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Albéric
MAGNARD

Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2

Philharmonisches Orchester Freiburg

Fabrice Bollon

Albéric Magnard (1865–1914)

Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2

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when she died and the solitude of his life in the wake of her death probably explains his tendency to appear rather withdrawn.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.

Magnard was, then, still studying with d'Indy when he started work on his *First Symphony*, and his teacher supervised its writing. Given that he had started composing only a year or so earlier, and that he went on to wait some considerable time before attempting to write a string quartet, Magnard was clearly not lacking in confidence when it came to symphonic composition.

The *First Symphony* was premiered in Angers in 1893, after which it was not heard again for a century. It received a mixed welcome – its profusion of ideas, which some felt was balanced out by its concision but others felt hindered its flow, received both praise and criticism. Admiration was also expressed, however, for his skill in writing for the kind of vast orchestral forces (including three saxophones, with organ-like sonorities, in the slow movement) that he would afterwards abandon.

The entire symphony is based on one principal theme, giving a sense of continuity consistent with cyclic form. This is what Magnard wrote about it in the edition of *Angers-Artiste* published on 11 March 1893, the day before the premiere: 'The phrase set out at the beginning of the first movement dominates the whole work. It makes a brief reappearance in the second movement, before the return of the chorale; it is developed in fragmentary style and set out again in the third movement, after the trio; in the finale it provides most of the transitions and, appearing in the major for the first time, reaches the conclusion drawn from the chorale of the second movement.'

The first movement is marked *Strepitoso* ('noisily!'). In sonata form, it contrasts the main theme, jerky and somewhat rustic in style, with the slower second theme, which is songlike and delicate. It ends *pianissimo*, in preparation for the slow movement. This is a varied chorale, marked *Religioso: Largo – Andante*, and is completely different in atmosphere – strange, mysterious and contemplative. The traditional *scherzo* is a lively but sensitive *Presto* whose bucolic, pastoral trio plays a fairly complex role in the formal scheme, although less so than the *Molto energico* finale, which has elements of both *rondo* form (with two episodes) and ternary form (the second episode being a lengthy digression, tender and warm in feel).

Let us leave the last word here to Magnard's first biographer, Gaston Carraud: 'This is the most complicated of all Magnard's works, its imperfection giving it a striking quality, a true individuality, even at this early stage of his career.'

Magnard had already started work on his *Second Symphony* by the time the *First* was premiered. It is remarkable that he felt himself equal to the task of embarking on a second work in the genre without, on this occasion, d'Indy's guidance. Especially as, even taking into account the significant revisions he would later make to the symphony, this can be seen as the work in which Magnard really found his compositional voice, young as he was.

As this letter to his friend and fellow composer Guy Ropartz shows, he put everything into its creation: 'I've just finished the finale of my symphony. Phew! It was such hard work! I've spent a year on it, and worked on nothing else all that time ... I'll play this pile of rubbish to you when I've copied it out and got ink all over my fingers.'

The original version of the *Symphony* was premiered in Nancy in 1896, conducted by Magnard's long-time friend Ropartz. It caused a genuine scandal and was still being talked about in the city long after the event. The audience was not impressed and for the most part critics judged the performance harshly. Magnard conceded that the work was too complex and too long (around 50 minutes) and made several changes, including two cuts: he completely rewrote the second movement, originally entitled *Fugues et Danses*, to create the shorter and less austere *Danses*, and he also cut one entire variation from the third movement (*Chant varié*).

The strong and yearning main theme of the sonata-form *Ouverture: Assez animé* works an irresistible charm on the listener. Magnard then creates a striking contrast between this first subject and a dreamlike, ethereal second subject, set out by the clarinet. The *scherzo* in this work – the above-mentioned *Danses* – is placed in second position and is a movement of constant energy and uninterrupted inspiration. We are then led into the third-movement *Chant varié: Très nuancé*, notable for its expressive lyricism and, a few nostalgic moments aside, brimming with optimism. The sonata-form finale is marked *Vif et gai*. Its first subject is full of colour and unalloyed joy, while the second, again entrusted to the clarinet, is peaceful and serene. The work comes to a radiant, dazzling conclusion.

The *Second* is the only one of Magnard's symphonies to begin in a major key, and offers the most resounding expression of earthly happiness to be found in any of his works.

Pierre Carrive

English translation: Susannah Howe

Albéric Magnard (1865–1914)

Première et Deuxième 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 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, mais aussi au regard de la musique française de l'époque. La *Première* a été écrite sous le contrôle 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.

Magnard étudie encore avec Vincent d'Indy, qui l'a supervisée, quand il se lance dans sa *Première Symphonie*. Il avait commencé à composer seulement un peu plus d'un an avant. Pour lui qui eut par la suite bien des hésitations à aborder le quatuor à cordes, voilà qui prouve à quel point il avait confiance en lui dans le domaine de la symphonie.

La création intégrale a lieu à Angers en 1893. Notons que par la suite, il faudra attendre un siècle pour l'entendre à nouveau. L'accueil est assez contrasté. La profusion d'idées, que la concision de l'œuvre compense pour les uns, ou n'aide pas à rendre fluide pour d'autres, est à la fois louée et regrettée. On admire également la science de l'écriture pour un orchestre très fourni (avec notamment trois saxophones, aux sonorités proches de

l'orgue, dans le mouvement lent), auquel Magnard renoncera par la suite.

Toute la symphonie est basée sur un thème fondamental, conformément à l'orthodoxie cyclique. Voici ce qu'en dit Magnard, dans *Angers-Artiste* du 11 mars 1893, la veille de la création de l'œuvre : « La phrase exposée au début de la première partie domine toute la symphonie. Elle fait une courte réapparition dans la seconde partie avant la rentrée du choral ; elle se développe par fragments et s'expose à nouveau dans la troisième partie après le trio ; dans le finale elle fournit la plupart des transitions et, s'affirmant pour la première fois en majeur, achève la conclusion empruntée au choral de la seconde partie. »

Le premier mouvement est indiqué *Strepitato* (*bruyamment* !). De forme sonate, il oppose ce fameux thème, heurté et un peu fruste, à un second thème chantant et délicat, plus lent. Il s'achève dans la nuance pianissimo, et nous prépare au mouvement lent.

Il s'agit d'un choral varié, noté *Religioso : Largo – Andante*, d'une ambiance toute différente, étrange, mystérieuse, et en effet recueillie.

Le scherzo traditionnel de la symphonie est un alerte mais sensible *Presto*, dans lequel le trio, bucolique et pastoral, prend une place assez complexe sur le plan formel.

Moins, toutefois, que le final *Molto energico*, qui tient à la fois du rondo (avec deux couplets) et de la forme ternaire (le deuxième couplet étant un long épisode tendre et chaleureux).

Laissons Gaston Carraud, le premier biographe de Magnard, conclure : « C'est la plus compliquée de toutes les œuvres de Magnard, frappante déjà, dans son imperfection, par la personnalité de l'accent. ».

Magnard se lance dans la composition de sa *Deuxième Symphonie* avant-même la création de la *Première*. Il est d'ailleurs remarquable qu'aussi rapidement il se sente de taille à telle entreprise, sans, cette fois, la tutelle de Vincent d'Indy. D'autant que, même en considérant les importants remaniements qu'il fera par

la suite, nous pouvons considérer cette œuvre comme celle où Magnard devient, déjà, véritablement lui-même.

Ainsi que cette lettre à Ropartz le montre, il n'a pas ménagé sa peine : « Je viens de terminer le finale de ma symphonie. Ouf ! Que j'ai le travail pénible ! Voilà un an que je suis là-dessus et je n'ai rien fait d'autre. C'est la constipation et l'impuissance. Je vous jouerai cette ordure de dimension quand je l'aurai recopiée et m'en serai barbouillé les doigts. »

Elle est créée, dans sa version initiale, sous la direction du fidèle Ropartz, à Nancy, en 1896. C'est un véritable scandale, dont les échos dans la ville perdureront longtemps. Le public est furieux, et les critiques pour la plupart très sévères. Magnard concède la trop grande complexité et la durée excessive (une cinquantaine de minutes) de l'ouvrage, et procède à plusieurs modifications, dont deux de taille : il réécrit totalement *Fugues*, pour de moins longues et moins austères *Danses*, et supprime toute une variation du *Chant varié*.

Le premier mouvement est une *Ouverture : Assez animé*, de structure sonate. Son thème principal, robuste et ardent, prend irrésistiblement possession de l'auditeur. Le contraste avec le deuxième thème rêveur et aérien, énoncé à la clarinette, est saisissant.

Ici en deuxième position, le scherzo habituel prend la forme de *Danses* d'une constante énergie, à l'inspiration continue.

L'auditeur est alors prêt pour un *Chant varié : Très nuancé* remarquable de lyrisme expressif, bouleversant d'optimisme, malgré quelques touches de nostalgie.

Le final est un *Vif et gai* de forme sonate. Le premier thème est truculent et franchement joyeux, tandis que le second, à nouveau confié à la clarinette, est paisible et serein. La conclusion est éblouissante et lumineuse.

Cette symphonie est la seule de Magnard à commencer en majeur. Elle est son œuvre qui chante le bonheur terrestre de la manière la plus éclatante.

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

The tragic death of Albéric Magnard, killed defending his home against German troops in 1914, brought a premature end to the composer's life but not before he had completed four powerfully expressive symphonies (the *Third* and *Fourth* are on 8.574082). *Symphony No. 1*, with its strangely beautiful chorale, was first performed in 1893 but was then not heard again for a century. *Symphony No. 2* caused a scandal at its premiere due to its length and complexity, but in its revised version offers radiant serenity and a dazzling confidence that reveals Magnard's true compositional voice.

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Albéric
MAGNARD
(1865–1914)

Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2

	Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 4 (1890)	31:40
1	I. Strepitoso	10:13
2	II. Religioso: Largo – Andante	8:41
3	III. Presto	3:55
4	IV. Molto energico	8:35
	Symphony No. 2 in E major, Op. 6 (1893, rev. 1896)	37:03
5	I. Ouverture: Assez animé	10:19
6	II. Danses: Vif	4:58
7	III. Chant varié: Très nuancé	12:29
8	IV. Final: Vif et gai	9:10

Philharmonisches Orchester Freiburg
Fabrice Bollon

A co-production with Südwestrundfunk

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Executive producer: Wolfgang Scherer (Südwestrundfunk) • Producer, balance engineer and
post-production editor: Manuel Braun (Südwestrundfunk) • Co-producer: Reinhard Ermen (Südwestrundfunk)

Audio engineers: Norbert Vossen, Johannes Grosch (Südwestrundfunk)

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