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Albéric MAGNARD

Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4

Philharmonisches Orchester Freiburg

Fabrice Bollon

Albéric Magnard (1865–1914)

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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when she died, and the solitude of his life in the wake of her death probably explains his tendency to appear rather withdrawn.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 who 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 not only within his own production but as regards French music of the time. The *First* was written with the guidance of his teacher d'Indy, and includes a few less successful moments. In the *Second* (which he later revised substantially), Magnard liberated himself from d'Indy's influence and really came into his own. The *Third* is a work of full maturity, while the *Fourth*, his last published work, looks to the future.

Of all Magnard's compositions, it is the *Third Symphony* that has contributed most to our understanding of his music. Always his most frequently performed orchestral work, it was for years the only one available on disc, thanks to Ernest Ansermet's exceptional 1968 recording.

Magnard wrote the symphony at the time of his marriage, and conducted its premiere as part of a concert entirely made up of his own works which he organised in Paris on 14 May 1899. Paul Dukas, who was in the audience, praised its 'perfect clarity' which reflected 'the most vibrant nuances of the composer's personal creativity, drawing its limpidity from the brightness of their hues alone', and called it a symphony to be classed 'in the first rank of contemporary production, among those all too rare creations which ... aim higher than the egotistical expression of a particular artistic sensibility.'

The *Third* has sometimes been nicknamed the '*Bucolic*'. This hugely reductive title owes nothing to Magnard and should not be used. That said, the work exerts a great deal of charm on the listener and is very characteristic of the composer's writing.

The opening movement begins with an *Introduction*, an austere yet fervent chorale. This is followed by a sonata-form *Overture*, in which two contrasting themes, one of communicative rhythmic energy, the other tender and ardent, respond to one another. The chorale of the opening brings this lyrical and majestic movement to an end.

The second movement, which acts as a *scherzo*, is called *Danses*, and comes straight from the Auvergne, the region in which Magnard was then in the habit of taking holidays, delighting in its 'strange, sinister landscapes' and the 'magnificent views over its central plains'.

The slow movement, *Pastorale*, features a wonderful, melancholy cantilena for the oboe, in a serene and tranquil atmosphere which is interrupted by more disquieting moments.

In the *Final* we again encounter two contrasting themes: a joyful, invigorating round, and a poetic, dreamy melody. Here, however, they are set in opposition to one another, and play with each other, before being brought together by the introductory chorale. The symphony ends by recalling previously heard elements, in irresistible high spirits.

Years, later, having spent much of the interim working on his two grand operas, *Guerçœur* and *Bérénice*, Magnard wrote his *Fourth Symphony*. A committed feminist, he once again proved the courage of his convictions by giving the premiere with the Orchestra of the Union of Women Teachers and Composers on 2 April 1914. Their poor rendition was, happily, soon followed by a far more successful second performance at the Société nationale de musique, conducted by Rhené-Bâton.

Magnard spent three painful years writing this luminous symphony: 'The optimism of the *Fourth Symphony* is repugnant to me, since no other work has given me so much trouble or been conceived in such depths of despair.' It is also worth noting that, exceptionally, it was composed straight into orchestral

score, without being sketched out at the piano. The difficulties involved in the writing process must have played their part, however, in creating this masterpiece of astonishing modernity, often compared to early Schoenberg.

From the start we are gripped by a dazzling volley of woodwind, which gives rise to a passionate statement from the strings. Then comes the theme – clear, harsh and rhythmical – which will run throughout the entire symphony. After this introduction, marked *Modéré*, we move on to the main part of the movement, an *Allegro*. This is built around two contrasting themes: the first virile and triumphant, on the horns, the other lyrical and generous, on the violins. Between the two we hear the sound of an unforgettable trumpet motif.

The *scherzo*, *Vif*, features an essentially rhythmical main theme, and a central section in a rustic style.

The *scherzo* gives way to the splendours of the slow movement (*Sans lenteur et nuancé*). With its lengthy phrases, simultaneously poignant and serene, it has a spacious quality rarely found in French orchestral music of its time.

There are analogies between the opening of the finale and the first movement: the spectacular volley, and the character of the two themes: one rhythmical and leaping, the other broad and songful, almost chorale-like. On this occasion, the bridge between the two has a folk-like feel, while the development section consists primarily of a masterful fugue. At the end there is a return to the second-subject chorale. Like its three predecessors – though unusually for Magnard – this movement has a calm, *piano* ending.

There is no doubt that the *Fourth Symphony*, his last surviving work, marked the start of a new phase in his production. Sadly, we shall never know what further masterpieces he might have been able to produce had his life not been cut short.

Pierre Carrive

English translation: Susannah Howe

Albéric Magnard (1865–1914)

Troisième et Quatrième Symphonies

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 s'en est préoccupé très tôt. 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, mais aussi au regard de la musique française de l'époque. La *Première* a été écrite sous la férule de son maître d'Indy, et contient encore quelques maladresses. Dans la *Deuxième* (qu'il remania considérablement par la suite), Magnard s'affranchit de cette influence, et devient vraiment lui-même. La *Troisième* est celle de la plénitude de la maturité. Et dans la *Quatrième*, sa dernière œuvre publiée, Magnard voit vers l'avenir.

La *Troisième Symphonie* est l'ouvrage de Magnard qui a contribué le mieux à la connaissance de sa musique. Elle a toujours été son œuvre symphonique la plus jouée. Et grâce à Ernest Ansermet, qui l'enregistra magistralement en 1968, elle a longtemps été la seule œuvre orchestrale disponible au disque.

Magnard la composa au moment de son mariage, et en dirigea la création lors d'un concert, entièrement consacré à ses compositions, qu'il avait lui-même organisé à Paris, le 14 mai 1899. Paul Dukas, qui assista à ce concert, en apprécia la « parfaite clarté » qui reflète « les nuances les plus vives de la sensibilité personnelle du musicien et ne tire sa limpidité que de l'éclat de leurs teintes. », et parla d'une symphonie qui « se classe au premier rang de la production contemporaine, parmi ces

trop rares créations qui [...] visent plus haut que l'expression égoïste d'une sensibilité particulière. »

On a parfois surnommée cette symphonie la « Bucolique ». Ce titre, très réducteur, ne doit rien à Magnard et doit être proscrit. Il n'en demeure pas moins qu'elle agit sur l'auditeur de manière particulièrement bienfaisante, et sent bon le terroir.

Le mouvement initial commence par une *Introduction*, un choral à la fois austère et fervent, auquel succède une *Ouverture* de forme sonate, dans lequel deux thèmes contrastés, l'un d'une énergie rythmique communicative, et l'autre tendre et ardent, se répondent. Le choral du début conclut ce mouvement lyrique et majestueux.

Le mouvement suivant, qui fait office de scherzo, sont des *Dances*, qui nous viennent tout droit d'Auvergne, où Magnard faisait alors des séjours au cours desquels il se délectait des « paysages sinistres, bizarres » et des « échappées grandioses sur les plaines du centre ».

Le mouvement lent, *Pastorale*, est une merveilleuse et mélancolique cantilène au hautbois, dans une atmosphère sereine et apaisée, qui n'est cependant pas exempte de moments plus inquiétants.

Dans le *Final*, nous retrouvons à nouveau deux thèmes contrastés : une joyeuse ronde roborative, et une mélodie poétique et rêveuse. Mais cette fois ils s'opposent, jouent l'un avec l'autre, avant de se trouver réunis par le choral d'introduction. La symphonie se termine par un rappel d'éléments précédemment entendus, dans une irrésistible allégresse.

Dix ans plus tard, pendant lesquels il travaille notamment à ses deux grands opéras, *Guerccœur* et *Bérénice*, Magnard compose sa *Quatrième Symphonie*. Ardent féministe, mettant une fois de plus en pratique ses convictions, il en assure la création en dirigeant l'Orchestre de l'Union des femmes professeurs et compositeurs, le 2 avril 1914. L'exécution fut semble-t-il assez médiocre, heureusement suivie par une reprise réussie, quelques semaines plus tard à la Société nationale de musique, sous la direction de Rhené-Bâton.

Cette symphonie lumineuse aura coûté à Magnard presque trois années de travail dans la douleur : « L'optimisme de la *Quatrième Symphonie* est répugnant, car aucune œuvre ne m'a donné autant de mal et n'a été conçue dans un marasme plus complet. » Il faut dire aussi que, fait exceptionnel, elle a été rédigée directement en partition d'orchestre, sans esquisse au piano. Mais la difficulté du procédé a contribué à produire ce chef-d'œuvre d'une modernité étonnante, souvent comparé au premier Schoenberg.

D'entrée, nous sommes happés par une fulgurante fusée des bois, qui amène une phrase aux cordes d'une ardeur puissante. Puis c'est le thème, clair, âpre et rythmé, qui parcourra toute la symphonie. Après cette introduction notée *Modéré*, place à l'*Allegro*. Il est construit autour de deux thèmes contrastés : l'un viril et conquérant, aux cors, l'autre lyrique et généreux, aux violons. Entre les deux, un inoubliable motif de trompette.

Le scherzo est un *Vif*, avec un thème principal essentiellement rythmique, et une partie centrale dans un style villageois.

S'enchaîne alors le mouvement lent, un splendide *Sans lenteur et nuancé*. Avec ses immenses phrases, poignantes et sereines à la fois, il est d'une ampleur rare dans la musique française symphonique de l'époque.

Le début du *Final* présente des analogies avec le premier mouvement : la fusée spectaculaire, et les caractères des deux thèmes : rythmique et bondissant pour le premier, ample et chantant, presque à la manière d'un choral, pour le deuxième. Entre les deux, le pont, cette fois, est d'allure populaire. Le développement consiste principalement en une fugue magistrale. À la fin, nous retrouvons le choral du deuxième thème. Ce mouvement, ainsi que les trois précédents, se termine, apaisé, dans une nuance *piano*, ce qui est inhabituel chez Magnard.

Assurément, cette symphonie, dernière œuvre de sa production qui nous soit parvenue, ouvrait une nouvelle étape. Nous ne saurons hélas jamais quels autres chefs-d'œuvre Magnard aurait pu nous donner.

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

Albéric Magnard became a French national hero when he died defending his home at the outbreak of the First World War and, although he wrote relatively little, his catalogue is full of expansive and beautifully crafted music. Magnard was a symphonist at heart, and with its evocations of landscape and expressive lyricism his *Third Symphony* was admired by Paul Dukas for its 'perfect clarity' and as an 'all too rare creation'. The luminous *Fourth Symphony* is one of Magnard's last surviving works – a masterpiece that successfully synthesises Wagnerian high drama with Classical transparency.

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Albéric
MAGNARD
(1865–1914)

Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4

Symphony No. 3 in B flat minor, Op. 11 (1896) 37:31

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|---|--|-------|
| 1 | I. Introduction et Ouverture: Modéré – Vif | 12:04 |
| 2 | II. Danses: Très vif | 6:06 |
| 3 | III. Pastorale: Modéré (Oboe solo: Andreas Hölz) | 10:17 |
| 4 | IV. Final: Vif | 8:47 |

Symphony No. 4 in C sharp minor, Op. 21 (1913) 36:47

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I. Modéré – Allegro | 11:25 |
| 6 | II. Vif | 5:09 |
| 7 | III. Sans lenteur et nuancé | 12:05 |
| 8 | IV. Animé | 8:04 |

Philharmonisches Orchester Freiburg
Fabrice Bollon

A co-production with Südwestrundfunk

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Audio engineers: Norbert Vossen, Johannes Grosch (Südwestrundfunk)

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