

**Orchestrating the *Nude***  
***Descending***

Henri René  
(29 December 1906, New York City – 25 April 1993, Houston, Texas)

Born in New York City and growing up in Germany, conductor and arranger Henri René received a thorough education in classical music at the Royal Academy of Music in Berlin. He moved to the U.S. during the mid-1920s, appearing with a variety of orchestras before returning to Berlin, he is appointed musical director of Electrola, a recording company, and UFA, the German movie studio at Babelsberg. In 1936, he emigrates to the U.S. and is appointed musical director for RCA International; in 1941, he establishes a Continental-style orchestra. After serving with the allied forces in World War II, he returns to RCA as a musical director to arrange and conduct a variety of classical recordings. René retired from RCA in 1959 and worked as an independent for the remainder of his career.

Passion in Paint  
(Famous Paintings Set to Music)  
Henri René and His Orchestra

[click to enlarge](#)



Marcel Duchamp,  
*Nude Descending  
a Staircase, No. 2*  
, January 1912

© 2000 Succession Marcel

Duchamp, ARS, N.Y./ADAGP, Paris

"Passion in paint, passion in music...how differently they are expressed, and yet how closely akin are they! Music has color and paintings have rhythm, and both convey to us beauty and emotion. Here, as far as I know, is the first attempt to link popular paintings with what is usually called "popular" music. I am not sure I know precisely what popular music is: I am certain that these original rhapsodies by Henri René are music which everybody can enjoy, which everybody can understand and from which everybody can experience an emotional lift. Henri René has, of course, not attempted any literal description of the paintings. That would be impossible in music. He has given us impressions. These very sensuous mood of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* to the famous and still controversial Duchamp *Nude Descending the Stairs*, a painting which no longer "describes" or "tells a story" but is all impression and emotion. What you have here, therefore, is a *mood music* album with many moods. Many of the paintings treated musically by René are familiar favorites. Several of them can be seen in our country. To see others you will have to travel as far as Florence, Madrid and Paris. To enjoy René's music you don't have to travel at all: you can "see" the paintings from your armchair. This latest work of Henri René follows a series of highly successful albums composed, arranged and conducted by him in his own individual style. That style is Continental, which is quite natural considering that René has spent much of his life abroad. Among the albums which have become best sellers are *Listen to Henri René* and *Music for Romance*... Here, then, is passion in paint translated into passion in music. Whatever you play the album one "painting" at a time or whatever you play the whole album together I think you are in for a new kind of enjoyment."

George R. Marek  
*Director of Artists and Repertoire*  
Copyright 1955, Radio Corporation of America  
[Click for the Music](#)

"Nude  
Descending [the] Stairs" from the suite "Passion in Paint" by Henri René  
Henri René and His Orchestra  
"Passion in Paint: Famous Paintings Set to Music" (1955)  
Recorded by RCA Victor LPM-1033  
Music inspired by famous paintings throughout the centuries include:

[click to enlarge](#)



Album Cover, RCA Victor, 1955

Side 1

Marcel Duchamp-Nude Descending the Stairs  
Pierre Auguste Renoir-Gabrielle in an Open Blouse Sandro Botticelli-The Birth of Venus  
Francisco Goya-The Nude Maya  
Pablo Picasso-Girl Before Mirror  
Henri Toulouse-Lautrec-At the Moulin Rouge

Side 2

Leonardo da Vinci-Mona Lisa  
Edgar Degas-L'Absinthe  
Amedeo Modigliani-Nude on Cushion  
John Singer Sargent-Madame X  
Edouard Manet-Olympia  
Salvador Dalí-The Persistence of Time

(We are grateful to Veit Schuetz of *Cosmic Art Enterprises* for transferring the music from record to tape)