. Quinze ans plus tôt, il avait écrit : « Je crois que le triomphe de certaines idées vaut bien la suppression de notre tranquillité et même de notre vie. » C'est dire à quel niveau il mettait son exigence d'homme et d'artiste.

S'il est vrai que le catalogue de Magnard est assez réduit en quantité, il s'agit principalement d'œuvres amples, complexes et d'un très haut niveau artistique.

Quand Magnard, interrompant ses études au Conservatoire de Paris, choisit comme maître Vincent d'Indy plutôt que César Franck, c'était en bonne partie pour sa science de l'orchestre. Pour Magnard, c'était en effet primordial. L'étude de sa production est, de ce point de vue, assez éclairante : sur vingt-et-une œuvres publiées, neuf sont pour orchestre seul (dont quatre symphonies), auxquels il faut ajouter ses trois opéras.

Magnard a écrit très tôt pour l'orchestre. Ses deux premières symphonies sont déjà les quatrième et sixième ouvrages de son catalogue. Il était un symphoniste dans l'âme. Lorsque l'on cherche à le comparer à d'autres compositeurs, ce sont les noms de Mahler, et surtout de

Bruckner, qui nous viennent : deux compositeurs indissociables de leurs neuf symphonies officielles, à l'instar de Beethoven, le modèle dont Magnard s'est maintes fois revendiqué.

Si sa mort prématurée ne lui a pas permis d'atteindre ce chiffre symbolique, ses quatre symphonies constituent également un corpus très important au sein de sa production, et permettent de suivre l'évolution de Magnard. Comme en parallèle, le compositeur nous a aussi laissé quelques pièces orchestrales de moindre envergure, que l'on peut classer en deux catégories : les formes traditionnelles, qui sont des passages plus ou moins obligées pour nombre de compositeurs (*Suite d'orchestre dans le style ancien*, *Ouverture*), et celles qui s'apparentent à des poèmes symphoniques, qui ont comme point de départ des préoccupations plus personnelles (*Chant funèbre*, *Hymne à la Justice*, *Hymne à Vénus*).

Magnard venait tout juste de commencer à étudier auprès de Vincent d'Indy, quand il se lança dans sa *Suite d'orchestre dans le style ancien* (1888). C'était donc un moyen pour Magnard de se tester immédiatement dans cette formation, lui qui n'avait alors composé que trois pièces pour piano et une mélodie. L'élève soumet une première orchestration au professeur ; voici comme il le raconte à son ami Ropartz : « J'ai montré l'orchestre de ma suite à d'Indy ; c'est entièrement à refaire. J'ai voulu faire le malin en employant continuellement le cor anglais ; de là des effets grotesques et déplorables. » Il revoit alors entièrement l'orchestration.

Écrite pour une formation relativement restreinte (cordes, bois par deux, deux cors, une trompette, percussions), elle a comme modèle la suite de danses du XVIII^e siècle et son unité tonale : ses cinq brefs mouvements sont tous en sol mineur. Traditionnellement, ces suites de danses commencent par une Allemande. En ces années post-1870, Magnard choisit pourtant une Française, bien qu'aucune danse ne porte ce nom ! Doit-on voir dans cette page à l'allure décidée, à la fois solennelle et joyeuse, au thème unique, un geste de fierté patriotique ? La Sarabande qui suit, au lyrisme mélancolique, fait la part belle au cor anglais. La Gavotte

commence par de gracieuses cordes ; sa partie centrale utilise surtout les vents, et en particulier la flûte aux allures pastorales ; le thème initial reprend alors, cette fois avec tout l'orchestre. Le Menuet est le plus long mouvement de tous, mais aussi le plus symphonique, le plus complexe... et le plus personnel ; nous sommes loin ici de l'état d'esprit de la suite préclassique. La Gigue finale, fuguée, dans laquelle on retrouve des éléments des mouvements précédents, conclut dans l'énergie et la bonne humeur une œuvre encore verte, certes, mais dont l'élégance et la variété mérite tout de même mieux que le quasi oubli dans lequel elle est tombée.

D'aucuns considèrent le *Chant funèbre* (1895), dédié « à la mémoire de mon père », comme le premier véritable chef-d'œuvre de Magnard. Ses rapports avec son père étaient complexes. Le jeune Albéric rejeta sur son père la responsabilité de la mort de sa mère. Pendant son enfance, leurs rapports étaient presque inexistants. Jeune homme, Magnard refusa toujours de profiter des facilités qu'aurait pu lui donner la puissante situation sociale du directeur du Figaro. Son attitude s'explique bien sûr par la très haute idée qu'il avait de l'indépendance de l'artiste, mais aussi, probablement, par des facteurs beaucoup plus personnels. Malgré tous les conflits qu'ils eurent, Magnard fut ébranlé par la mort de son père : « Il m'a fallu le perdre pour comprendre à quel point il m'était cher. » (lettre à Émile Cordonnier). Il interrompit son travail en cours pour lui consacrer cette œuvre d'une quinzaine de minutes, ample mouvement lent très émouvant de simplicité et de sincérité.

L'*Ouverture* (1895) en la majeur souffre principalement de son nom peu évocateur. Car elle possède d'indéniables qualités, et on y reconnaît pleinement Magnard, notamment avec son début joyeux et vigoureux. Il est vrai que l'énergie retombe assez vite ; mais nous avons alors droit à un épisode calme et rêveur plein de sensibilité. Nous retrouvons ces éléments contrastants dans toute l'œuvre, dont la forme est celle d'une sonate.

La justice et l'amour représentent, en quelque sorte, ce que Magnard mettait au-dessus de tout. Il est révélateur qu'il leur ait consacré un Hymne à chacun.

Son militantisme en faveur de Dreyfus est bien connu. La lettre qu'il écrivit à Zola, au lendemain de son célèbre *J'accuse* de 1898, qui commence par « Bravo Monsieur, vous êtes un crâne ! En vous, l'homme vaut l'artiste. » et se termine par « Marchez, vous n'êtes pas seul. On se fera tuer au besoin. » nous montre à quel point Magnard avait une haute idée de la justice. Au point, donc, de lui consacrer cet *Hymne à la Justice* (1902) assez unique dans l'histoire de la musique. Pour autant, il n'a pas été écrit en pleine Affaire ; Magnard a pu prendre de la hauteur par rapport à l'actualité, et nous offrir un vrai manifeste qui honore un principe moral, au-delà de la défense d'un homme.

Voici comme Gaston Carraud, ami et premier biographe de Magnard, voyait ce chef-d'œuvre : « Nous entendons, dans la première idée, se succéder l'oppression de l'injustice et l'appel douloureux à la justice. Brutalement terrassée, la victime lève les yeux vers l'idéal inaccessible. Avec une plainte qui réveille la persécution, elle voit s'évanouir la douce lueur ; mais au même moment que la violence impose son retour le plus insolent, le triomphe de la justice éclate, foudroyant, en apothéose. »

Et puis, il y avait l'amour, et en particulier féminin, célébré avec l'*Hymne à Vénus* (1904). Nous avons vu qu'Albéric avait perdu sa mère à l'âge de quatre ans. Ses deux filles seront pour lui une source de réel bonheur. Et puis, au milieu, sa femme, Julia Creton, à qui est dédiée cette œuvre. Nous avons trop facilement l'image d'un Magnard misanthrope et renfermé sur lui-même. C'est ignorer ses fidèles amitiés (et tout particulièrement sa relation tellement privilégiée avec Ropartz), mais aussi le profond amour qu'il eut pour sa femme, une jeune femme d'un milieu très modeste, dont Magnard adoptera le fils « naturel » qu'il élèvera comme son propre fils. Magnard a été véritablement heureux avec elle, dans une attitude toujours tendre et respectueuse, prouvant au passage que son féminisme, très en avance pour l'époque, était véritablement sincère. Nous retrouvons tout cela dans cette œuvre puissante, à la fois tendre et passionnée, sereine et rayonnante.

Pierre Carrive

Philharmonisches Orchester Freiburg



The Freiburg Philharmonic Orchestra was founded in 1887 and quickly established itself as the official orchestra of the city at the Theater Freiburg, collaborating with musicians such as Clara Schumann and Richard Strauss in its early days. The Freiburg Concert Hall has served the orchestra as a second home since its opening in 1996. With a hundred performances annually, also appearing as the opera orchestra, the Philharmonic has for many years been involved in chamber music series as well as concerts and collaborations with schools in Freiburg and in the region. Composers such as Wolfgang Rihm, Manfred Trojahn and Reinhard Febel have written works for the orchestra. The orchestra has played under leading conductors, including Franz Konwitschny, Marek Janowski, Adam Fischer and Donald Runnicles. Fabrice Bollon has been general music director since the 2008–09 season. The orchestra has been nominated several times as the orchestra of the year in the professional journal *Opernwelt* and was awarded the German Music Publisher's Prize for the best programme in the 1998–99 and 2011–12 seasons. Among the orchestra's many recent albums, the award-winning *Francesca da Rimini* was highly praised as a reference recording.

www.theater.freiburg.de

Fabrice Bollon



Fabrice Bollon studied with Michael Gielen and Nikolaus Harnoncourt in Paris and at Salzburg's Mozarteum before completing his studies with Georges Prêtre and Mauricio Kagel. He worked as musical assistant at the Salzburg Festival until 1998, was deputy musical director at Oper Chemnitz (2000–04), was chief conductor of the Flanders Symphony Orchestra (1996–2000) and has made numerous appearances with many renowned European orchestras. From 2009 he has been general music director/chief conductor at Germany's Theater Freiburg. In September 2016 Bollon was unanimously re-elected for another term and began recording for Naxos, releasing a remarkable interpretation of Korngold's *Das Wunder der Heliane* in 2018 (8.660410-12). His work in Freiburg has garnered international acclaim, including Editor's Choice accolades in *Gramophone* magazine and Diapason d'Or Awards, among others. Bollon appears regularly with the Moscow State Opera Stanislavsky, several German radio orchestras, and in Japan, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria and Monte Carlo. Bollon is also an acclaimed composer: his opera *Oscar und die Dame in Rosa* was highly praised by both critics and audiences. An album of his works will be also released by Naxos.

www.fabricebollon.com

Although Albéric Magnard's oeuvre is relatively small, the uncompromising perfectionism with which he worked created a catalogue that is filled with expansive, complex and beautifully crafted music. Composed while he was still a student of Vincent d'Indy, the *Suite d'orchestre dans le style ancien* follows 18th-century models and is simultaneously solemn and joyful in mood, while the *Chant funèbre* is seen as his first true masterpiece. The importance of justice in Magnard's life is expressed in the *Hymne à la justice*, while the *Hymne à Vénus* reflects every aspect of love, from tenderness to elation.

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Albéric
MAGNARD
(1865–1914)

❶	Ouverture, Op. 10 (1895)	11:38
❷	Chant funèbre, Op. 9 (1895)	12:03
❸	Hymne à la justice, Op. 14 (1902)	13:34
❹	Hymne à Vénus, Op. 17 (1904)	13:30
	Suite d'orchestre dans le style ancien, Op. 2 (1888; ed. Philippe Marquet, 1892)	14:29
❺	I. Française: Allegro giocoso	2:48
❻	II. Sarabande: Mesto	2:06
❼	III. Gavotte: Allegro	2:16
❽	IV. Menuet: Tranquillo	4:53
❾	V. Gigue: Energico	2:11

Philharmonisches Orchester Freiburg
Fabrice Bollon

A co-production with Südwestrundfunk

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