

Piston - Symphony No.6 Martinu - Fantaisies Symphoniques (Charles Munch) [1980]

Written by bluesever

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Walter Piston, Symphony no.6 1. *Fluendo espressivo* 2. *Leggerissimo vivace* 3. *Adagio sereno* 4. *Allegro energico* Bohuslav Martinu, *Fantaisies symphoniques* (Symphony no.6)
5. *Lento - Andante Moderato - Poco Allegro* 6. *Allegro* 7. *Lento*
Boston Symphony Orchestra Charles Munch – conductor

Piston, a native New Englander and certainly one of the best-known composers in the Boston era (he held a longtime academic post at Harvard), enjoyed an especially prosperous relationship with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The Sixth Symphony, considered by many the composer's finest, was commissioned for the BSO's seventy-fifth anniversary season and was premiered by the ensemble under the direction of Charles Munch on November 25, 1955.

In his notes to the work, Piston wrote of the advantage of having a personal relationship with an ensemble and knowing its sound on every level, from the individual players to the unique personality of the entire body. Piston further observed that every time he put down a note, he could hear the sound of the particular player or section that would play it. Perhaps to amplify his point, he made particular mention of the fact that when composing the symphony he did not play a single note of it on the piano. Piston's observations translate musically into what is one of the richest-sounding and most colorful of his symphonies.

There is a particular Frenchness, an Impressionistic quality, to much of the Sixth Symphony, hearkening to the composer's years of study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. The first movement is aggressive and rhythmic, at times receding to the effect of distant strings. The second movement is a brief, witty Scherzo, in which, nonetheless, one senses an underlying anger. True to its *Adagio sereno* marking, the third movement provides a calm oasis between the briskness of the previous and succeeding movements; its lyricism is enhanced by a notable solo

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part for the cello. The finale, propulsive and marked by syncopation, ends in a glorious, brassy burst. --- Joseph Stevenson, Rovi

The first of the late orchestral works of Martinu, the Symphony No. 6, "Fantaisies symphoniques," is truly awe-inspiring. Commissioned by Charles Münch of the Boston Symphony in 1951, Martinu completed the work two years later, a remarkably long gestation period for a composer of Martinu's fluency. But the concentration of the work and the freedom of the development was both a challenge and a goal for him, and he assiduously applied himself to its realization. In the Fantaisies symphoniques, Martinu takes the slow-fast-slow, three-movement form of Debussy's Three Nocturnes and La mer and the glittering orchestral palate of Les Six and imbues them with his own elusive symphonic procedures. Each movement grows out of the same three-note motif that emerges out of the blooming, buzzing confusion of the trills of the winds and strings at the work's start, and each movement develops the motif in radically different ways. The opening movement contrasts blocks of music moving at different tempos through different textures. The central movement is a scherzo of sorts, developing the motif in airborne colors racing over the bar lines. The closing movement grows through intensities and rhythms to a final cadence that vertically expands the three-note motif as three huge and quiet chords spread over the range of the orchestra. --- James Leonard, Rovi

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