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DARIUS
MILHAUD
LES
CHOËPHORES

GENEVIÈVE MOIZAN **SOPRANO**
HÉLÈNE BOUVIER **ALTO**
HEINZ REHFUSS **BARITONE**
CLAUDE NOLLIER **NARRATOR**
CHORALE DE L'UNIVERSITÉ
LAMOUREUX ORCHESTRA **PARIS**
IGOR MARKEVITCH CONDUCTOR

ARTHUR
HONEGGER
SYMPHONY
No. 5 (DI TRE RE)

LAMOUREUX ORCHESTRA **PARIS**
IGOR MARKEVITCH CONDUCTOR

COLOSSAL VASE OF TERRACOTTA • GREEK, EIGHTH CENTURY B.C. • COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

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DARIUS MILHAUD • LES CHOÉPHORES

Geneviève Moizan, Soprano
Hélène Bouvier, AltoHeinz Rehfuß, Baritone
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L'Université

ARTHUR HONEGGER • SYMPHONY No. 5 (DI TRE RE)

Lamoureux Orchestra, Paris • Igor Markevitch, Conductor

Recorded in Europe by Deutsche Grammophon

side one

Les Choéphores Milhaud
(Part II of L'Orestie d'Eschyle)Vocifération funèbre
Libation
Incantation
Présages
Exhortation

side two

Les Choéphores (concluded)
La Justice et la Lumière
Conclusion
Symphony No. 5 (Di Tre Re) HoneggerI. Grave
II. Allegretto—Adagio—
Allegretto
III. Allegro marcato*The Decca Art-Music
Masterpiece Collection*COLOSSAL VASE OF TERRACOTTA,
showing the lying-in-state of the dead and
the funeral procession.Greek (8th century B.C.)
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It is possible to say—certainly the psychoanalysts would insist—that modern drama was born in the spring of 458 B.C. at Athens, during the archonship of Philocles. That was the season in which the latter's uncle, the celebrated Aeschylus, won the city-state theatre contest for the (fated number) thirteenth and last time with a quartet of new works including the three tragedies collectively known as the Oresteian trilogy (*Agamemnon*, *Choephoroe*, and *The Eumenides*) and the satyr-play *Proteus*.

By a fitting coincidence, it is possible to say also that the birth of modern music was concurrent—2,369 years later—with the germination of a plan to translate the metric-lyric language of Aeschylus into musical terms.

For it was in 1911 that Igor Stravinsky changed the course of music history by combining, in *Petrouchka*, the keys of C and F sharp (the world did not know that the iconoclastic Charles Ives had done the same in his *Over the Pavements* much earlier). And it was in 1911, too, that Darius Milhaud, still in his teens, met his idol Paul Claudel. The already famous poet-diplomat had just then completed a French version of *Agamemnon* and started on its sequel. He had decided that the plays cried out for music, and his enthusiasm found a ready ally in the burgeoning Milhaud's hero worship.

In his charming autobiography, published in 1953 by Alfred A. Knopf as "Notes Without Music," the composer recalled their conversation thus: "He talked of *Les Choéphores*, on which he was then engaged... He described scenes to me in which the text became so intensely lyrical that it called for musical expression; others in which only words could convey the fierce exaltation of the characters. I found his notions perfectly clear, and wholly consonant with what I wanted to do myself. What a happy day that was! It marked the first step not only in a faithful collaboration, but in a precious friendship too."

Specifically as to Aeschylus, this like-mindedness was to be manifest in *Agamemnon*, *Op. 14* (for orchestra, soprano, and chorus); the present *Les Choéphores*, *Op. 24* (for the same forces plus baritone, other soloists, and narrator); and *Les Euménides*, *Op. 41* (a three-act opera). In addition, the historically not unrelated satyr-play was to figure in *Protée*, *Op. 17* (for orchestra and chorus), and again in the Second Symphonic Suite ("d'après 'Protée'"), *Op. 57*. Nor does this begin to enumerate the works in which Milhaud has joined forces with Claudel. But that is another story.

In the summer of 1915, having been rejected for military service, Milhaud was giving most of his time to a war refugee organization. But he did have some spare moments, and all of them he spent on "a thoroughgoing study of the problem of polytonality." He had noted, it seems, that a certain little duet of Bach's, written in canon at the fifth, really gave the impression of two separate keys succeeding each other and then becoming superimposed and contrasted, though needless to say the harmonic texture remained tonal. And so, as he has reported with typical candor: "I set to work to examine every possible combination of two keys superimposed and to study the chords thus produced. I also studied the effect of inverting them. I tried every imaginable permutation by varying the mode of the tonalities making up these chords. Then I did the same thing for three keys. What I could not understand was why, though the harmony books dealt with chords and their inversions and the laws governing their sequences, the same thing could not be done for polytonality. I grew familiar with some of these chords. They satisfied my ear more than the normal ones, for a polytonal chord is more subtly sweet and more violently potent. I built up the music for *Les Choéphores* on the basis of my research, and added to my manuscript the subtitle: 'Harmonic Variations' [This does not appear on the Heugel-Mercure miniature score]. For each strophe and antistrophe, indeed, I established in most cases a definite line of harmonic research, applying to sequences of chords the technique used for variations. The essential part of the music, however, remained the general melodic line. Even when I studied chords containing twelve notes, I used them only to sustain a diatonic melody..."

Thus briefed, students and lay listeners alike cannot but approach *Les Choéphores* more receptively. As a

pendant to the foregoing, it is perhaps relevant to point out that in composing this work Milhaud was not at all the superbly adaptable, ever practical maker of *Gebrauchsmusik* he has so often shown himself to be in his association with the stage and screen. The fact is that *Les Choéphores* was tailored to nothing except the text and the composer's expressive ideals—"with no view to immediate performance," as he once put it with a certain poignance. Perhaps this explains why Milhaud had to wait until 1927 (eight years after he had finished the score) to hear its concert première, and until 1935 for a full stage production. These performances were in Paris and Brussels, respectively. In the United States the music has enjoyed the advocacy of Dimitri Mitropoulos, but the present recording is the first to present the enormously difficult work in its entirety.

It would be presumptuous, if not improper, to submit any analysis of this unusual piece other than the composer's own précis: "The score of *Les Choéphores* was constructed in the following way: a Funereal Vociferation for choir and orchestra to accompany the entry of the Choephoroi bearing libations to Agamemnon's tomb; a chorus *a cappella* entitled 'Libation', my first attempt to write a chorus in two simultaneous keys, with the lines of chords in the male voices set over against the women's voices, and with both forming a background for a soprano solo; an 'Incantation' sung by Electra (soprano), Orestes (baritone), and chorus before Agamemnon's tomb; and then 'Présages' and 'Exhortations', two scenes so violent in character that they created a problem [Milhaud describes them in the score preface as "savage, cannibal, as it were... How was I to set to music this hurricane?"] that I solved by having the words spoken in time with the music by one woman narrator, while the choruses uttered words or disjointed phrases, the rhythm but not the pitch of which was indicated. To support all these various speech elements I used percussion instruments having no definite pitch—quite ordinary instruments listed in all the treatises on orchestration. Finally, I ended with a 'Hymn to Justice' for choir and orchestra, and a spoken 'Conclusion' for voices and percussion."

It remains only to note that an extraordinary extended analysis of *Les Choéphores* (in French) is to be found in Paul Collaer's "Darius Milhaud," a valuable critical survey published in 1947.

* * *

The second modern master represented on this recorded program—the late Arthur Honegger—was born at Le Havre in the same year (1892) that Milhaud was born at Aix-en-Provence. The two encountered each other as teen-agers at the Paris Conservatoire and subsequently were fellow *enfants terribles* in that formidable fraternity (plus one distaff member) known as "The Six." In later decades their development was diametric and partisan of the one found the other's music anathema, but Milhaud and Honegger themselves were quite above this pettiness. The former, in his memoirs, spoke warmly of their "indissoluble friendship."

In 1947, eight years before his death, Honegger declared that the four symphonies he had composed were "enough." He added: "From time to time, I write a little piece, perhaps." Among the "little pieces" he then composed was the powerful Fifth Symphony. He finished it at Paris in December of 1950.

The published score (Salabert-Ricordi) bears the seemingly cryptic superscription "DI-TRE-RE." The significance of this is not to be confused with the "Three Kings" of the Montemezzi opera. Literally, it means "of three Ds," *re* being that note in the French nomenclature. And indeed, each of the three movements (*Grave*, *Allegretto*, *Allegro marcato*) ends with a pizzicato and a stroke of the timpani on D. The listener is free to infer some further enigma, but the composer did not elaborate except to confess a certain trepidation that the lack of a subtitle would seem to place the work beside the incomparable Fifth Symphony of Beethoven. The perceptive John N. Burk, never one to complicate matters, has suggested that the fanciful sobriquet merely affirms the suitability of three quiet endings for a symphony so dark in color and so sober, however profound or personal, in feeling.

James Lyons

Les Choéphores: Synopsis based on the tragedy of Aeschylus.

The plot of "Les Choéphores" is based on the Aeschylus tragedy of the same title, which forms the central section of the Greek dramatist's Orestes trilogy. The three separate plays which comprise it—"Agamemnon," "Choephoroe," and "Eumenides"—deal with the murder of Agamemnon, his son Orestes' revenge, and divine retribution.

In "Agamemnon," the victorious Greek general, home from the Trojan war, is murdered by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. As the sequel in the series, the "Choephoroe" (the Libation Bearers), opens, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are established as the legitimate rulers of the kingdom, while Orestes, Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's son, is in exile.

Plagued by evil dreams, Clytemnestra has sent for soothsayers, who warn of the underworld's anger. To appease the spirits, she sends a group of her women to offer sacrifices at Agamemnon's tomb. These are the choephoroi—libation (sacrifice offering) bearers. They bewail the fate of the royal house, prophesying that blood begets more blood, and, as the sacrificial ceremony takes its course, call for an avenger for Agamemnon's murder.

The avenger soon appears—in the person of Orestes, secretly returned from exile. Together with his sister Electra, who has come with the choephoroi to assist in the sacrifice, he implores his departed father for guidance. The chorus, with Electra at their helm retells Clytemnestra's crimes, and their vague call for justice and revenge becomes gradually more insistent and more specific. Inflamed by their impassioned words, Orestes decides to kill his own mother and her consort. The choephoroi exhort the gods to mete out stern justice and aid Orestes in his undertaking.

The bloody deed is done. The chorus of choephoroi exult in the victory of justice. In a final summing up, the libation bearers remember the interrelated tragedies that have befallen the royal house of the Atreides—the ghastly murder of Thyestes' sons by Atreus, who was cursed by the gods for this misdeed together with his whole house and was subsequently killed by Aegisthus, another of Thyestes' sons; the murder of Agamemnon, Atreus' son, by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra; and finally, Orestes' revenge.

About Igor Markevitch...

Igor Markevitch is one of the foremost conductors of our day. Born in Kiev in 1912, he spent most of his early years in Switzerland. He made his first mark in the musical world as a composer, when Diaghileff introduced one of his compositions at Covent Garden (1929). A few months later, Markevitch made his debut as a conductor with the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra. Since then he has appeared as guest conductor with many of the world's greatest orchestras, and has also taken leading parts in the European Music Festivals, including those at Florence and Salzburg. He first visited the United States in 1955, when he appeared in several triumphant concerts with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Since then he has conducted many of the leading orchestras in this country, including those in St. Louis, Cleveland, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Chicago and the Symphony of the Air in New York.

Maestro Markevitch now holds the posts of permanent conductor of the Lamoureux Orchestra, Paris, and musical adviser of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra.

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Chorale de L'Université

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SIDE 1

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LES CHOÉPHORES

(Milhaud)

Vocifération funèbre - Libation -
Incantation - Présages - Exhortation

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SIDE 2

Recorded by
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1. LES CHOÉPHORES (Concluded)

(Milhaud)

La Justice et la Lumière - Conclusion

SYMPHONY No. 5 (Di TRE RE)

(Honegger)

2. 1st movt, Grave - 3. 2nd movt, Allegretto -
Adagio - Allegretto - 4. 3rd movt,
Allegro marcato

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