

APPENDIX



Charles Munch The Recorded Legacy



Brahms: Symphony no. 1, movt. 4
Orchestre National de l'ORTF
Tokyo, October 20, 1966

In Africa I have a chance to see what it means when the creations of the great masters of composition can be heard in a perfect rendering, anytime, anyplace, whenever the mood strikes us. How different it was in my youth, when we sometimes had to wait months or years to reexperience an opus that appealed to our souls in a special manner.

This possibility of becoming familiar with the masterpieces of music is a spiritual advance that must be valued highly for our civilization. It is of special importance that Bach can now be revealed to us completely.

I must therefore thank you for making the treasures of music accessible to us.

—Albert Schweitzer to *Hans Hickmann at Polydor*¹

Recordings are a wonderful and inestimable way of spreading music to the remotest places for innumerable listeners to enjoy all over the world. It is also a splendid help both for musicians and music-lovers, to study music.

—Charles Munch to *Martin Bookspan*²

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FOREWORD

Charles Munch—the book—took shape concurrently with the era of pandigitization. In the late 1990s the twelve-CD *Charles Munch Dirige . . .* appeared, embracing virtually all of the significant repertoire recorded before Munch went to Boston (Dante Lys, 1997–1999); then in 1998, thirty years after his death, a boxed set of nine CDs, *Hommage à / Tribute to Charles Munch* (Valois Auvidis, 1998), was engineered from the broadcast transcriptions of the Orchestre National. In 2006 a forty-volume set called *The Art of Charles Munch*, representing the substance of the Boston legacy, was published by the new corporate entity RCA BMG Japan. Meanwhile, various kinds of super-CDs and the first retrospective DVDs had begun to accrue.

Not all of these could have been acquired in any one place, as publications were limited by national marketing and copyright provisions. By this time, however, Internet marketing had made it possible to shop anywhere.

As this book reached print, the Internet cloud embraced a thrilling (and sometimes bewildering) range of options to study the work of historical figures in both sound and image. It is not merely that, with a click, one can hear snippets of almost any recording presently for sale. Early television broadcasts have also become widely available, and the new vocabulary of blogs and feeds is understood by the public at large. Every week, somewhere, a library or an archive or a collector introduces a web gateway to new treasures. For instance, INA, the French Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, has made breathtaking strides in its quest to safeguard the national heritage under its jurisdiction. For Munch this includes the following:



Concert à domicile, French dubbing of a 23-minute RCA commercial film, in color, on the manufacture of stereo records, featuring Munch and the Boston Symphony while recording Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* in Symphony Hall, March 12, 1956 (RCA LM-2043). (Snippets from the American version of the film appear elsewhere on the web.)



Mort de Darius Milhaud, June 24, 1964, televised obituary, with footage of the premiere of Milhaud's *Pacem in terris* as performed by Munch and the Orchestre National for the inauguration of the new auditorium in the Maison de l'ORTF, Paris, December 20, 1963.



Charles Munch et un orchestre, a 20-minute feature on the birth of the Orchestre de Paris, broadcast November 17, 1967, just after the inauguration, and

(4) Appendix

including substantial footage of an early rehearsal of the new orchestra, which began with “Un bal,” from the *Symphonie fantastique* (Théâtre de la Gaité-Lyrique, September 1967). The *Fantastique* footage was reused in a number of subsequent documentaries.



Mort de Charles Munch, November 6, 1968, televised obituary, including the 1967 *Fantastique* rehearsal and the last moving pictures of Munch, after the much-anticipated Carnegie Hall premiere of the Orchestre de Paris, October 26, 1968.



(And do not overlook *Concert Wagner au Palais de Chaillot*, June 6, 1941, the footage of the young Herbert von Karajan conducting the Berlin Opera Orchestra in the *Meistersinger* Prelude at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, with Winifred Wagner in attendance—for nowhere is there a better suggestion of the political and social environment through which Munch had to navigate the Société des Concerts in wartime.)

Owing to the volatility of media and markets, I cannot hope to keep abreast of all that is available to readers and listeners at any one moment. What follows here, then, is a simple introduction to the published audio legacy of Charles Munch, especially the Decca recordings of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, the RCA recordings of the Boston Symphony, and the burst of post-Boston projects that culminated in four discs left by Munch with his Orchestre de Paris. I have chosen some 131 audio clips of 30 seconds or less to illustrate these points, as well as a few short videos. The audio clips illustrate particulars of the conductor at work, of course; that is the reason there are comparatively few examples from the rich discography of concertos, where celebrated soloists take precedence.

Additionally, other cue points (rounded to the closest 5-second mark) are provided for readers who wish to cue up their own CDs or commercial downloads. References to the source recordings appear in the index to the audio clips.

INTRODUCTION

Consider now a televised performance of Brahms's First Symphony by the Japan Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra as conducted by Charles Munch in December 1962.³ It is a very large, earnest orchestra of considerable talent. Many of the players are young, and while the string ensemble is well disciplined (and chaired by an American), the winds reveal enough idiosyncrasies in approach to ensure that the net sound is anything but prefabricated in the West.

The fourth movement shows Munch fashioning his favorite portion of a concert: the end, with all it demands of the conductor by way of lasting impressions. His jowls quiver with each pizzicato. The eyes grow wide as the "alphorn" passage is reached. Throughout he nods encouragement to the players or sometimes simply appears satisfied—and this despite a number of inaccuracies in the brass. The very long wait between the end of the Adagio and the beginning of the famous march theme, *Allegro non troppo ma con brio*, takes the players by surprise: A palpable air of uncertainty hovers for an instant. He begins in four, beating the quarter note, though the score is marked *alla breve*.

A good deal more of the exposition is taken with four beats to each bar. As the movement gathers its form, there is plenty to consider: the extremes of tempo, as in the unparalleled degree of braking before the horn entry (53:50). The brass-choir climax at the end is full of wonder: grand, revelatory, poetic. Munch's mouth opens wide; both hands sweep upward as though inviting celestial attention. He beams with contentment through the last bar, exactly like the veteran orchestra musician who tells you, toward the end of a long career and full of conviction, that it is still a privilege to play such music—a gift from God.

Munch leaves the stage quickly. In his returns to the stage he does not retake the podium but rather bows in gentle, quick tilts toward the public's thundering ovation. The third and fourth bows take a little longer, but he makes it clear that the composer and the work, first, and then the one hundred individuals grouped on stage are the focus of the accolade. He has been able to draw from an orchestra he has known only a few days something artful and compelling, keenly uplifting, that belongs to these specific players and their public.

Subtract a quarter century, both its material advances and its harsh store of distress, correct for the (slight, in his case) cost of those years in physical appearance, and you probably have some conception of how Charles Munch was on the podium in 1937 as he began his recording career and was just reaching stardom. What he lacked in formal schooling he had absorbed within a few inches of the legendary dictators of the baton. His laboratory had

consisted of observing the Furtwängler generation: what works and what does not, where real beauty can be found, how to make an old piece new and a new piece survive. You cannot sit for even a season in an orchestra of substance and not form your own notions of good performance or, if you are like Munch, ideas of how you would go about making it better. “How did you feel playing under so many conductors?” an interviewer asked him. “Often,” Munch said, “I was unhappy.”⁴

We cannot glean much from the early records about the particulars of his preferred orchestral sonority: The mechanics of that era’s recording do not allow very deep listening for balance and interplay. However, we can sense the progress in time, questions of attack and phrase shape, how an orchestra interacts with its soloists. We hear the spirit Munch brings even to works of little consequence and, when at length he begins to record the core orchestral repertoire, at least something of the gravity he attaches to interpreting great masters. Evidence of the market and of political circumstance runs through the recorded legacy, but there is little suggestion of a learning curve. His apprenticeship in the recording industry was a matter of weeks, not years. The mutation in style has more to do with mechanics: When the long-playing record comes along, for instance, there is no more adjusting to accommodate the four-minute side of a 78-rpm disc.

In all three periods of his career, Charles Munch was a significant figure in the recording industry, leaving behind a discography of roughly 160 original albums of some three hundred individual titles—and many hundreds more reprints, recouplings, and remasterings as the works were made available to new markets using the latest medium and remastering technology. The most beloved Munch recordings today were produced in the United States by an American orchestra and an American publishing house, the work of a little over twelve years, 1949–1962. The European publications are equal in number and traverse a very much longer time span, the three decades of 1938–1968—that is, from the highest influence of the 78-rpm recording to the golden age of stereo.

Charles Munch thus enjoyed the opportunity to record many of the central works in his repertoire twice or more, typically once in Europe and once in the United States. Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique* Symphony, for instance, he did with the Société des Concerts in 1948 (Decca) and the Boston in 1962 (RCA); *Franческа da Rimini* had a Boston recording in 1956 and another with the Royal Philharmonic in 1963 (*Reader’s Digest*). There is a “Chasse royale et orage” [Royal Hunt and Storm] from Berlioz’s *Les Troyens* with the Conservatoire in 1949 and with the BSO a decade later—both of them, as it happens, failures; a Berlioz *Requiem* from RCA, published in 1959, and an equally important one from Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft in 1968, on the eve of the Berlioz

centenary year. At the end of his career, Munch was understandably pushed to repeat his customary repertoire with the Orchestre de Paris, which had just been established, largely in his image. From the later period, too, come many dozens of off-air audio and video recordings.

Between Munch's appointment to the Société des Concerts in 1938 and the winding down of the French recording industry during wartime, more than a dozen titles were released by Gramophone / La Voix de Son Maître. At first these were ordinary commercial recordings designed to attract sales in a capitalist market: *La Mer*, *La Valse*, works that featured famous soloists like Jacques Thibaud and Pierre Bernac. During the war came added focus on living composers—Honegger, Jolivet, Samazeuilh, Schmitt—who cannot have had a large market but who conveyed messages seen as important by the financial and political sponsors. When the industry restarted after the war, the Decca company of London booked Munch and the Société des Concerts for an ambitious series that amounted to eighteen titles on some forty 78-rpm discs all recorded in England in 1946 and 1947. Another six Decca recordings of the period featured Munch with the London Philharmonic.

The Decca albums constitute a critical body of work, often beautifully preserved readings of a conductor in full maturity and a legendary orchestra's habits and techniques in the months leading up to the explosion of long-playing records and with it the thorough redefinition of every parameter of the trade. That the recording sessions took place during the most bitter disputes between Munch and his Paris employers, at the very moment of his leap into international stardom, gives them considerable poignancy. The last recording session with Decca in London was in early October 1947; in early November came the first American recording, for Columbia (U.S.) with the New York Philharmonic. Then two more sets of sessions for Decca took place back in Paris in May 1948 and in May–June 1949, just a few days before the move to Boston. These last Paris sessions resulted in a profoundly original *Pathétique*, Munch's initial foray into recording the music of Berlioz, and the introduction of Nicole Henriot as a recorded soloist.

Records gave orchestras a new lifeline both in Boston and in Paris. The combination of the war, Occupation, liberation; the dramatic changes in daily and family life occasioned by the radio; and other upheavals of the era contrived to mask a major crisis that had already befallen the Paris orchestras even before Munch arrived at the Société des Concerts. That is, the Sunday orchestra concerts were artistically suspect and financially nonviable. Only the impresario-arranged events, films, and recordings, compensated at the syndicate norm ("union scale"), brought orchestral music back from the brink of certain bankruptcy. The Paris recordings up to 1949, then, tell the story not only of Charles Munch's arrival on the international scene but also of life and death at the institutional level—and how music was made to serve during wartime.*

THE EARLY RECORDINGS

Recordings before World War II**With [London Philharmonic] Orchestra**

Gram.	DB 2577/79	Saint-Saëns: Piano Concerto no. 4 (Alfred Cortot, recorded July 9, 1935, London) ⁵
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With Orchestre de la Société Philharmonique de Paris


Polydor	566.192/93	Ravel: Piano Concerto for the Left Hand (Jacqueline Blancard, January 1938)
	566.205/06	Widor: <i>Fantaisie</i> for Piano and Orchestra (Marcelle Herrenschmidt, February 1938)



With Société des Concerts du Conservatoire

Oiseau-Lyre	OL 83/85	Haydn: <i>Sinfonia</i> <i>concertante</i> (Morel, Oubradous, Charmy, Navarra, October 1938)
Pathé	PAT 143/46	Mozart: Violin Concerto no. 7 (Denise Soriano, March 14, 1939)
Col. fr.	LX 819/22	Bloch: Violin Concerto (Joseph Szigeti, March 22–23, 1939)
Pathé	PAT 154/55	Vivaldi, arr. G. Dandelot: Violin Concerto in D Major; Fauré: Berceuse (Denise Soriano, May 9, 1939)
Gram.	DB 3885/86	Ravel: Piano Concerto for the Left Hand (Alfred Cortot, May 12, 1939)


Nearly all the early recordings are concertos with known soloists: Neither Gramophone nor French Columbia was as yet especially interested in Munch as a purveyor of the symphonic repertoire. Backing concerto soloists was a standard career chapter, in any case, and probably the single most impressive thing about Charles Munch as he first took the podium is the quality of the soloists he encountered in live concerts early on: Jacques Thibaud and Lotte

Lehmann in his first season; Stravinsky, Casadesus, and Francescatti in his second; Rubinstein in his third. This was the period of Alfred Cortot's centrality as mentor to Munch, and it was Cortot who called Munch to London for his very first recording session, in which they re-created the performance they had given together for a Saint-Saëns centenary concert in June 1935: the Fourth Piano Concerto.

Even in the first minutes of the first movement of the first work Munch ever recorded—the Saint-Saëns Fourth Piano Concerto—one can hear several markers of his style: how the orchestral statements dissolve in volume and speed at the points of handover to the soloist, the very short staccatos in the woodwinds and sometimes hammering brass, the fluidity with which time is delineated. The second orchestral period is exemplary of the many kinds of details Munch paints into a seemingly ordinary idea.  Cortot's performance is, of course, at the fore: very fine, precisely sculpted. However, where refined conducting is essential, for instance in the wonderful rubatos of orchestra and soloist in the Andante (08:35), the result speaks for itself. No hints of apprenticeship are found here.

For Polydor (the export branch of Deutsche Grammophon) there were two concertos with Munch's first orchestra, the Société Philharmonique, and young women soloists. The Ravel Left-Hand Concerto was a specialty of French pianist Jacqueline Blancard, later a noted teacher in Montreux and Lausanne. Everybody involved in this performance has a good sense of how the work goes, and while distortion of the *tutti* passages prevents much analysis of the ensemble, we get a good sense of the conductor at work from the tender orchestral response to the long lyric strophe for the pianist  (the more he conducts this concerto, the longer this sort of lift will last), also from the fingerboard glissandos and carefully paced build in the concluding march tarantella (10:45). Munch and Marcelle Herenschmidt (1895–1974), a protégée of Isidor Philippe at the Conservatoire and sometime assistant to Charles Widor in his old age, make of Widor's circuitous and derivative *Fantaisie* something of interest, again with the studied withdrawal of the orchestra from its big theme, taut and amusing scherzo textures, and strong focus on shaping the end. Munch also takes real pleasure in the best work of his musicians—here including the very fine Parisian horn playing of the era. 

In October 1938 Charles Munch recorded for the first time with his new orchestra, the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. Haydn's *Sinfonia concertante* featured Roland Charmy, violin; André Navarra, cello; Myrtil Morel, oboe (not a *sociétaire* but the first oboist in the Garde Républicaine); and Fernand Oubradous, bassoon. (For the live performance in January 1939, the société's own Roland Lamorlette took the oboe solo.) The microphone placement—and, it must be said, Haydn's own approach—favors Charmy and the


legendary Oubradous, leaving the equally distinguished Navarra out of reach, but the result is graceful and good hearted, with impressive velocity. 

The Andante is the suavest playing we have so far heard from Munch. The work is also a very good example of the kind of reduced-orchestra fare that got the Conservatoire through full seasons during the war years.

Publisher of this unusual foray into the past was the prestige house Éditions Oiseau-Lyre, founded in Paris in 1932 by Louise Hanson-Dyer, an Australian devotee of the Baroque and patroness of such contemporary composers as Roussel, Milhaud, and Ibert. Munch is known to have liked the Haydn *concertante*, and there is a direct connection, via Munch, between its emergence in the Hanson milieu and Martinu's sudden composition of an identically titled work for the same players in Princeton in 1949. In one variant of the story, Michael Steinberg, having heard Munch lead the New York Philharmonic in the Haydn *concertante*, asked about it during his weekly lesson with Professor Martinu. Martinu at first seemed certain that such a work could not exist, then made inquiries and produced a score. In two weeks' time he came back to the lesson holding the manuscript of his new work.⁶

When Munch went to the Société des Concerts in 1938, he acquired, along with his orchestra, recording contracts of substance. Recording sessions were coordinated with the live concert series, as was later the practice in Boston. Recordings for the French Columbia label, a division of the new EMI music conglomerate, feature top-flight soloists. These began with Joseph Szigeti in the Violin Concerto of Ernest Bloch, a work completed for him in Switzerland that year—and already of political and social significance, since Szigeti was in the process of emigrating to California. (Bloch had lived primarily on the West Coast of the United States for some time.) Though the Violin Concerto had been premiered earlier in Cleveland under Mitropoulos, Szigeti played it with the Société des Concerts at the concert of Sunday, March 19, 1939, with the recording session the following Wednesday, March 22. Later Munch and Szigeti would play the Brahms Violin Concerto together on several occasions in Paris and New York, but Szigeti never appeared with Munch and the Boston Symphony.

The Bloch Violin Concerto is very long, with a 20-minute first movement. The composer variously ascribed its influences to a Native American melody heard in Arizona, then to a need to express the glory of God, giving the critics a cue to unleash their tiresome observations on his “Hebraic style” or distance therefrom. The microphone placement puts the soloist in high relief, such that the ear is drawn almost exclusively to his silken, richly inflected playing. To the extent that we can comprehend the pitches in the accompaniment—and some manifestly wrong notes emerge from the brass—Munch and his players for the most part provide Szigeti a confident backup. The second movement, not taxing the acoustic so sorely, is quite elegant, with an exquisite passage for bass clarinet and bassoon (01:10), where one can hear the unmistakable voice of Munch, sighing.

Among the last recordings in peacetime, in spring 1939, were those with violinist Denise Soriano (1916–2006), wife of Jules Boucherit and sonata partner of Lola Bobesco. Soriano left two discs, with a Mozart violin concerto and excerpts by Fauré and Vivaldi, but these are now essentially fugitive. During those same weeks, Alfred Cortot joined Munch and the Société in the Ravel Concerto for the Left Hand (making three accounts by Munch of the same work in short succession). One of the handful of recordings best left on the shelf, in ordinary times it would not have survived even routine editorial scrutiny: the abysmal pitch, above all, but also Cortot's blunderings and the tinny noises of an understaffed little band. Yet note the elegant clarity of the episode with bassoon and snare drum. 

Wartime Recordings (1941–1945)



Gram.	DB 5135/37	Honegger: <i>La danse des morts</i> (March 27–28, 1941)
Col. fr.	LFX 595/98	Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto (Kostia Konstantinoff, April 17, 1941)
Gram.	DB 5142/44	Mozart: Violin Concerto no. 5 (Jacques Thibaud, June 1, 1941)
Gram.	DB 5184/86	Delannoy: <i>Sérénade concertante</i> (Henry Merckel), excerpts from <i>La pantoufle de vair</i> (July 21, 1941)
Col. fr.	LFX 629/30	Halffter: <i>Rapsodie portugaise</i> (Marguerite Long, October 27, 1941)
Pathé	PDT 49/50	Liszt: Piano Concerto no. 1 (Joseph Benvenuti, November 7, 1941)
Gram.	DB 5193/94	Bach: Cantata 189: <i>Meine Seele rühmt und preist</i> (Pierre Bernac, December 22, 1941)
Gram.	W 1524/27	Mozart: Piano Concerto in D Minor, K. 466 (Jean Doyen, December 23, 1941)
Gram.	W 1500/02	Debussy: <i>La Mer</i> (March 2, 1942)
Gram.	W 1557/58	Ravel: <i>La Valse, Pavane pour une infante défunte</i> (March 3, 1942)
Col. fr.	LFX 631/33	Ravel: Piano Concerto in G (Jacques Février, October 8, 1942)

Action Artistique

	AA 8	Bachelet: from <i>Un jardin sur l'Oronte</i> (December 23, 1942)
	AA 9	Gallois-Montbrun: <i>Lorsque tu dors, Chanson</i> (Jacques Jansen, baritone, December 23, 1942)
	AA 30	Dandelot: Symphony in D Major, movt. 2 (June 1, 1943)
	AA 31	Nat: <i>Que lentement passent les heures</i> (Apol- linaire); <i>L'enfant à poule aux œufs d'or</i> (Nat) (Irène Joachim, soprano, June 1, 1943)
	AA 35	Rivier: <i>Ouverture pour une opérette imaginaire</i> (November 1943)
Gram.	W 1563/64	Samazeuilh: <i>Nuit, Le cercle des heures</i> (April 21, 1943)
	W 1559/61	Schmitt: <i>La tragédie de Salomé</i> (June 3, 1943)
	DB 11158/59	Jolivet: <i>Les trois plaintes du soldat</i> (Bernac, October 29, 1943)
	W 1600/02	Honegger: Symphony no. 2 (October 15–16, 1942; March 1, 1944)
	DB 11100/02	Chopin/Aubert: <i>La nuit ensorcelée</i> (April 28, 1944)
Col. fr.	LFX 679/83	Beethoven: Piano Concerto no. 5 (<i>Emperor</i> , Marguerite Long, June 11 and 18, 1944).

The wartime recordings were done in fits and starts, and multiple sessions on the same work were sometimes spaced six months apart. That the record companies could accomplish anything at all is remarkable: No two engagements had the same musicians; equipment was in short supply; and the rooms were often far too cold for proper tuning.

All the same, there were significant recording projects when the interests of commerce, politics, and high culture momentarily aligned.⁷ Exactly what messages are to be read into the lavish production of Honegger's third "oratorio," *La danse des morts*, in early 1941 is open to speculation. Munch had conducted the Paris première with the Société des Concerts in January under the sponsorship



of *La Voix de Son Maître* with, as noted in the main text, a first-rate cast and *de luxe* design: full-color posters and programs and a handsome record album. Claudel's anguished duologue with God provokes histrionics from Jean-Louis Barrault and, from the choir, the hammered and jarring recitative style that is a Munch trademark. In other ways, however, this is the first recording of Charles Munch and his new orchestra to suggest real finish. Honegger's musical focus was on the "choreographic garland" that enveloped the poet's reflection on the Basel Dance of Death: His macabre tarantella brings in traditional tunes—most obviously "Sur le pont d'Avignon"  and, inevitably, the *Dies irae* chant. That movement and the stirring *Lamento* as sung by lyric baritone Charles Panzéra to a tender, liquid accompaniment , earn this recording its central place among the orchestral artifacts of the Occupation. One cannot help wondering who might have cared enough at the time to have purchased a copy.

Famous soloists lent a hand in keeping the industry alive through 1941: Jacques Thibaud, Joseph Benvenuti, and Jean Doyen from the Conservatoire, the visiting Russian pianist Kostia Konstantinoff in a bold, noisy Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto. Six sides devoted to the music of Marcel Delannoy, film composer and later biographer of Honegger, include the 20-minute *Serenade concertante*, an ebullient reading with violinist Henry Merckel, former concertmaster of the Société des Concerts. (The little beguine from Delannoy's Cinderella ballet, *Le pantoufle de vair*, reminds us how often light music helped the Conservatoire players pay the rent.) Pierre Bernac had sung the Bach cantata 189, *Meine Seele rühmt und preist*, for a live concert of *musique ancienne* in October 1940, recording it more than a year later in a painfully slow and labored account, the more disappointing as it is our only Bach cantata from Munch.

Marguerite Long's premiere of the *Rapsodie portugaise* by Eric Halffter is from several perspectives the most interesting of these wartime discs, partially recorded in October 1941 after the premiere in March 1941 but not completed until March 1942. The sessions were in the Salle du Conservatoire, among the few serious recordings we have from that historic venue, but the players are so few in number and everything so distant that it is difficult to judge the performance beyond its high points—the lovely transition to the second movement (05:40) and the start of the third, a typical Franco-Iberian *fête* (10:10). Long writes that undertaking this work, composed for her, had its political subtexts, and she, like Munch, had reasoned that her role was to apply music's balm and that of French music in particular to her country's wounds.


During the year between November 1942 and November 1943 the government's Office of Fine Arts and the propaganda service established by

Cortot—the Association Française d'Action Artistique—funded a series of some forty records to demonstrate the ongoing health of composition and performance in France. The Société des Concerts did eight of these, with Munch conducting five. (The Orchestre National and the Lamoureux also have recordings in this series.) Of these only two have reappeared on the market: a pair of children's songs by the celebrated French pianist Yves Nat (1890–1956), by then retired from his concert career to teach and compose. These occupy a single side, innocently sung by Irene Joachim, the violinist's granddaughter and the most famous Mélisande of her generation.

Amid all the concertos were two projects of major artistic significance for Munch and his orchestra: *La Mer* and *La Valse*, recorded in March 1942. The orchestra was coping well with external circumstances, giving large-scale concerts at the Palais de Chaillot staffed by adequate numbers of players. They had successfully negotiated the politically nuanced Mozart commemoration the previous fall. (Munch had perfected his technique of being indisposed for that sort of thing, as well as when Wagner was played.) *La danse des morts* was heard again, and a multiauthored *Jeanne d'Arc* ended the season. Both *La Mer* and *La Valse* were heard in 1941–1942, which was for all intents and purposes a complete subscription season. The exuberant versions recorded on March 2–3, 1942, present the Société des Concerts in peak form and suggest how convincing such works could be even without the dozen-man string section. One can hear the orchestra's formidable technique: the effortlessness, for instance, with which it can accomplish a sudden acceleration. Here, too, are Conservatoire traditions that disappear with the passage into the modern era, most notably syrupy string portamento and vibrato in the brass. For the latter, listen to the end of *La Mer*, movement 1,  the trombone choir in movement 3 (03:25), and certainly (on side 4 of *La Valse*) one of three famous renditions of Ravel's *Pavane pour une infante défunte* with Lucien Thévet playing the horn solo.  (The other two are with André Cluytens, 1952 and 1962.)

This particular array of musicians and circumstances favors the second movement of *La Mer*, the “Play of Waves,” with airy sonorities, laughing expression, brisk speeds, and well-harnessed brass. The orchestral sound at the end, with tiny cymbal, percussion, and harp, epitomizes the lean approach of that time and place. *La Valse* is similarly excited and exciting: On no other recording do we hear such insistence on the throbs at the beginning, and when the violins finally make their famously curvaceous entry (01:15), it is all slide and glissando as only the Parisians ever tried. Side 2 seems very fast, as though hurrying to fit enough music on one face, but



Munch accommodates the mechanical requirements very elegantly. (In this respect, note that the cello episode in the first movement of *La Mer* is made to open side 2.) As *La Valse* reaches its head, there is a sudden scramble at 09:30 and a groan from Munch at the climax, also to be heard at the same spot on other recordings.

Honegger's Second Symphony, a work more closely identified with Munch than any other (save possibly Roussel's *Bacchus et Ariane*), was about a year old when it was recorded in October 1942; Paul Sacher had led the Zurich premiere in May 1942, and Honegger conducted the Paris one in June, though it had been prepared by Munch. The performance as recorded is considerably less accurate than similar first recordings from the BSO (the Easley Blackwood symphony, for instance), with the work still obviously unfamiliar: It did not become a Munch signature piece until after the records had circulated. The symphony was surely underrehearsed that October, where in Boston there would be a full rehearsal sequence and multiple concert performances before the studio session. The result is harsh and screamy in the high registers and the big fugues. But that is in the nature of the work, too, said (by others after the fact) to express the agony of the Occupation and, at the trumpet chorale, the certainty of liberation. Perhaps it captures the sense of the work in a way that no postwar performance could, and the famous brooding opening, like the dissolution of the lament,  seems the quintessence of Honegger and his agony. The second movement comes from March 1944, a replacement take of much higher technical quality than the 1942 sessions.


Munch went on to premiere two major works of Arthur Honegger, the Third and Fifth symphonies, and probably did more than anyone else to establish *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher*. After five years in Boston there had been as many Honegger performances as Haydn, Handel, Strauss, or Debussy—more than any other francophone composer but Berlioz and Ravel. Except, of course, for his brother Fritz, Charles Munch had no greater personal and artistic affection than for Arthur Honegger and his household. (One of the few pictures of Munch with a child shows him holding hands with Honegger's daughter Pascale.) Their correspondence was of long duration. Like Munch, Honegger was a Protestant from a German-speaking family but was most comfortable in France, where he had been born. Like Munch, he took it as a matter of faith that the French and German styles were different facets of the same jewel.

The music critic José Bruyr liked to tell the story of journeying as a very young man to hear Munch conduct Honegger in one of the Bordeaux May festivals. He secreted himself into the theater to study the music, then ran headlong

into Munch leaving the rehearsal. With a glint in his eye, Munch said “So you love him, too?” Then, after an awkward pause, “Come, then, let’s have a hug in his honor.” And off he went.⁸

Munch writes briefly about the importance of the film projects to the financial well-being of his orchestra during wartime. The film scores he himself conducted were for the two most celebrated products of that era, *Les visiteurs du soir* [The Devil’s Envoys], 1942 , and *Les enfants du Paradis* [Children of Paradise], 1945 , both with uncredited scores by Joseph Kosma. This work was certainly seen by Munch as craft, not art, and as a mark of social solidarity with his players. He would also have grasped the currents of political subversion in the subject matter, though the personal risks involved in simply showing up to conduct the score were by that time minimal.

Three other recordings came before the liberation. Munch and Pierre Bernac premiered André Jolivet’s *Les trois plaintes du soldat* in February 1943 in a concert that also featured Samazeuilh’s *Nuit*, recorded just afterward. A smallish work with text by the composer, Jolivet’s cycle shows something of his sharp turn away from the avant-garde during the war years: tonal, restrained, with a personal and personable orchestration—the harp and celesta in the third song, for instance. Munch thought highly enough of Jolivet to have brought the more progressive Concerto for *Ondes Martenot* (1947) to Boston, importing composer, soloist, and instrument for his first season there. Louis Aubert’s sugarplum stitching together of Chopin waltzes for *La nuit ensorcelée* and his own *Habañera* leave the strong sensation of a read-through with just a stand or two in the strings and the winds struggling to bring the pitch under control. Still, the good humor shows through, hinting at Offenbach’s *Gaité parisienne* of the 1960s, the merriest of the Munch recordings.

By contrast, Marguerite Long in Beethoven’s *Emperor* Concerto was recorded after the Allied landing in Normandy (and close on to the Gestapo attack on Nicole Henriot, her student). It embraces an excitement, an exuberance, not to be missed. Madame Long at seventy was still going strong and by halfway into the third movement has built up a powerful head of steam. Her playing is far from note perfect, though the impression she leaves behind is one of meticulousness, in large measure the result of clarity of touch and impressively delicate velocity, traits she passed on to Henriot. Munch accompanies with dignity and precision and now and then a hint of gusto, and the deliberate, space-filled retreat from the orchestral statement in the second movement, from the deceptive cadence to the entry of the piano, foreshadows a technique that defines the best of his Boston recordings. 

Quite possibly Marguerite Long's Chopin Second Piano Concerto of a decade later, with the Société des Concerts and Munch's successor, André Cluytens, is more memorable still, and by then she was eighty. Still, there is something quite compelling about an *Emperor* Concerto where the soloist never seems to hammer, where things never threaten to become too big. (The Boston trumpeting was seldom this refined.) One cannot resist the thought that the Conservatoire was taking Beethoven back.

After the War: Decca/London

(in order of recording date)

With Société des Concerts (London, October 1946)

K 1643/44	Roussel: <i>Petite Suite</i> ; Fauré: <i>Pavane</i> (October 9, 1946)
K 1584/86	<i>Daphnis et Chloé</i> , suites 1–2 (October 10, 1946)
K 1637/38	Ravel: <i>Boléro</i> (October 10, 1946)
K 1587/88	Franck: <i>Symphonic Variations</i> (Eileen Joyce, October 11, 1946)
K 1639/42	Franck: <i>Symphony in D Minor</i> (October 11, 1946)
K 1695	Saint-Saëns: <i>Le rouet d'Omphale</i> (October 11, 1946)
LXT 2677	Berlioz: <i>Benvenuto Cellini ov.</i> (October 11, 1946)

With London Philharmonic Orchestra (London, June 1947)


K 1781/84	Bizet: <i>Symphony in C</i> (June 2, 1947)
K 1772/73	Roussel: <i>Suite in F</i> (June 2, 1947)
K 2022/24	Schumann: <i>Symphony no. 4</i> (June 4, 1947)
K 1740/41	Fauré: <i>Pelléas et Mélisande Suite</i> (June 5, 1947)
K 1784 s. 2	Bizet: <i>Danse bohémienne</i> fr. <i>La jolie fille de Perth</i> (June 5, 1947)
K 1691/92	Roussel: <i>Le festin de l'araignée</i> (June 6, 1947)

With Société des Concerts (London, Autumn 1947)



K 1715/18	Mendelssohn: Symphony no. 5 (<i>Reformation</i> , September 29–30, 1947)
K 1763/65	Debussy: <i>Ibéria</i> (September 30–October 1, 1947); <i>Berceuse héroïque</i> (October 1–2, 1947)
K 1933/35	Beethoven: Symphony no. 8 (October 2, 1947)
K. 1718 s. 2	D’Indy: Prelude to <i>Fervaal</i> (October 4, 1947)
K 1756/57	Prokofiev: <i>Classical</i> Symphony (October 4, 1947)

With these records Charles Munch emerges in the international marketplace as a major conductor, leading for himself, without soloists, canonic works by the French masters, as well as by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, and Prokofiev. The Conservatoire orchestra was as unready for direct competition with London, Vienna, and Geneva as their conductor was poised for precisely that. Every indication is that the journeys to London to record taxed the players physically, the institution monetarily, and the august recording house artistically—while Munch was straining at the bit to get out of France. The *affaire Charles Munch* was in full swing at the Conservatoire by the end of the 1945–1946 season, and by the time of the first recording sessions in London in October 1946, Munch had resigned or been dismissed, depending on one’s point of view, from his Paris orchestra. Nevertheless, the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire remained one of the world’s historic orchestras and was capable of rising to the challenges of the midcentury. Though there were only ninety players at most, these occupied seamless lineages back to 1828. Here Pierre Nérini (1915–2006) sits at the head of a legendary aggregation of string players. Among the winds are flutist Lucien Lavailotte, oboist Roland Lamorlette, and the easily recognized hornist Lucien Thévet. The sound quality of the orchestra was less complex than in Boston, purer at best, but also prone to anemia when recording conditions became adverse.

The autumn recording sessions in London in both 1946 and 1947 came in conjunction with tour appearances of the Société des Concerts in England (shared in 1947 with Cluytens). In June 1947, while the Société des Concerts was on tour in France with Cluytens, Munch spent a week with the London Philharmonic, making his first commercial recordings with a foreign orchestra. Except for Schumann’s Fourth, the repertoire is all French: the Bizet Symphony, the Roussel Suite in F and *Le festin de l’araignée*, and Fauré’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* suite—none of these signature works, remarkably, were recorded again in Boston.



Our first sensation of the records with the Conservatoire orchestra from October 1946 concerns the cavernous echo of the Walthamstow Assembly Hall. The orchestra sounds, however, to be in good form: Though small, it seems fully staffed. Except in the clarinet section, most of the wartime tuning problems are resolved, with exact tuning in the parallel intervals in *Boléro* and a good sampling of uniquely Parisian sounds soon to be lost altogether. 


Both suites of *Daphnis et Chloé*, nearly the entire score, are to be found in this first Munch recording of the work, a precedent extended with both Boston recordings, which are not only *intégrale* but also with chorus. Here there is some constraining of his usual rubatos in order to fit the sunrise sequence from suite 2 into four minutes; by contrast, the bacchanal is more deliberate than usual. The ensemble violin work in the spinning figures of *Le rouet d'Omphale* shows why the orchestra earned its reputation for technical perfection and why Munch so often took such pleasure in programming this inconsequential little piece.

With the two major orchestral works by César Franck, Decca again offers the first published accounts of scores at the very center of the Munch repertoire. Pairing Munch with the glamorous Australian celebrity pianist Eileen Joyce for the *Symphonic Variations* must have pleased all parties, none more so than the conductor. They had met in 1945 when the London Philharmonic under Thomas Beecham traded venues and conductors with the Société des Concerts, and she was just the sort of figure who would have captivated him. The performance becomes sublime at the dreamy nocturnal variation  with all its opportunities for sensuous lingering. In the D-Minor Symphony, too, Munch seems thoroughly in his element, and it is to his credit that in this performance, as well as the Boston version, he is able to overcome the tedious elements of the formal organization by drawing attention to the intrinsic interest of the orchestration and symphonic procedure—for instance, the elfin string effects in the second movement.  American critics tired of the work and of Munch's insistence on playing it, but his solution to its puzzles merits appreciation.

With the London Philharmonic recordings of June 1947 we have a good glimpse of the repertoire increasingly associated with Munch as he exported it, in this case works of Roussel and George Bizet's Symphony in C. The London Philharmonic players grasp the *grandes lignes* of the treacherous Roussel style, enjoying the folkish song in the third movement of the Suite in F, for instance, but the overall performance seems blustery and, in part owing to the transfer, indistinct. One can hear only part of the contrapuntal interplay on which Munch insisted, and some of the players (the English hornist, for example) are

left behind. The storytelling in *Le festin de l'araignée* is rendered with aplomb once it settles in: the invasion of the ants, the butterfly's waltz, and the wonderful funeral march for the day-fly (15:45) get right to the essence of the fantasy. Munch was as strong a proponent of the two suites and *Le festin* as he was of the Third and Fourth symphonies and the ubiquitous *Bacchus et Ariane*. It is good, then, to have these records, since the only Roussel recording by the BSO is *Bacchus et Ariane*, suite 2.

Munch and the Conservatoire orchestra were effectively divorced by the second London recording week, in late September and early October 1947. No one, it appears, was content with the results, and when Munch said of his last recordings in Europe, "*C'était un désastre*," he was likely referring to the second London group. He must have been disappointed in the feeble Debussy, with what sounds like a substitute oboe soloist and possibly some missing brass players. *Ibéria*, with its extravagant detail, was a Munch specialty, and the specifics he brings to his reading in terms of metric sensitivity and the articulation of the inner voices foreshadow the great recording to come later from Boston. Compare, for instance, the trombone glissandi and string portamento toward the close of the first movement, *Par les rues et par les chemins* ( Société,  Boston), where serves up a catalogue of portamento effects that goes well past the Conservatoire model. The last movement, *Le matin d'un jour de fête*, gathers in spirit and speed but comes unglued at several points and by 03:10 is unredeemable.

By the same token the Mendelssohn *Reformation* Symphony fails to deliver on its many promises, and we must look to Boston for a better account. This may be as much a problem of the recording environment and the state of the transfer as it is of the performers. Passages such as the reemergence of the chorale in the fourth movement (04:05)  suggest the personal warmth—one might even say religious conviction—Munch brought to Mendelssohn, if not always achieving the nobility of the Boston reading.

The atmosphere had quite substantially improved in time for Prokofiev's *Classical* Symphony, which was in any event more likely to show off the most interesting characteristics of the Conservatoire orchestra in its last decade. A record reviewer in the *Musical Times* rightly observed that both the work and the Société des Concerts flattered "neat, expert playing."⁹ All the Munch trademarks are here: his hurrying through the first movement, driving to the final bar; seductive limning out of the slow movement's melodies; close control of a wide dynamic range. A swaggering gavotte foreshadows the strut of Prokofiev's Montagues and Capulets as later captured in Boston. Finally there is a splendid, effervescent finale taken at the breakneck speed this orchestra considered routine, ending with the kind of live-concert flourish that brought his audiences to their feet.

The two fillers for these sessions, Debussy's *Berceuse héroïque* and the prelude to d'Indy's *Fervaal*, should not be overlooked, both for their curiosity and for the fine solo work within. Thévet's horn playing in the d'Indy is certainly unique, as is the sonority of his duo with bassoon (02:50). The prelude also offers splendid examples of Munch's elasticity of pulse and his theatric, seemingly inevitable retreat into the comfort of infinitely varied *pianos*.

First American Recordings

New York Philharmonic-Symphony

Columbia (U.S.)

- | | |
|---------|--|
| ML 4120 | Saint-Saëns: Symphony no. 3 (November 10, 1947) |
| ML 4298 | d'Indy: Symphony on a French Mountain Air
(Robert Casadesus, December 20, 1948) |
| ML 4791 | Mozart: Piano Concerto in C Major,
K. 467 (Casadesus, December 20, 1948) |

also:

Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra

- | | | |
|-------|-----------|---|
| Decca | K 2055/59 | Brahms: Violin Concerto; Saint-Saëns: <i>Danse macabre</i> (Ossy Renardy, September 1948) |
|-------|-----------|---|

The three published records from Munch's visits to the United States before moving to Boston come from two sojourns with the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra, separated by a year. (These are supplemented by a number of off-air recordings now in circulation: for instance, the live broadcast of December 19, 1948, with Robert Casadesus—and Deems Taylor's commentary—which just preceded the recording session for the Mozart concerto.) The New York Philharmonic-Symphony during the period of transition to Mitropoulos was an athletic orchestra with the inestimable advantage of having Carnegie Hall as its home. The choice of the Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony is thus in a way hardly surprising: The hardware was there, and Munch had learned the work in 1942 for a performance at the Palais de Chaillot with Duruflé. The Organ Symphony was for all intents and purposes not recordable in Paris during the Munch era, yet it had long been associated with the Société des Concerts and the famous Cavaillé-Coll instrument built for the Trocadéro. The later Boston stereo recording probably did more than anything else to make Charles Munch a universally recognized star.

The Saint-Saëns symphony is certainly ambitious for a first date, but the players and conductor seem comfortable enough with each other from the start.



The recording itself is most attractive in the gorgeous slow movement, where the organ is warmly present without taxing the recording system; the lyric ensemble of the viola and cello strophe and the pizzicato reminiscences of the first movement are impressive in shape and design. The *esprit* of the finale is undeniably Munchian. By contrast, the Mozart C-Major Concerto, K. 467, with Robert Casadesus is loud and unsubtle; even the second movement, so often the place Munch begins to exert real personality in a concerto, seems unrefined. In fact, there is not much good Mozart in his recorded legacy.

At the end of the summer of 1948,¹⁰ just before leaving for New York with the Orchestre National, Munch led the Amsterdam Concertgebouw at the Edinburgh Festival, followed by a recording session in Amsterdam with Ossy Renardy (the twenty-something prodigy noted for his Paganini Caprices) in the Brahms Violin Concerto and *Danse macabre*. For Munch the Brahms, with its daunting 20-minute first movement, figured right alongside the symphonies in his favor. He programmed it with the great soloists as often as he could. The Concertgebouw was yet another best-in-class orchestra where Munch was a popular guest. Here he uses familiar tactics to achieve a unique result. For one thing, the Dutch pitch and tuning are of an exactitude not so far encountered on record, and the house sonority is quite particular. Munch answers Renardy's understated tone quality in like fashion, which serves both outer movements well. The microphone placement, as is customary for this period, promotes the soloist to the disfavor of anyone sitting behind, but the new Decca *ffrr* system compensates in other ways. The ravishing, high-Dutch oboe playing in the second movement, presumably by Haakon Stotijn, is unlike any other, and the performance revels in it. One reviewer considers this the best account of the movement anywhere.

Last Société des Concerts Recordings (Paris)

Decca K 1948	Berlioz: <i>Le Corsaire</i> ov. (Paris, May 27, 1948)
K 1968/73	Tchaikovsky: Symphony no. 6 (Paris, May 24, 1948)
LLP 76	Ravel: Piano Concerto (Nicole Henriot, May 31, 1949)
LLP 3	<i>Berlioz Program</i> : orchestral excerpts from <i>Roméo et Juliette</i> (Grande fête chez Capulet, La Reine Mab: Scherzo, Scène d'amour; Chasse royale et orage from <i>Les Troyens</i> (May 30–June 1 and July 14, 1949)


also:


Orchestre National

Col. fr. LFX 880–85

Berlioz: *Symphonie fantastique*


(September 9, 1949)

All of the music from these last Paris sessions would soon be done again in Boston. The Ravel Concerto, with Nicole Henriot, can be imagined as a farewell present to her, much as the Boston version salutes her marriage and reemergence as Nicole Henriot-Schweitzer. There was to be no keeping Munch in Paris by this time, and the worst of the bad feeling with the Conservatoire had begun to ease. Both works recorded in late May 1948 by the Parisians seem a quantum improvement over the best that had come before. The *Pathétique* merits close comparison with the Boston version from the last weeks of the Munch tenure, in 1962: The orchestras are radically different in organization and concept of playing—there was not much truth to the suggestion that the Boston was a “French” orchestra. Tempi are different: stabler and more sophisticated in Boston, less comfortable and thus more provocative in the Paris version, with its lurch to overdrive toward the end of the scherzo.  The distinctive passages in the Conservatoire account are by no means the same as those we remember from Boston. Yet the overarching concept is similar; the lengths of the movements vary by less than half a minute, and performances dwell more on the balance of gracious and brooding elements than on resignation or pathos. Consider the poetic solution to the second-movement waltz, where the pensive trio is greatly slower than the rest, and how at the transition the waltz tries repeatedly to reassert itself at the faster tempo.

Munch and his agents staked discographical claim to Berlioz before Munch moved to Boston, though that is where he became the acknowledged master Berliozian. His very first Berlioz recording, a single of *Le Corsaire*, shows a speed and a virtuosity of technique seldom approached even in Boston. 


The Berlioz program—the three symphonic movements from *Roméo et Juliette* and the “Royal Hunt and Storm” from *Les Troyens*—was marketed to American audiences as Decca LLP-3: For some buyers this was not only their first exposure to the “extended” Berlioz repertoire but also their first LP. (The masters were 78s, however. This explains the big pause just before the *réunion des thèmes* in the *Fête chez Capulet*, which accommodates the disc change.) Even though the orchestra is back to its full complement of virtuosi (note the sensational display of technique in the chains of triplets at the end of the *Fête*, for instance), its constitution favors the transparent material over the noisier passages. Hence *Queen Mab* seems the most lucid of the readings. The balletic coda

with antique cymbals is highly refined (06:15), a good antidote to the vibrato-laden horn calls: What works in the Ravel *Pavane* simply does not suit the hunt and storm. Munch's decision to cut from just before the chorus of Capulet boys to the opening bar of the Adagio misses the point of the delicious setting-up of the love scene (better to have done without it altogether), and later one feels the tempo straining forward to fit the record sides. Here the details of the cello playing are very suave: Consider the recitatives at 04:45 and 07:20 and the love music itself.

 In the Hunt and Storm, owing to the corrupt score and parts then in circulation, one dramatic saxhorn entry is lacking entirely, and the climax at 05:05 is musically unintelligible. It is little better in the Boston version, one of the rare examples of Munch never getting it quite right.

The *Symphonie fantastique*, done with the Orchestre National just days before his departure for Boston, is our first sound artifact of a pairing of orchestra and conductor that guaranteed Munch his ongoing foothold in France. Almost certainly the record is meant as a souvenir of the many performances of the *Fantastique* the orchestra had given in the United States. The differences between the Orchestre National and the Société des Concerts are substantial: The National was considerably larger; it had more stringent work rules, a larger budget, and a more routine reaction to microphones, which it saw every day. (Interestingly, this is Munch's only formal recording from the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, though dozens of his concerts were broadcast from there.¹¹) Though many of the so-called French traditions, largely developed at the Conservatoire, apply to their playing, the individual musicians are different and promote their own particular styles. The brass row, for instance, is very much louder; cellos and basses come from farther away, while the woodwinds are closer. The string ensemble may lack some of the detail and storied perfection heard at the Conservatoire, but that is easily met with the certainty of this performance of the *Fantastique*: They had played it more than a dozen times the previous season, in circumstances for which there was seldom occasion at the Conservatoire.

Munch whips the *Ronde du sabbat* and the chromatics in the development of the first movement (06:30) to very near record-setting pace, and despite a missed seam or two, the players respond with *élan* to spare. In both of those movements the *mise-en-scène* is very fine, their details conspicuously different from Boston's. The *Scène aux champs* is probably the strongest of the many readings Munch left, with the best of the English horn/oboe duos, unusual and convincing renderings of the cello hiccup before the *idée fixe* (06:10), and a ravishing solution to bowing

the big string cadence.  The thunder at the end and dissolution are very nearly perfect, marred by an extraneous note just on the release (a harp string? the *sonnette* in the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées?).

Certainly, by the time he left Paris, Charles Munch was a partisan of novelty both in repertoire and in the performance of established masterpieces. “*Tradition, c’est trahison*,” he came to believe, and he said it often in both French and English: “Tradition often means treason.”¹² This is not to say that he purposefully denied the primacy of the score—though often that seems the net effect. Instead, he believed in rediscovery: “I try to find a way of understanding the intention of the composer the best I can, and then to interpret and convey it to the audience. . . . Each time you study a composer’s work, you may discover in the score you are preparing new ideas and new emotions, which give new life to even the oldest composition.”¹³

There is some evidence as to how he studied his scores. Among his papers is a spiral-bound stenographer’s pad that appears to have works diagrammed by phrase counts grouped into paragraphs, a technique conductors sometimes use to memorize works or to reduce a score to a single page. The scores in his library are clothbound copies of what were the definitive publications of his era: Breitkopf und Härtel for Beethoven and Berlioz, Durand for Debussy. They bear evidence of detailed preparation at home, copiously marked with the red/blue pencils in vogue among conductors of the era. For the Berlioz *Requiem* the standing and sitting of the chorus are indicated in bold scrawls across the first page of each movement: *assis, debout*. There is shorthand for the repeat schemes and from time to time rewriting of musical details. On the flyleaf of Beethoven’s Second is a plan for how the movements are to conclude, and the word “*sec*” [dry]. Phrases and their subdivisions are carefully marked, with frequent tallies of phrase lengths. The markings reinforce what is already there: the fermatas in the Agnus Dei of the Berlioz *Requiem*, for instance. They are also very neat. Few of these notations would have been entered during rehearsal but rather serve as simple *aide-mémoire*. In the long run, after all, that was the role of the published score.

One of the downsides of the Toscanini mystique is his supposed insistence on absolute adherence to “the score”—that is, to a printed source that contains the composer’s last word on his music. The very concept was foreign to Munch, who presumably understood that even the best of scores has its errors and that the score was a mere preliminary to bringing music to life.

“I hope there will be joy,” Munch said at the very beginning of his Boston years, and, at the end, a keynote speaker was pleased to observe that “there has been joy.” So before he departs for a prevalingly anglophone existence, it seems important to make a point or two about his use of language. For one thing, he would, in nearly every context, continue to think in French. Even when he acquired enough proficiency in English to speak extemporaneously and to draft his own remarks, he was most often translating from the French. His notion of *plaisir*, for instance,

was considerably more affirmative and less carnal than “pleasure”; *travailler* and *métier* have more nuance than their usual translations, “work” and “trade.” *Gloire* was not something to be sought or even to be recognized when one had it: Munch seldom understood how famous he had become. And *joie*—the joy of living, of meeting, of discovery, of labor itself—is the all-compassing goal of an implicitly understood good life. He meant considerably more by *joie* than enjoying the moment. He needed the musician’s world to be rich with satisfaction.

French propagandists, since the Great War, had been fond of the notion of radiating the glories of the culture outward at whatever the cost, so obvious were its merits of good taste, proper décor, and high style. They paid immense sums to send their art and artists abroad, certain (and correct) that this would return dividends of every sort. For Munch in Boston they paid nothing at all and got the same result. Very like Boulez, Charles Munch sought freedom from the national cocksureness, a cosmos where France was just a member state. Yet for all his mixed lineage and all he acquired on the open road, he remained quintessentially French in exactly the parts of his demeanor that mattered most. Americans and Canadians and Japanese and Israelis loved it. The French were already pondering how to get him back.

THE RCA RECORDINGS

Munch arrived in Boston an experienced recording artist, veteran of impressive projects with the two leading European firms, Pathé-Marconi/La Voix de Son Maître in France and Decca/London in England. These lines in his résumé had been important in attracting the Boston Symphony Orchestra to Munch to begin with. He was accustomed to microphones as an ordinary part of music making, having led the radio orchestras in England and France practically since the beginning of his career as conductor. There had been broadcasting in Leipzig, too; Munch is identified as violinist in Mitteldeutsche Rundfunk broadcasts of Karl Straube's Bach cantatas, and he was certainly heard as well on the Gewandhaus broadcasts, which began while he was there.¹⁴

In America both the broadcasting and recording industries continued to be defined by the fierce corporate rivalry between the National Broadcasting Company / Radio Corporation of America / Western Union on the one hand and Columbia Broadcasting System / Columbia Records / Bell Telephone on the other. The New York Philharmonic and Philadelphia Orchestra recorded with Columbia and broadcast on CBS, while the Boston Symphony and the NBC Symphony recorded for RCA and broadcast on NBC. Serious amounts of money were at stake in this capitalistic environment, where income streams that a decade before had amounted to a modest trickle now became key to the orchestral budget. Symbiotic business relationships between the media companies and classical performing artists were America's solution to patronage.

Munch arrived, too, at the very moment the 78-rpm record began to disappear. Columbia and RCA were also competing over the media format that was to succeed the 78. Columbia had perfected the 12-inch, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ -rpm, or LP (long-playing) disc, while RCA favored a 7-inch, 45-rpm disc, the "extended-play" format in which all three of the inaugural Munch/BSO recordings were released. What was not yet known to the public but certainly told to Munch early on was RCA's planned capitulation to the LP at least for classical music. A headline in *Retailing Daily* on November 17, 1949—"RCA Head Denies Issue of 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ Discs"—instead confirmed the rumor, introducing, as it did, the detail that the RCA LPs would sell for \$4.50, some \$.35 less than Columbia's.

The LPs made by Charles Munch with the Boston Symphony Orchestra reshaped the orchestra's calendar, bankbook, and perception of its public: in short, its very mission. The same kind of thing was happening all over the country, most dramatically with Szell and the Cleveland, Ormandy and the Philadelphia, and eventually Bernstein in New York. The heady vision was of a musically literate American public, schoolchildren to grandparents, where everybody knew their

instruments of the orchestra, their sonata form—and their *Grand Canyon Suite*. “We have to use films, recordings, television to increase our knowledge,” Munch told the Tanglewood students, but he was quicker than some, as noted earlier, to see the drawback that “very often they have made *poor* music popular.”¹⁵

Full-page RCA ads and catalogue listings are found in every BSO program book of the Munch tenure. The album covers mutate from dowdy and old fashioned to splashy, modernist, at length mildly erotic. (The keyword “cheese-cake” appears with some of these items as advertised on eBay, and the Munch-Schweitzer-Henriot households must have enjoyed a good laugh over the leather-jumpsuited Medea on the cover of LM-2197, for which her Prokofiev concerto was the lead entry.) Many of the “modern” covers are still in use for the CD reprints. When the BSO went on tour, local record shops and radio stations would get inviting new promotional materials for the records available and soon to appear, and anyone could write in for a souvenir portrait of Charles Munch and eventually for Charles Munch trading cards. Meanwhile, American magazines—*Time*, *Life*, *Look*, and the *Saturday Review*—devoted more and more space to news from the recording industry and record reviews. So, too, did the better dailies.

On September 28, 1949, just a week after Munch had arrived in Boston, Samuel Chotzinoff of NBC and RCA came from New York for a conference at Symphony Hall meant to establish an aggressive recording program with the BSO and its new conductor. Chotzinoff, NBC’s senior music producer, liked to think of himself as the brains behind Toscanini, and Munch, as happy as he was to discuss recording options, hoped also to establish a convention that would have two other results: Toscanini’s coming to conduct in Boston and the BSO’s broadcasting on NBC, essentially succeeding the NBC Symphony. The second of these happened in due course, but Toscanini never came to Boston.

The charmingly impractical list Munch brought to the table began with the Franck D-Minor Symphony, then went on with the *Dardanus* Suite of Rameau and d’Indy, the Roussel corpus, Fauré’s *Shylock*, and perhaps some Mendelssohn.¹⁶ Important recording projects all, few of these promised much by way of an American sale, and the company was already a good deal more interested in connecting Munch with Debussy and Ravel.

Richard A. Mohr, RCA Red Seal’s producer, soon joined the conversations, confirming Franck for the first day of a two-day session and then Schubert’s Second Symphony and proposing to continue with works of Chabrier and Sibelius that Munch in turn thought “old hat.” (Subsequently, he indicated he would be pleased to examine the Sibelius repertoire in question: *The Tempest*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and *King Cristian*, though nothing further came of that enterprise.) In due course the Franck was abandoned in deference to Decca/London, whose edition with Munch and the Société des Concerts was still fresh. The first

recording sessions with Munch and the Boston Symphony Orchestra thus took place on December 19 and 20, 1949, with Beethoven's Seventh, Schubert's Second, and the *Béatrice et Bénédicte* overture of Berlioz.

The list of possibilities eventually discussed between Mohr and Munch that season included several French titles he never recorded at all: notably Rabaud's *Procession nocturne*, the work added to the first Boston concert *in memoriam* (and which, for Munch, had taken on a symbolic significance of the Boston-Paris connection), Chabrier's *Gwendolyne* Overture, *Le tombeau de Couperin*, and Honegger's Third (*Liturgique*); also Roussel's Third, later recorded with both the Lamoureux Orchestra and the Orchestre National. On the same list were several works that ended up as sturdy offerings from RCA, for instance the Berlioz *Requiem* and three of the four Brahms symphonies. Munch never recorded—and seldom played—the Third.

The result of the first recording sessions was deemed entirely satisfactory, and in less than twenty-four hours Mohr signaled the BSO management that he would take as many recording sessions with Munch as he could get. He came again to the concert of March 20, 1950, primarily to set in motion a second round of sessions for April 10–11, 1950: the Brahms Fourth, *La Valse*, Lalo's *Le roi d'Ys* Overture (delayed until November), and Haydn's Symphony no. 104 (*London*)—plus the Rabaud if there were time. Munch also promoted Fauré's *Péleas et Mélisande* (unsuccessfully on this occasion); like the Franck Symphony, it was still being offered by Decca/London. The Fauré would eventually figure on Munch's magnificent 1963 disc with the Philadelphia Orchestra but never with the BSO for RCA.

On April 28, 1958, excerpts from the recording of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, the first collaboration of Munch with the BSO to appear, were played to the public in Symphony Hall, and Munch there signed a five-year contract to continue an association of orchestra and a label that extended back to 1917. The next day, April 29, 1950, the discs became available in music stores across the country.

Charles Munch and the Boston Symphony Orchestra were thenceforth serious moneymakers for RCA, with correspondingly lavish promotions in print and over the air. In one full-color magazine ad, the president of RCA is about to present silver batons to Munch and Arthur Fiedler, Munch sitting in a red velvet easy chair in full white tie and tails. In addition, RCA paid a famous Broadway playwright to provide a squib that recurs to the present with annoying persistence as "Moss Hart's recipe for a conductor: Take one large measure of the most solid craftsmanship, add two dashes of international elegance of the rarest vintage, sprinkle with a *souçon* of Gallic wit, age in years of experience, and you have the essential personality of Charles Munch. Funny thing, too, how it all comes through whether he's playing Haydn, Debussy, or Prokofieff. Inspiration with elegance—that's Charles Munch."¹⁷

The planning for each season of the BSO now included routine conferences with RCA about works desired for recording and how and when the sessions might be scheduled. Where it was a matter of anchor projects for the year, especially those involving big-name soloists, the recording sessions would take place just after the live performances. A typical case concerns the Dvořák and Walton Cello concertos with Piatigorsky. The Walton was played in the thirteenth pair of the season, January 25–26, 1957, and recorded in sessions on January 28 and 30. The Dvořák was played in New York on February 19–20, 1960, and recorded on February 22. *La damnation de Faust* was recorded on February 21–22, 1954, after performances on February 18–20; the second complete *Daphnis et Chloé* was performed on February 24–25, 1961, and recorded on February 26–27. On the same pair of live concerts was Milhaud's *La création du monde*, taped in mid-March, two weeks later. This kind of scheduling—Leonard Burkat's particular specialty—played both ways: The order of the first Debussy cycle was set by RCA: *L'Après-midi d'un faune* and *Le martyre de St.-Sébastien* (January 1956), *La Mer* (December 1956), *Images* (that is, *Gigues*, *Ibéria*, *Rondes de printemps*; December 1957). Then the scheduled works were dropped into the calendar of live concerts. A second Debussy series, with *Afternoon of a Faun*, two *Nocturnes*, and *Printemps*, came in 1962.

Two of the Tanglewood seasons included on-site recordings (the Mozart Clarinet Concerto with Benny Goodman in 1956 and the Brandenburg Concertos in 1957), and occasionally there would be August recording sessions just after the musicians returned from the Berkshires, as was the case with *Don Quixote* in 1953 (since Piatigorsky taught at Tanglewood) and Beethoven's Sixth in 1955. This is intensive scheduling by any definition: The years 1955–1958 were also the period of radically increased travel and the vigorous seventy-fifth-anniversary commissions. The furious pace of the Conservatoire concerts had conditioned Munch to this sort of thing, while adrenalin and the size of their paychecks spurred the musicians on. Erich Leinsdorf eventually quit over the schedule.

The specific arrangements between conductor and recording company were among the many details in his first contract that had passed Munch by. With Decca he had earned £75 per recording session plus a personal royalty of 5 percent on gross sales. The arrangement with RCA included nothing for the extra services and a 10 percent royalty to the BSO, of which the conductor got a third. Moreover, Decca and RCA actively sought, from opposite sides of the Atlantic, exclusivity for their wares, robbing Munch, he thought, of large sales and his fans of the opportunity to buy the performances that most interested them. Eventually ways were found to maneuver around this inelegance of competitive industry, and the size of Munch's recorded legacy beyond Boston grew to be quite substantial. However, for aesthetic coherence and longevity, nothing matches the shelf of eighty-some records with RCA.

Experiments in what became stereophonic sound had begun in the 1930s. By 1953 the necessary hardware had been acquired and refined for RCA's particular purposes. "We were not surprised when they came up with the equipment . . . and we had to come up with the techniques in order to make it sound right," said John Pfeiffer, guru of the stereophonic age: "I was probably the most logical one to do the experimenting." In Boston they practiced positioning microphones and mixing the signals into two channels, and when they listened to the tapes back in New York under adequate conditions, "we decided this was something really of substantial nature."¹⁸ Not that the revolution obviously in the making could be achieved immediately: How to distribute such recordings was anybody's guess.

In 1954 RCA became serious about multichannel taping with no less a work than *La damnation de Faust*. For a time both monophonic and stereophonic master tapes were prepared (with, one of the principals later confessed, nobody really listening to the stereo feed), and in those cases the root publication was monaural. This was true of *Faust*, Beethoven's Fifth coupled with Schubert's *Unfinished*, Tchaikovsky's Fourth, and the French collection first marketed as *The Virtuoso Orchestra*. All these recordings are now available as re-engineered from the stereo masters. The reel-to-reel stereo tape player was the first solution to reach the mass market, and in 1955 RCA began issuing stereo tapes (reel-to-reel, ¼-inch tape traveling at 7½ inches per second) branded Stereo Orthophonic. Among the first sensations was Jascha Heifetz in the Beethoven Violin Concerto, recorded in November 1955.

When the vinyl discs started to appear in 1958, they carried the designation Living Stereo in large white letters between opposing golden loudspeakers (and the "shaded dog" logotype on the labels) and serial numbers that began with the letters LSC: RCA Victor LSC-0000 Red Seal / Stereo Orthophonic High Fidelity Recording. There were forty-eight stereo records in the classical catalogue that October 1958; including pop titles, 200 Living Stereo titles were on the market within a few months of the launch.¹⁹ The golden age of stereo thus directly coincided with the mature work of Charles Munch, and many of the Munch/Boston LSCs have essentially never been out of print. Professional engineers describe the Living Stereo master tapes as "among the most cherished in the history of classical recording."²⁰

Generally the classical recordings were made with two or three microphones on separate tracks of a master tape at 15 inches per second. No equalization process was used in this period: The signal went straight to tape. Richard Mohr and Lewis Layton, the senior producer and engineer, respectively, were two of the five staff members in RCA's classical music department charged with accomplishing all this—two producers and three engineers, covering Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Munch and Boston, and everything that

went on in New York. Layton kept draftsman-quality drawings of his microphone placement so that any correction needed later could be made in duplicate circumstances. Curtains and shell pieces in Symphony Hall were repositioned with every lesson learned, and experimenting with the deployment of the musicians was common: where, for instance, to put the chorus—on the floor or on the stage, in front of or behind the players. (The seats could be removed from Symphony Hall for recordings, much as they are for Pops concerts.) Once the setup was determined, however, there was minimal turning of knobs: The constituents of these recordings are the players, their conductor, Symphony Hall, and the best hardware money could buy.

John Pfeiffer (1920–1996) came to RCA in 1949 and subsequently oversaw the transition to the stereophonic paradigm and to the trademark LSC. Urbane, properly educated in both music and engineering, as well as elegantly expressed, he was, according to Van Cliburn, “everything that represented refinement and cultivation.”²¹ Pfeiffer promoted the new technology to anyone who would listen, dragging executives and performers in to hear demonstration tapes and eventually installing stereophonic playback in the recording room at Symphony Hall. In a series of interviews and essays before his death, he described the excitement of the venture: “I was scared to death for the first ten years.” He emphasizes the experimental first steps, as well as the complex technical challenges of reconciling the recording equipment with the consumer playback arrangements or tooling groove cutters to compensate for the difference in linear speed between the outside and the inside grooves. Gradually the RCA staff agreed to first principles: The philosophy was simplicity of setup, economy of microphones, a ratio of direct-to-reverberant sound that gave a maximum clarity with ambient blending of orchestral instruments, and as full a dynamic range as the recording and playback equipment could handle. The original recording was limited to three tracks; the master cutting was uniformly controlled. The plating and pressing were carefully executed: The vinyl was top quality, and the pressings were heavy. And many of the releases were superb.²²

If the list of intimate friendships Pfeiffer says he kept for life—Heifetz, Horowitz, Rubinstein, Reiner—fails to include Munch, nevertheless one of his “very favorite recordings” was the Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony for its sonic juxtaposition of the two “monsters” of classical music—the orchestra and the pipe organ.

It was thus Pfeiffer who decided that the medium was there to stay and who sold it from there on out. In the 1990s, by then a fan of the compact disc and surround sound, he was nevertheless nostalgic about the BSO of the era and wished he was still recording it.²³

Munch did not fully grasp the sea change in the technology behind the recordings. (Horowitz, similarly, could not understand why the sound was

coming from the middle, where there was no speaker.) Living Stereo comes from 1958, far along in his reign: after the Soviet Union, after the Berlioz renaissance was well under way. Still, he must have felt quite lucky that industrial circumstance led him to be able to record a good portion of his work again. One of the roots of his connection with Lita Star on Park Avenue was that she had the very latest stereophonic equipment: It was there that he hurried to hear the Saint-Saëns.

As the last two recordings of Munch and the BSO were appearing in 1963, RCA introduced its brand of electronic equalization, called Dynagroove, which (among other things) trimmed dynamic range while boosting bass frequencies in an effort to reduce tape hiss and make LPs sound better on consumer-level equipment: brilliance, in short, and the absence of surface noise. (Similar claims were made not long after by Decca for its Phase Four Stereo process.) Then RCA also began promoting the BSO as “the Aristocrat of Orchestras”—a characterization seen on the same record jackets that trumpet the merits of Dynagroove. Dynagroove was unpopular with discriminating listeners, who believed that the net result on high-end equipment was actually worse. The process was abandoned within a few years.

The most successful of the stereo recordings—some two dozen—were re-released on the budget Victrola label (serial numbers beginning with VICS), where they enjoyed very large sales. With the introduction of the CD came another round of re-releases, the best of them, in the early and mid-1990s, bearing the label RCA Gold Seal. The CD reprintings of the LSC series, its publishers claimed, had the best sales in the history of classical music.

In recent years fresh releases have featured high-technology re-engineerings from the BMG conglomerate, both the Japanese Victor Corporation (JVC) and what was called, beginning in September 2004, the BMG Classics SACD (super audio CD). Its primary advantage for this repertoire was to make audible the left-center-right configuration of the original three-channel tapes. A secondary process called direct streaming digital (DSD) provided, it was claimed, “additional fidelity.” Promotional materials held, perhaps with some accuracy, that “the listener can now hear detail and clarity far beyond what was heard even during playbacks at the original sessions.”²⁴

The initial publications in these formats were, not surprisingly, the blockbusters: the Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony using the three-track master and coupled with *La Mer* and *Escales; Daphnis et Chloé* complete (two channels, 1955); the Heifetz recordings of the Beethoven Concerto (LSC 1992, two channels, 1955), and the Mendelssohn Concerto (LSC 2314, three channels, 1959). In 2005 came the Berlioz *Requiem* (LDS 6077, 1959: LDS designating the high-design Soria series named for its producers, Dario and Dorle Soria), still thought by many the definitive reading of that work, also the series of

masterpieces for cello and orchestra—Walton, Bloch, and Dvořák—with Piatisgorsky, and most of the other works in the Ravel cycle. The artistic and technical merit of these records was still attracting buyers.

Commercially, their impact was wider still. *Boléro* and the Barber Adagio have been used again and again in soundtracks: It is Munch and the BSO who are heard in *10*, the Bo Derek film of 1979 that sparked a nationwide rage for Ravel; likewise, their Adagio figures in *Platoon* (1986). The 1990 *French Album* was designed by Martha Stewart to be heard as background music for a proper French meal, and the 1995 *Out Classics*—Barber, Copland, Bernstein (none of whom were especially “out”)—shows on its cover art a bare-chested, well-chiseled, tight-jeaned cowboy. Berlioz’s *Roméo et Juliette* figures in *Mars & Venus: A Musical Portrait of Men & Women* (1998: again with provocative flesh on the cover). Then there are the cheap-pop \$3 issues: *Adagio: Greatest Hits*, *More Stressbusters*, *Classics at the Movies*, *More Classics at the Movies*, *Monster Classics*, *Family Circle Weekday Soothers*, *Decaf Classics*. People have heard more Charles Munch than they realize.


Munch’s approach to the technique of recording seems at first glance characteristic of his spur-of-the-moment personality. He disapproved of detailed retakes and splicings—a concept just gathering momentum with the younger set (Glenn Gould, the Beatles)—and aspired instead to the single playthrough, preceded by a guttural, peremptory “*Faites rouler la machine!*” Passages would then be retaken until the principals—producer, engineer, soloist, conductor—were satisfied. Munch often asked to run a movement again “just for us.” It was this second full run that often became the primary take, and seldom are the splices more than minimal.

From the green room, the musicians wondered whether he ever actually listened to the result. He did, thoughtfully: There are photographs of Munch and sometimes his soloists concentrating in the control booth, foreheads furrowed, cigarettes at the ready. Claude Samuel, who produced a Barraud-Roussel recording for Véga in 1961, was annoyed when Munch told him too many rehearsals had been scheduled and thought he would be vindicated when the results were played. Instead, Munch, reviewing the takes and discovering flaws of the moment, smiled his “most delicious smile.” “Yes,” he said, “but that will be lost in the shuffle.”²⁵

In fact the aesthetic Munch brought to recordings differs sharply from his custom in live performance in that he seems to eschew the fevered approach, the driving finish, in favor of more deliberate and expansive readings. Such movements as the openings of the *Eroica* and the *Unfinished*, for instance, are more leisurely on record than they were live. In the studio environment, moreover, he would sit with the score on a desk in his direct line of vision. Seldom would he sally into the unexpected, taking the players by surprise. His goal instead was to


mark clear time and evoke certain result. The LPs and the live concerts had fundamentally different meanings, since they promised to convey repertoire and performance habits forward to future generations. The stakes were higher both financially and as a matter of legacy. Wild rides to the double bar are, in any event, partly visual. Munch had learned this lesson, he told his players, when trying to re-create his concert-hall trademarks while recording for Decca with the Société des Concerts in London.


The players sensed the gravity of the studio, too, perhaps more than Munch did. The majority were recording their first (or only) *Eroica*, *Pathétique*, and *Great C-Major*, perhaps their one chance to leave posterity some notion of how they thought *Till Eulenspiegel* was meant to go. And everybody grasped the import of the megaprojects: Berlioz, *Daphnis et Chloé* complete, and the like. The records routinely offer gripping solutions to solo passages and ensemble interactions not suggested in the radio and television tapes. It is as though the musicians understood, too, that Munch and the BSO had something particular—and permanent—to say.

Here, more than in the press or on television, one is seized by the expertise, personality, and long professional interaction of the solo players: Doriot Anthony Dwyer, flute; Ralph Gomberg, oboe; Gino Cioffi, clarinet; Sherman Walt, bassoon; James Stagliano, horn; and Roger Voisin, trumpet. The string principals—Richard Burgin, Joseph de Pasquale, and Samuel Mayes—have enough featured work on the discs for us to begin to know them nearly as well as the wind soloists, though not so directly as the Boston audiences who saw them in the front row week after week. Percussionists Harold Farberman and Vic Firth, both in their twenties, and seasoned harpist Bernard Zighera leave sharply defined personalities as well. Proof of the singular sonority delivered by this particular community of musicians lies in comparing the way things work on the dozen or so records from 1949 to 1952, before this roster coalesced, with what happens from, say, the emergence of the Berlioz cycle in 1953 through the valedictory renderings of spring 1962. In the second version of Schumann's *Spring* Symphony, for example, there is a particular finesse to the cadenzas in the opening Andante  that represents an obvious advance over what had come before.

It is not so much that the earlier ensemble is any the less capable; rather, the individuals have found solutions—the unique way Dwyer manages her vibrato, the consistently illuminating passages Walt delivers on the bassoon, so often buried in other orchestras by the surrounding tenor instruments—that make for a distinct, hearable character that is the foundation of Munch's best work in Boston.

Equally defining is the exquisite balance of the string sections, the second violin and the viola sections equal partners in the discourse, seldom

boxed in. (This, too, is in part the result of stereophony and also, Munch believed, of his particular solution to deploying his players on the Symphony Hall platform.) The famously resonant cellos and basses charge with equanimity into the limelight when needed, then are content to return to their underpinning. Good examples of how artfully the string choir interacts fill the string-serenade album—the layers of the waltz in the Tchaikovsky Serenade for Strings  and the setting out of the Russian theme in the finale; consider, too, the interplay of string and wind choirs in the orchestral statement that begins the intermezzo of Rachmaninov’s Third Piano Concerto.




 With no other orchestra except for the Philadelphia did Munch enjoy such opportunity to control nuances of voicing and ornament.

By the time of Living Stereo, Munch and his players knew full well what they had in each other. He was confident that his orchestra would express its innate power and scarcely rivaled virtuosity as matters of course. Even in costly recording sessions he would encourage musical moments simply to emerge on their own: Some of the passages that linger in the memory as the most characteristic of the Charles Munch era would hardly have been rehearsed in advance. Allowing the players broad latitude to find their art as it happens and taking pride in the kind of give-and-take that exists in popular and improvised forms run counter to the then popular concept of the master conductor, stern autocrat of the baton: Koussevitzky, Reiner, Szell. Leinsdorf later found the Munch traditions dangerous and even intolerable to the discipline of the house. But Munch always retained authority for the fine-tuning: In passages like the pizzicato close of the second movement of Schubert’s *Unfinished*, the delicacy comes from the podium and nowhere else. So, too, did the decision—and here the obvious analogy is with jockeys and thoroughbreds—to let them run.


The dramatic changes in clarity and depth of the BSO’s sound that came with the technology of the mid-1950s—it was not merely a matter of the multiple channels but also of greatly improved electronics and machinery in general, from microphones to the groove cutter—had little enough to do, one might think, with the conductor’s artistic decisions. It is not so simple as that: Wilcox, Pfeiffer, Layton, and the others were listening to and thinking about the orchestral ideals that Munch had established in the first place, and Munch must surely have been learning something about his own work from the impressive ears of industry. Even if this was a negotiated outcome, the “Boston sound” of those years nevertheless pleased nearly everyone who heard it.

His admirers from the era complain that “recording was not his forte” and that you cannot understand the mystique unless you were there like they were—much as old-timers will greet even the most superb performance of the modern

Philadelphia Orchestra with “yes, but Ormandy’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* was better.” If, as a studio, Symphony Hall lacked its audience and therefore the stimulation Munch thought the very essence of what brings music to life, it also afforded Munch the opportunity to show off his cerebral side, the calculations and philosophy that came from long, often lifelong, deliberations over the published scores. In this respect the uncanny similarity in timings of movements made many years apart suggests that what seems to be spontaneous may in fact be crafted: The fleeting afterthought, the sudden onset of determination, and the *aperçu* may be carefully planned after all. Close listening to the recorded results becomes, then, an essential task. It carries us into the realm of his innermost thoughts about the canonic repertoire, something he seldom writes or even talks much about. Munch, in his mid-sixties, was not a young man when he led these playings. His manner and his mannerisms were by this time well established, so the substance of his art and the wisdom of his years are at our fingertips, inviting scrutiny. For, said Bernard Haitink, “There’s always something to learn from Munch.”²⁶

Easily the most recognizable characteristic of the mature Charles Munch is his tendency—and technical ability—to suspend forward motion at any given instant. Sometimes this involves resting momentarily on an already long pitch in order to enrich its expressiveness; sometimes it has to do with space left empty just longer than the ear expects. Often, in tender passages, the subbeats are thoroughly irregular; almost always there is an envelope of swell and retreat at the level of the subphrase. All of these are at issue in the opening of the second movement of Dvořák’s G-Major Symphony.  In Marguerite’s romance from *La damnation de Faust*, the English hornist Louis Speyer lingers in the second bar, long beyond any concept of beat.  The effect is very different from ordinary orchestral rubato and can be very powerful indeed when repeated again and again. In the Wotan’s Farewell section toward the top of the “Magic Fire Music” , there is greater or lesser stretch in nearly every bar, with (after the trombone fanfare) an unwillingness to move further along through this melancholy and nostalgic unwillingness that strikes directly at the heartstrings. Very similarly, the first cello refrain in the love scene from *Roméo et Juliette* catches for an instant and then lifts off of the dotted eighth, narratively (first version, 01:45; second, 01:30). In both instances we understand the unsaid all the more; the voices of Wotan and Romeo become more powerful still, as Berlioz put it, than had there been words.

One extension of this approach is the Munchian afterthought, or *arrière pensée*, a furtive retreat from what was just said—a thrilling *pianissimo* consequent to some deep opening statement. The best example,

one of the loveliest passages in the whole of the Munch discography, comes in the beginning moments of Fauré's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, where bars 1–2 are answered in bars 3–4, after a thrilling lift, by a much softer, slower restatement.  And this is with the Philadelphia Orchestra, not the Boston. It is doubtless a “found” moment, born of the week of concerts just past, the trust that had emerged between conductor and players, as well as the magic of a passing instant.



Munch often allows orchestral counterpoint to take precedence over theme. At the beginning of the Schubert “Great C Major” (after the horn call), the bassoon countermelody, the pizzicati, and the little clarinet fill are each as compelling as the tune in the oboe; in addition, the suave confidence with which the cello section gathers up the theme and folds into its own duo of violas and cellos establishes the rich color of this performance. What results is a clarity of orchestral conversation from top to bottom and from side to side.



Munch's fondness for precise, dry articulations informs much of his work. This was considered an attribute of French refinement, and it does indeed account for one of the ways Munch's performances sounded out of the ordinary to American listeners. When used with minuscule bow strokes, as in the scherzo from the Mendelssohn Octet or the *Leggierissimo vivace* from Piston's Sixth Symphony, the effect is one of transcendent virtuosity. When brusque and loud in an orchestral *tutti*, as at the beginning of Beethoven's Third or Seventh, it becomes exclamatory and in a way affirmative. The downside is how quickly repeated dry strokes become percussive, then jabbing, and in the end ponderous. The plodding start to the Chopin First Piano Concerto with Gary Graffman is more about the relentless attack points in the lower strings than about length: The piercing, clipped staccato from the brass in the “Marche hongroise” from *Faust* and the fanfares that begin the finale of Beethoven's Ninth grow strident.

Munch liked his brass section work big, and, almost without exception, if the brass are there at all, they are loud. At the end of *La Mer*, for instance, it is the trumpets and trombones that anchor and then control the fluctuations in speed; a similar effect can be heard in the *Feria* from Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole*, again at the end. Authority from the orchestra's back rows helps articulate the density of the layers in big post-Romantic works, and the Munch-Voisin response identifies these performances as Bostonian, sparkling in the brass more often than glowing.

The Munch sound has also to do with the range and depth of the other orchestral palettes: the wide variety of pizzicato effects (*Harold en Italie*, movement 2, the finale of the Brahms First), the many degrees of softness he summons, the remarkable care he takes in elaborating textures (the *Eroica* funeral

march, the chorale in the *Reformation* Symphony); the glistening of sun on water in *La Mer* and *Daphnis et Chloé*, suite 2.

This natural matching of orchestral color with rhetorical gesture is seductive indeed: Take as an example the debonair opening of the Dvořák G-Major Symphony in the tenor voices and the landscape implied by the flute's birdcall just later. Listen for the extraordinary play of timbres at the beginning of Ibert's *Escapes*: Munch's sunrises are very fine.  At heart his work is narrative and image evoking: He pauses in the details of each new vignette, looking forward only a little and backward not at all. Where Szell and other formalists pound out moments of structural return and compel the listener to acknowledge the specifics of a sonata form, Munch just as often pushes relentlessly through his recapitulations as though they have been, after all, inevitable from the beginning. There is thus a particular flow to Munchian symphonic discourse that has less to do with themes on a time line than with deployment of musical materials through a much larger space. With Beethoven or Franck, the argument builds from patiently derived materials, escaping from fours and eights into something considerably more fluid—long lines, rich with *bel canto* and respiration. The finale of the *Mother Goose* Suite, so often a commonplace end to an otherwise attractive entertainment, is instead uplifting: The sense of all the elements gathering and then floating away is palpable, a confident crescendo into the golden world of fairy-tale princesses and their handsome suitors. 

There is real spirit, of course, to the Boston virtuosity: in “Queen Mab” , or the sheer velocity of “Young Juliet” in Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*.  People remember the rousing finales, the speed of the musicians' fingers, the sweat dripping from chins and foreheads. On the videos you can see the determination with which the players respond to being whipped ahead, a feeling several of them characterized as simple panic. Actually Munch was at his very best in slow movements, painting one detail at a time, reveling in his tints and textures. Here raptness would set in among the listeners; nobody dared interrupt such beauty by a fidget, and at length (the videos show us) couples would grasp one another's hand, and eyes would begin to moisten.

For all he was interested in new music, Munch was essentially untouched by recent scholarship on the established repertoire. His Bach became notoriously old fashioned in direct proportion to the advances of the “authentic performance practice” movement with its replica harpsichords, improvised continuo, and rich ornamentation. Munch stayed, willingly, at the periphery of these things. If he ever saw an unrefashioned violin and an old bow or a

Baroque woodwind instrument, or if he ever heard Bach at low pitch, he never mentioned it. (The young reviewers, successors to Olin Downes and Ross Parmenter, went on and on about these very matters, and he must have at least read some of what they had to say.) How closely he followed Beethoven scholarship or the Berlioz revival is open to conjecture, but the probability is that he gathered what he knew from bits and pieces of backstage conversation. The work was happening, after all, in proximity: The Beethoven authority Elliot Forbes was at Harvard; the Berlioz crusade was being led by Jacques Barzun at Columbia; the great Bach scholar Arthur Mendel was at Princeton. It is said that G. Wallace Woodworth, Forbes's predecessor at Harvard, disapproved of Munch's Bach and fought with him about it. Leonard Burkat, who was generally well educated and well informed in such matters, must surely have discussed at least some of them with Munch. Nonetheless, by his American period, Munch was not likely to change his mind much about inherited tradition. He had learned the core repertoire by playing it in Strasbourg, Cologne, and Leipzig under conductors who took it as a matter of faith that they carried on the direct lineage of Bach and Beethoven and Mendelssohn and Brahms.

This meant a certain obliviousness to the history of published scores or the chronology of instrument design and manufacture, let alone their implication for repeat schemes or how to fill in the horn parts in the *Eroica*. For all his score study, there is not much evidence that he wondered where the scores had come from. This caused some degree of misplaced fidelity to the texts found in French published scores, for example a particularly aberrant oboe passage in the first movement of Dvořák's G-Major Symphony. Critical lines are missing from Berlioz's "Royal Hunt and Storm" and even the "March to the Scaffold" in the *Fantastique*. Cuts that Munch learned in Leipzig or fashioned in Paris stayed with him unless an intimate convinced him of the error of his ways.

The glorious thing about records was that they could be compared and replayed when the memory needed refreshing or simply when one wanted to resavor a favorite moment. Records quickly begot a new genre of music criticism, where groups of recordings were treated together in one column. In this context the Munch readings were not always seen as definitive. Irving Kolodin, for instance, writing of LM-1700, a 1951 release featuring Ravel on side 1 and other French favorites on side 2, took the position that Munch on record suffered from predictable excesses.

The kind of performance with which Munch closes a frenzied evening of music-making is faithfully duplicated in every particular—which is reason enough, if only of a kind, for buying the record. However, it is a much more arbitrary, much

less artistic thing Munch makes of the “Rapsodie” than was recently offered by Ansermet (London). With a second side that contains Saint-Saëns’s “La Princesse Jaune” overture, Berlioz’s “Beatrice and Benedict,” and Lalo’s “Le Roy d’Ys,” the economics of the transaction, if not the artistry, are attractive. “La Valse” is a particularly gaudy piece of reproduction.²⁷

This sort of remark, in the *Saturday Review*’s “Recordings” section, did not go unchallenged. Two readers wrote back to complain. One of them, David H. Flight of Fort Benning, Georgia, asked, “What exactly is your attitude toward Charles Munch at the BSO? If I recall correctly you have never admitted that Mr. Munch has waxed anything except a mediocre performance since his advent in Boston.”

Not so, answered an editor’s note:

There is a fine distinction, but an important one nonetheless, between the standards applied in judging a concert performance and those used in evaluating a recorded interpretation. We have found Mr. Munch more than satisfactory as conductor of the Boston Symphony concerts—and have said so in print. But there is a difference between a single performance of the Beethoven Seventh in Carnegie Hall as part of a varied orchestral program and a recording of the Seventh [LM 1034, in Munch’s first year] that must stand comparison with the recordings of Toscanini, Weingartner, Walter, et al. In this company, and in the Germanic repertoire, Mr. Munch as yet appears at a disadvantage. We have been very appreciative of this conductor’s “Ibéria,” “Daphnis et Chloé,” and “Festin de l’Araignée”—to name a few items from the French repertoire he has recorded—and we hope that RCA will concentrate on exposing this side of his interpretative personality.²⁸

This, of course, is precisely how RCA and Columbia Artists wanted to brand Charles Munch. By the time the Berlioz recordings began to appear, the record critics were essentially won over. Writing in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, B. H. Haggin penned a panegyric to Berlioz, Monteux, and the San Francisco Symphony and finally got around to the artifact in question:

Everyone who hears [*Faust*] on this new RCA Victor Recording, as wonderfully performed by Munch, the Boston orchestra, the two choruses, and such soloists as Suzanne Danco, David Poleri, Martial Singher, and Donald Gramm will understand [Berlioz’s connection with the present]. In sound and in the reproduction it is easily the greatest record of its kind that RCA Victor has put out. Never have I heard such a perfect recording of chorus and soloists backed by such an impeccable orchestra. And never have I heard such a complete synthesis of what Berlioz has come to mean in our quarter century.²⁹

The players had opinions of their own as to their discs, of which they were avid collectors and remain inordinately proud. Most frequently they cite *La Mer* and the (second) uncut *Daphnis et Chloé* as their best work. Vic Firth thought the later, out-of-mainstream records better indicators of what conductor and orchestra did best, citing Stravinsky's *Jeu de cartes* and Poulenc's Organ Concerto (where Firth is the solo timpanist). For Roger Voisin the high point was Debussy's *Le martyre de St.-Sébastien*, with Munch himself declaiming the narrator's text. But that is a biased choice, too, since having Munch do the part was, Voisin claimed, his idea. Those who enjoyed the company of Charles Munch during his lifetime treasure the records as souvenirs. Sylvia Sandeen, who in 2005 still had her RCA Beethoven Violin Concerto with Munch and Heifetz on display in her living room, said wistfully, "Music was never better than that."³⁰

It is not my purpose, in the commentary that follows, to develop a fully formed critique of the Boston discography but rather to suggest ways of organizing a personal approach to the challenge of absorbing it. (The Internet embraces vibrant record criticism from *cognoscenti* and *dilettanti* alike.) It is worth noting again that much of this repertoire is easily available and that nearly all of it can be acquired with a little effort. I cite examples from the mass-marketed CDs, passages that can conveniently be cued up. I have also resisted the temptation to suggest a top-ten list partly because what would be on it seems obvious enough (the *Eroica*, the "Great C Major," Berlioz, Ravel, Debussy) and partly because it would be more like a top-forty list (that is the number of CDs in the Munch retrospective published by RCA BMG Japan in 2006) but mostly, I think, because nearly all of the LSCs, some fifty albums, are worth savoring.

Comparing conductors, orchestras, and—most interestingly—repeat recordings of the same work by the same performers has its pitfalls. One is always faster or longer or louder or better engineered than another. The determinants are slippery. Still, the exercise suggests valid conclusions as to how Munch's outlook evolved in Boston. Sometimes it even suggests ways to distinguish among the inherited, acquired, and discovered elements of his art.

My organization demonstrates how strongly rooted Charles Munch was in the ordinary orchestral repertoire: He begins his RCA series, for instance, with Beethoven and Schubert. Obvious threads reveal themselves, notably the great run of French masterpieces and not a little new music. The composers represented in the valedictory discs recorded just before he left Boston are those he held in deepest affection: Franck, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky, Strauss, Berlioz, Ravel, and Debussy. The scope of the collected output is considerable. A fan of Munch and the Boston Symphony would by 1964 have acquired more than sixty albums of compositions from Bach to Blackwood, a well-rounded library full of treasures, best sellers, first-ers, and a few never-agains.


Beethoven and Schubert

LM-1034 ³¹	Beethoven: Symphony no. 7, <i>Congratulations</i> Minuet (December 19, 1949)
LM-1200	Beethoven: Symphony no. 1 (December 27, 1950)
LM-1923	Beethoven: Symphony no. 5 (May 2, 1955)
LM-1997	Beethoven: Symphony no. 6 (August 16, 1955)
LM-2015	Beethoven: Overtures: <i>Fidelio</i> , <i>Leonore</i> ovs. 1–3 <i>Coriolan</i> (November 7, 1955; February 26–27, 1956)
LSC-2233	Beethoven: Symphony no. 3 (December 2, 1957)
LSC-6066	Beethoven: Symphonies no. 8 and 9 (November 30 and December 21, 1958)
LSC-2522	Beethoven: <i>Creatures of Prometheus</i> ballet excerpts (March 7, 1960)



See also the concertos (Heifetz, Richter), given later.



LM-41	Schubert: Symphony no. 2 (first of two, December 20, 1949)
LM-1923	Schubert: 46 t: Symphony no. 8 (<i>Unfinished</i> , May 2, 1955)
LSC-2344	Schubert: Symphony no. 9 (November 19, 1958)
LSC-2522	Schubert: Symphony no. 2 (second of two, March 7, 1960)

The famous coupling of Beethoven's Fifth and Schubert's *Unfinished* (LM 1923 of 1955) was a staple of American record collections. Moreover, these two composers were routinely linked by both Munch and RCA: in the very first recording sessions of December 19–20, 1949, when the great recordings of Beethoven's Eighth and Ninth and Schubert's Ninth were done together in late 1958, and when the stereo version of Schubert's Second was coupled with *The Creatures of Prometheus* in 1960. From any point of view Munch's *Eroica* and "Great C Major" figure among the signal achievements of the stereophonic age.


In both Schubert's Second and Beethoven's Seventh of 1949 we hear solid if rather preliminary accomplishments. The Seventh is not so much frenzied, as a reviewer implied, as it is very loud, and the sixteenth notes in the head motive of the Allegro seem differently executed by the different choirs. The high point here is the scherzo, with its insouciant trio.  With Beethoven's First Symphony of


December 1950 (coupled with Haydn's 103rd), still from the "early" LPs, we sense important strides in the making, both in the prevailing sonority and the apparent comfort level of conductor and players with each other. A sharper focus on details of volume and pace may be emerging, as well as significantly better pitch.

Comparing the two versions of Schubert's Second (and also taking into account how the two versions of Schumann's rather more portentous *Spring* Symphony differ) illustrates how Munch regarded the essence of a composition: There are very strong identities of concept on the one hand, alongside great leeway to accommodate the spirit of the particular account. As with the Schumann pair, one first notes in the Schubert the dramatic lowering of the Koussevitzky pitch into the Munch standard, most striking in the considerable distance of pitch that separates the two Andantes.   The vivaces in the first and third movements are faster in the earlier recording, much faster in the minuet, but the fourth movements go at almost identical speeds. (Munch skips repeats, in the earlier of the two minuets, not the later.) The Andantes are nearly identical in bow stroke and dynamic contour and only about 20 seconds different in length. On the flipside of the second Second is a pleasing selection from Beethoven's *Creatures of Prometheus*: dashing readings of the first movement and *Eroica* variations; in the lovely Adagio fine cameos from Zighera, Dwyer, Cioffi, and Walt; and further along an elegant stretch from the principal cellist, Samuel Mayes.


By the time of the Fifth and *Unfinished* symphonies in 1955, the Munchian approach and the BSO sound had stabilized in tandem with the new recording ideals. The Fifth has a prevailingly classical design, free of the wolfish, sinister sort of fate the central Europeans brought to bear and of the sentimentality that sometimes creeps into the second movement. The finale begins quite slowly and stays on the calm side, lending real distinction to the stretto at the end.  All four movements are tightly controlled: It is as though the breadth of the work and the scope of the playing are being revealed, not pent-up struggles with the psychology of the universe. If the first movement of the *Unfinished* feels dangerously slow (at 12 minutes plus, without the repeat), the shapes and textures are the more interesting for it: The signature cello theme is so softspoken as to seem an afterthought to the first, not the movement's *raison d'être*. 

Beethoven: Overtures, anchored by inspired readings of *Leonore* no. 3 and *Coriolan*, is an intelligent, well-negotiated approach to the clot of strangely shaped, discursive overtures left from the composer's only opera. It sits nicely beside the similar anthology *Berlioz: Overtures* (LSC-2438, 1960). The long, theatric crescendo in *Leonore* no. 1 (07:15) and the patient Adagio openings of *Coriolan* and *Leonore* no. 2 lead us to regret the absence of the Rossini and Weber overtures from the discography. Munchian staccato serves *Coriolan* very well, as echoes of the


opening thrusts hang dramatically into the empty space following. The torrent of violin scales that introduces the coda to *Leonore* no. 3 typifies the kind of showmanship with which the BSO routinely dazzled its audiences in and out of town. 

While the 1955 account of the *Pastoral* Symphony is routine and in spots tired, perhaps because the Boston recording session was squeezed into the August schedule only a few hours after the Tanglewood Festival had concluded (and with Munch on his way to Salzburg), the 1957 *Eroica* more than makes up for its shortcomings. For one thing the sonority and engineering are very near perfection: The tone quality is unusually sweet for Beethoven (the horn octaves at 10:55, for instance), and Munch achieves a nobility of gesture that serves such a portentous work well—complex and many hued, neither pounding nor urgent, nor for that matter especially Napoleonic. (At one point in the first movement he tries to pull away in speed, but this is short lived, as though vetoed by the players.) The funeral march is strikingly calm, with broad-bowed fugue and an epic horn subject, doubled. 

In the moments before the last cadence of this movement, Munch and his players seem transported in their own universe, with intelligence and art combating the forward press of time. That the scherzo comes in at only four minutes is a function of skipping the second repeats (the “B” section in the scherzo and the “D” in the trio); given the length and weight of these sections, the tactic makes some sense. Movement 4, emphasizing the three strokes, in Haydn fashion, is good natured without turning trivial. Withal it is an *Eroica* very much in the image of Munch himself: serious of purpose but with moments of cleverness poking through the context of great formality. There is a charm that somehow internationalizes Beethoven.

Schubert’s Ninth (“the ‘Great’ C-major in great stereo,” as the record jacket had it) and Beethoven’s Eighth and Ninth seek the same conceptual framework. The Schubert is a strong reading, competitive with any of the era. The landscape elements are panoramic, though with a jaunty second movement that reminds us how differently Schubert and Beethoven approach thinking about nature. The closing minutes of the finale are memorably huge: Schubert as precursor of Brahms and Mahler. 

The last two Beethoven symphonies are solid and consistently intriguing as well, with some hints that Munch was more interested in the Eighth than the Ninth at the time of the recording sessions. The New England Conservatory Chorus seems small and, of course, young for the Ninth, notably in the men’s voices, and the soloists are prone to wander in pitch—Donald Gramm’s bass solo at the beginning starts and ends sharp. Still, this account suggests something of the many times the Ninth stirred souls in Symphony Hall or the Shed at Tanglewood as the season closed. Note the unusual sound of the small cymbals and large triangle,

both in the Janissary march and at the end, where the effect is like a pipe organ's *Zimbelstern*. Schiller's text, of course, espouses central concepts of the Munch *manière de voir*.  Here it is the logic of the overall argument and the way that neither the finale nor the symphony as a whole seems long that most attract us.

Given that Munch had absorbed his Beethoven under Furtwängler and gone from there to the helm of an orchestra formed beneath Beethoven's mantle, his Beethoven on record is curiously uneven, possibly evidence of the boredom to which he was prone until his attention was fully engaged. Or possibly he thought that the Beethoven symphonies best played themselves: Beethoven was not a composer, like Berlioz or Schumann or even Brahms, who needed a conductor's help.


Mendelssohn and Schumann

- LM-2221 Mendelssohn: Symphonies 4 (*Italian*, February 18, 1958)
and 5 (*Reformation*, October 28, 1957)
LSC-2520 Mendelssohn: Symphony no. 3 (*Scottish*, December 7,
1959) and Scherzo from Octet (March 7, 1960)



See also the concertos (Heifetz, Laredo), given later.

- LM-7009 Schumann: *Genoveva* ov. (January 18, 1951)
LM-1190 Schuman: Symphony no. 1 (*Spring*, first of two,
April 25, 1951)
LSC-2474 Schumann: Symphony no. 1 (*Spring*, second of two),
Manfred ov. (October 5, 1959)

In Leipzig Munch was a direct heir to Mendelssohnian institutions and repertoire; at the Société des Concerts, Mendelssohn had long figured alongside Beethoven and Haydn in the trinity of the most venerated composers. Munch would have conceived a natural affinity for the *Reformation* Symphony: Its connotations intersected with his own faith and culture and had come to include reference to the war years, when Mendelssohn could not be played in Paris. In fact the Decca Société des Concerts recording of 1948 had marked the re-emergence from the war of the composer, conductor, orchestra, and record company. For Americans, RCA LSC-2221, with both the Fourth and Fifth symphonies, seemed to unveil a new repertoire niche for Munch and his musicians. The marketing naturally gave primacy to the *Italian* Symphony on side 1, with a cover photograph of the ruins of ancient Rome not so different from what Mendelssohn would have seen. But the *Reformation*, with

its evocations of cult and ritual in the Frankfurt cathedral, is the more exceptional account. This is clearest in the finale, which gathers from a gentle, affirmative start through a series of exquisitely wrought effects (the little march at 03:45; the cello lyric at 05:00; the stating of the fugue) to its brave close with full Victorian pomp.  The reading of the *Italian* Symphony reminds us of its several connections with Berlioz's *Harold en Italie*: parallels of rhythmic and metric material, a corresponding vividness of color, and the more obvious connections to monastic procession and brigandly saltarello. Where *Harold* was still relatively unfamiliar, the *Italian* was known everywhere, and the disc thus laid strong claim to Munch's dominion over the entire generation of early Romantic symphonies.

The *Scottish* Symphony, a year or so later, succeeds less well owing primarily to the differences of speed among the themes in the first movement and consequent ambiguities in ensemble. Munch is fully engaged by the rollicking second movement, tongues and bows flying to fashion the *perpetuum mobile*, which by the end becomes a galop. The Adagio at length settles into great beauty, with a moving close and a finely detailed downward arpeggiating of the last chord.  What listeners remember from this disc, however, is the scherzo from the Mendelssohn Octet, in the composer's later orchestration with winds, recorded three months later to fill the second side. Only four minutes long, the track counts as one of the ensemble's great recordings, the players taking as much collective pleasure in flaunting their virtuosity as Munch takes in unleashing it. Enjoy the fleeting solos of the section principals. 

We noted that the two renditions of Schumann's *Spring* Symphony, separated by a decade, summarize the way Munch and his players evolved together, savoring the advanced technologies, establishing trust and then loyalty, finding their particular voice. The 1951 reading  takes both sonata-exposition repeats, in the first and fourth movements, lending an epic sweep. The fourth movement of the stereo version seems hell bent to be done, with steam-rolling crescendos: Schumann's dancing peasants have become industrialized, factory built, anything but *gracioso*. This makes for a big-orchestra showpiece with a bracing close—you can see why Munch liked this movement.  The two readings of the slow movement are less than ten seconds apart, and the two versions of the scherzo vary by only one. The Schumann stereo recording of October 1959 includes a swashbuckling performance of *Manfred*, with splendid strings, while the earlier disc has a mysterious, intriguing *Genoveva*, not much helped by what seem to be flawed printed parts.


Brahms, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky



LM-1086	Brahms: Symphony no. 4 (first of two, April 10–11, 1950)
LM-1959	Brahms: Symphony no. 2, <i>Tragic Overture</i> (December 5, 1955)
LM-2097	Brahms: Symphony no. 1 (November 19, 1956)
LSC-2297	Brahms: Symphony no. 4 (second of two, October 27, 1958)
LSC-2629	Dvořák: Symphony no. 8 (March 13, 1961)
LM-1953	Tchaikovsky: Symphony no. 4 (November 7, 1955)
LM-2043	Tchaikovsky: <i>Francesca da Rimini</i> (April 23, 1956); <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (first of two, March 12, 1956)
LSC-2105	Tchaikovsky: Serenade for Strings (March 13, 1957)
LSC-2565	Tchaikovsky: <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (second of two, April 3, 1961)
LSC-2683	Tchaikovsky: Symphony no. 6 (March 12, 1962)


See also the concertos (Rubinstein, Graffman; Piatigorsky; Milstein, Szyerng), given later.

The Boston Symphony seriously outdistanced the Société des Concerts when it came to the core musical language of the 1870s and 1880s. Boston had been doing these works longer, more frequently, and better than had Paris. Munch's own sense of shape and pace made this a comfortable repertoire for him, and he reveled in the expanded numbers at his beck and call in Boston. Patrons who tired of the French programs and the "new work a week" found reassurance in the Brahms and the Tchaikovsky.


The Tchaikovsky recordings came in two runs: 1956–1957, with Symphony no. 4, *Francesca da Rimini* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and the Serenade for Strings, and in the last season another *Romeo and Juliet* and the Sixth Symphony. (Monteux recorded the last three symphonies with the BSO as well, 1955–1959.) Neither version of *Romeo and Juliet* solves the fiendish pitch challenges of the opening chorale and the harp cadence points (and, as with the Schumann and Schubert symphonies, the first version is tuned considerably higher than the second). The flamboyant string passagework under the clash of swords, separated and *détaché*, is a Bostonian trademark; the stereo version allows unusual focus on the strong timpani and double bass work. The monophonic version seems more cohesive, by avoiding the lethargy


with which the second version ends—and the blaring trumpets. It also seems more poetic, as in Juliet’s winsome reposes to Romeo’s lyric: bashful, reticent, retreating. 


The Sixth Symphony is brilliant in engineering and finish, strongly referencing the separation of Munch from his musicians a few weeks after the recording session and before the record went on sale. Yet it is the Fourth that achieves greatness in its aspiration and substance. The “fate” motive is commanding but not strident; the transition seems to coax the main theme into existence with a haunting prolongation of its very first note (01:20), then a falling off into Tchaikovsky’s world of troubled musings and anxieties: The *Moderato con anima* is enough slower than the conventional pace to convey real nuance of sentiment, the French horn countermelody especially glamorous even without stereo.  In the canzona, the deliciously understated viola and cello line, with its instant of portamento, is a marvel of shape (00:40), and when the flute’s musing separates gently from the cellos , one has a sense of the dangerous behavior that gives a Munch performance its sense of adventure. Everything about this record seems near perfect: the balances, the woodwind filigree, the metric control, the grace of the pizzicato polka (again, rather slower than usual).

The *Pathétique*, too, is full of wonder: the great climax in the recapitulation of the first movement and its stunning dissolve with pizzicato, the trombone work at the end of the lament, and the long-resonating stroke of tam-tam that precedes it.  A mere ten seconds separates the length of the scherzo/march here from that of the Société des Concerts, but there is an enormous difference between the two readings: the Boston one all *sec* and blaring, Voisin-style, and constant in tempo; the Paris version adopting a particular swagger for the last statement of the march, then a blustering redeclaration that nearly collapses as it drives to the end. Both BSO recordings are landmarks for another reason: Tchaikovsky’s Fourth and Sixth were works everybody knew, as they had been played many dozens of times in Boston since their composition and had already been recorded by Koussevitzky. Yet these discs offer the unmistakable voice and idiom of Charles Munch, as convincing here as for the music of France.

We have seen how Munch strongly favors the First Symphony of Brahms throughout his career and regards the Second and Fourth as anchors of his repertoire both in Boston and on the road; he conducted the Third a single time in Boston. The Boston recordings include two versions of the Fourth (1950, 1958), enveloping the Second and the First (1956–1957).

Except for imperfect splicings (01:48 to 02:23 in movement 2, for instance) and momentary ensemble issues in the second movement (02:45; also a trumpet misfire in the first movement, 07:45), Munch's account of the Brahms Second is warm, understated, perhaps a little offhand. The work of the hornist Stagliano at the close of the first movement surprises, then convinces in its idiosyncrasy.  Coupled with the Second Symphony is the *Tragic Overture*, Mendelssohnian in its classical shape and its evocations of *Fingal's Cave*. Orchestra and conductor seem in peak form for this session in early December 1955, just a month after the Tchaikovsky Fourth.

What drew Munch so strongly to the First Symphony of Johannes Brahms was its introspection, the sense of intertwined thoughts that pervades nearly all of it. He always excelled at the second movement, with its halting reticence and intimate counterpoint of meter and instrumental voice; in a way his brushwork in this movement epitomizes his approach to music making in general. Richard Burgin's obligatos at the close and the acuity of the octave work there are exemplary. Note as well the pacing of the fourth movement and the added depth of the contrabassoon, fearsomely flat for an instant in the first bar. Even the pizzicato accelerando is very deliberate, and the low-brass episode, arresting forward motion again and again, is as exquisite as anything in the discography.  When the main theme, too, is quite slow, it becomes apparent that the focus, in sum, is on breadth and depth, not surface. All of this is to be compared with the stereo rendition by the Orchestre de Paris, with which Munch effectively ends his career, the outer movements varying dramatically, the inner ones different from each other by only a few seconds—and with the two video versions that have been preserved.

The stereophonic recording of the Fourth shares with the others of that period the high values of production and sonority that characterize the LSCs, but the net result seems checkered. Conductor interest finally kicks in at the second theme of the second movement, in the cello (03:50), and this gathers into a fine, amber-colored restatement in cellos and violas.  The last-movement passacaglia, which should be the *summa* of Brahmsian form, comes across as disorganized, a mere sequence of solos, and the opening brass statement is very confusing as to what voicing is meant: The fifth takes precedence over the tune, a rising chromatic melody. A very much stronger reading is that of the Dvořák G-Major Symphony, where we have already noted the wisps of portamento and other delicacies of the string-ensemble works and the fetching countrified elements. The slightly lessened formal rigor suits Munch, who


delivers something of gravity and space, with the many shifts of speed and focus perfectly managed.

Wagner, Mahler, Strauss


- LM-2119 Wagner: Siegfried's Rhine Journey from
Götterdämmerung, Magic Fire Music from *Die Walküre*,
Overture and Venusberg Music from *Tannhäuser*
(April 1, 1957)
- LSC-2255 Wagner: Bruhnhilde's Immolation from *Götterdämmerung*,
Prelude and *Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde* / Eileen
Farrell (November 25, 1957)
- LSC-2371 Mahler: *Songs of a Wayfarer*, *Kindertotenlieder* / Maureen
Forrester (December 28–29, 1958)
- LM-1781 Strauss: *Don Quixote* / Burgin, Piatigorsky (August 17, 1953)
- LSC-2565 Strauss: *Till Eulenspiegel* (March 20, 1961)


also:


- LM-2110 Prokofiev: *Romeo and Juliet*, suites 1 and 2 (February 11 and
13, 1957)
- LSC-2105 Elgar: Introduction and Allegro for strings (April 3, 1957)

Till Eulenspiegel and the orchestral excerpts in *Munch Conducts Wagner* figured importantly in his repertoire; the other discs treated here were mostly conceived as vehicles for the soloists. Munch was in fact something of a Wagnerian. Wagner excerpts in the concert hall had been Parisian favorites until the Occupation occurred and the excerpts came to acquire political connotations. (Munch's popular *Meistersinger* act-3 excerpts, not recorded in the studio, are preserved on a television tape.) Of the works recorded here, the most characteristic of his style are the long orchestral stretches from *Die Walküre* and *Tannhäuser*.  The match with Eileen Farrell, another North American blossoming into a major career, seems uncertain, with singer waiting too long for conductor and vice versa, even though Farrell had had a huge success with Bernstein in the same excerpts.


The Canadian contralto Maureen Forrester was within five years of her debut when she first appeared in Boston in a Ninth Symphony. Under Bruno Walter's guidance, she was already acquiring a strong reputation for her Mahler Second, and Munch liked her because she came from Montreal. The Mahler stereo disc of 1958 is in several respects the best of the records

with a solo singer, profiting as it does from subtle microphone positioning and from Forrester's superb diction. The tempos are slow for these already lugubrious songs—at the top of “Ging heut' Morgen” she really wants to go faster—and, in consequence, breath control hints at becoming an issue. In the richest moments of *Kindertotenlieder*, Forrester and Munch are of a mind: Note, for instance, the elasticity of both measure and volume in “Nun seh' ich wohl”. 

The opportunity to use Piatigorsky for *Don Quixote* was a genuine break for RCA: Strauss himself had praised Piatigorsky's portrayal with the Berlin Philharmonic as exactly what he had wanted the Don to be, and Piatigorsky was a great favorite in America and a familiar figure at Tanglewood. In truth the recording, though it includes Richard Burgin and Joseph de Pasquale as the other soloists, is mostly about Piatigorsky: Some believe it remains the best recording of the work and contains some of the cellist's best playing, especially the big D-minor variation V: “the Knight.” Still, Munch and his players have a good time with the rest and reveal an aptitude for comedy not often heard on these records. 

The orchestra is at its most effervescent in *Till Eulenspiegel*, which holds its own in comparison with recordings under the great German conductors, and Munch enjoys himself as much as anyone.  The record, with the second Tchaikovsky *Romeo and Juliet*, counts as one of the Living Stereo masterpieces.

Munch and Prokofiev did not meet because they were never (so far as we know) in the same place at the same time; their points of artistic intersection in the modern milieu, on the other hand, are numerous, starting with Munch's advocacy of the Second Violin Concerto from nearly the moment of its composition. In the end his repertoire included the *Classical*, Sixth, and Seventh Symphonies, four or five concertos, the scherzo and march from *The Love for Three Oranges* (part of the set presented in the composer's memory in November 1953), and, for concerts and a record in February 1957, a selection from the *Romeo and Juliet* ballet suites. This performance has the same bright spirit and fleet passagework that informs the later recording of Stravinsky's *Jeu de cartes*, and the disc earned approval in the marketplace. Surprisingly, Munch never returned to Prokofiev after that.

The strings-only album of 1957 features Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings on side 1 and the Barber Adagio at the end of side 2 (on the LM edition)  — both signature performances. The tame and rather discursive reading of Elgar's Introduction and Allegro thus seems to have its impact squeezed away; one would have preferred to hear the *Enigma* Variations, which Munch conducted several times during the 1960–1961 season.


Bach and Handel**Mozart and Haydn**


LM-2182, 2198	Bach: the Brandenburg Concertos (July 8–9, 1957, Tanglewood)
LM-7009	Handel, arr. Harty: <i>Water Music</i> (December 26–27, 1950)
LM-49	Haydn: Symphony no. 104 (April 10–11, 1950)
LM-1200	Haydn: Symphony no. 103 (December 26–27, 1950)
LM-7009	Mozart: Overture to <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i> (April 25, 1951)
LM-2073	Mozart: Clarinet Concerto (Benny Goodman, July 9, 1956, Tanglewood)


Two generations stirred—before the purists gained sway—to big-orchestra Baroque: Sir Hamilton Harty’s *Water Music*, Beecham’s *Faithful Shepherd* suite, and the suite from Rameau’s *Dardanus*, fashioned by Vincent d’Indy and championed by Charles Munch from 1940. All these had clarinets, crescendos, and vibrato. The *Water Music* suite, which he learned in London in 1945 and then programmed for many dozens of concerts throughout the world, usually as the opening work, is thus a good window on one corner of concert life in the 1950s and ’60s. Munch’s approach is, not surprisingly, light and dry, though with a studied shift to long bows in the middle of the first movement (01:40). Stripped of their repeats and *doubles*, the other dances last a minute or less.

Given the affection with which the Boston players remember their performances of the Bach cantatas and passions, the absence of recordings becomes the real lacuna of those years. The Tanglewood recording of the Brandenburg Concertos, though about a very different kind of music making, is thus intrinsically important and ultimately provocative. One hears little evidence, for one thing, of the excesses the critics came to complain about in Munch’s Bach. The philharmonic sound has its merits, and the chance to hear the principal players in close-up, so to speak, is welcome. Here, after all, lies one of the few natural crossovers between Koussevitzky’s interests and those of Munch: Tanglewood was a locus where the Brandenburgs (and the Suites, not recorded by Munch) had been routinely played since before his time. Koussevitzky had recorded them (1945–1947). Counting the A-minor Violin Concerto with Jaime Laredo, then, there are two dozen Bach movements recorded here, and these may well



have readied Americans for the steady diet of Bach and Handel they would be served in the 1960s and '70s.

Roger Voisin is, of course, the star of the Second Brandenburg, which he had pioneered in the United States (having imported, at Koussevitzky's request, a late nineteenth-century instrument fashioned for the Bach repertoire in Paris³²)—a performance where very nearly every note of the outer movements is individually articulated.  (The splice at 02:30 in the first movement inserts a slower and much less interesting reading; the faster version seems to be spliced back in at about 03:45.) Big-orchestra habits keep trying to break out: The Third Brandenburg, for instance, begins slow and heavy, and there is a Romantic fade-out in the second of the two chords that constitute the second movement as notated. Then Munch gets a real one-to-the-bar going for the gigue, and things begin to feel less old fashioned after all. The solo interludes in the Fourth Brandenburg, with Richard Burgin, Doriot Dwyer, and James Pappoutsakis, avoid the problems of balance and register that often plague this work. Still, in the series of tutti strokes just toward the end (04:25), one cannot help thinking more of Beethoven than of Bach.

The utter originality of the Fifth Brandenburg seems mostly the work of the thirty-five-year-old Lukas Foss, seated at a grand piano and taking advantage of all its capabilities: pedal, crescendo, and the long line. The first-movement cadenza seems quiet, contemplative, altogether different from how a harpsichord would sound.  Only the three soloists play the second movement, with the continuo line taken by the left hand only, in an exquisite give-and-take redolent of Chopin and Brahms. It is difficult to imagine anyone objecting to such an inherently musical response. Unlike many of the Beethoven-to-Tchaikovsky discs, these performances have by now lost a certain degree of their allure, but they describe an important chapter of the BSO's and of Munch's long preoccupation with Bach.

Benny Goodman's Mozart Clarinet Concerto is again a product of the Tanglewood summer concerts, with reduced orchestra. (By contrast, the Sixth Brandenburg appears to use all available violas, cellos, and basses, and Jaime Laredo remembers how badly Munch, eventually overruled, wanted to use the whole string section for his Bach Violin Concerto.) The ear soon grows accustomed to Goodman's bright reedy sound and nightclub vibrato—what else might we expect?—and to the Romantic tints from the orchestra, as in the halting sentimentality of the second movement.  The winding up of the last movement with a blare of horns (four of them?) must have been largely Munch's idea. Orchestras and their audiences love mixing with popular stars, especially during summer festivals: This record of one such encounter was held before

countless pre-adolescent clarinetists as evidence of what was possible in America.

Haydn's last two symphonies and the Mozart *Marriage of Figaro* Overture (as filler for the *Water Music* on three 45-rpm discs) are from the earliest stretch of RCA recordings, when how to deal with longer movements was still at issue. It was also a transitional period for players and their conductor, with stresses of pitch and pounding textures that mostly disappear with the passage of time. The woodwinds have not yet secured an equal place alongside the strings. Munch takes real pleasure in shaping the forms, as in the waltzy material in the first movement of the 103rd  and the chirping horn and oboe in the minuet. The minuet from the 104th is served up with a provocative contrast of loud and soft at the first repeat.  Munch was quite fond of the late Haydn symphonies and went on programming them during the Boston years, often to begin road concerts. One regrets the absence of the 102nd, played throughout 1955 and 1956, from the RCA list, though the Moscow performance of 1956 is available from a Melodiya disc.

Berlioz


LM-1700	<i>Beatrice and Benedict</i> ov. (December 20, 1949)
LM-6011	<i>Roméo et Juliette</i> (first of two, February 22–23, 1953)
LM-6114	<i>La damnation de Faust</i> (February 21–22, 1954)
LM-1900	<i>Symphonie fantastique</i> I (first of two, November 14–15, 1954)
LM-1907	<i>Les nuits d'été</i> (April 12–13, 1955)
LM-6053	<i>L'enfance du Christ</i> (December 23–24, 1956)
LSC-2228	<i>Harold in Italy</i> (William Primrose, viola; March 31, 1958)
LSC-2438	<i>Berlioz Overtures</i> (December 1, 1958; April 6, 1959)
LDS-6077	<i>Requiem</i> (April 26–27, 1959)
LDS-6098	<i>Roméo et Juliette</i> II (second of two, April 23–24, 1961)
LSC-2608	<i>Symphonie fantastique</i> II (second of two, April 9, 1962)


Munch was a confirmed Berliozian by the time he recorded the *Fantastique* with the Société des Concerts in 1949; he can also be said to have taught the Berlioz *Requiem* to the French. However, the Société des Concerts lacked the numbers to do the big works justice, and there had been no workable solution to the problem of providing a suitable French-speaking chorus for the recordings in London. The partnerships he had forged in his first sea-


sons with Wallace Woodworth and the Harvard-Radcliffe singers, then with Lorna Cooke de Varon and the New England Conservatory Chorus (to deliver Bach and Beethoven, it must be said), made possible this methodical circuit through a largely unrecorded repertoire. (Toscanini and the NBC Symphony had broadcast an essentially complete *Roméo et Juliette* in February 1947, now available on CD.³³) Berlioz was a composer that music lovers knew something about but seldom heard beyond a few titles, so there was pent-up demand.

Moreover, for Berlioz, recordings were all-important, since the forces necessary to present any one of the central works came together only rarely. The first Boston *Roméo et Juliette* was a way station to *Faust*: Munch knew the orchestral movements from his Decca recording but had never conducted either work in concert. When the cycle was done, with the splendid album of overtures published in 1960, he went back again to supply stereo versions of *Roméo* and the *Fantastique*.

Munch understood Berliozian color, voice, and pacing. He found nothing unusual in the structures and harmonic language that gave the Beckmessers of his time so much to write about. Berlioz, in America, was a much easier sell than Roussel or Honegger. Munch was also at his best treating the kinds of vignettes, both panoramic and psychological, Berlioz excelled at composing. Like Berlioz, Munch believed in the superiority of instruments over voices when it came to describing the deepest passions of the soul.


He had a strong affinity for the second movement of the *Fantastique*, “Un Bal” , devoting disproportionate rehearsal time to it and seeming to take special pleasure in it in live performance. He liked the violin-centricity of the waltz and its opportunity for sentiment and rubato, the mysterious anticipation at the beginning, the two harps. For the fifth movement he had brought newly cast French bells to Boston for his first performance of the work in November 1950 (as Monteux also did in San Francisco); by contrast, his understanding of other performance problems in this score was minimal and typical of his age. In the tritone confrontation at the end of the *Marche au supplice* (03:40) it sounds as though the ophicleide part, that is, the bass line, is missing entirely, and in the finale the *Dies irae* melody is woefully short in its bottom octave.

The second of the two Boston performances, with its advanced engineering, is bright and shiny and outdistances even the Orchestre de Paris recording of 1967 in brilliance, but it is tempting to find in the earlier version—the contours and nostalgia of the first-movement “Reveries” , the swing of the “Scene in the Country”—the more attractive solutions: the *Fantastique* before they had played it into a trademark. From about the midpoint of the last movement, things are

captivatingly disorganized, but at the scamper of woodwinds just before the close  one cannot imagine a more perfect ensemble or comprehend how they managed to do it. At the climax of the long crescendo that begins the later version of the *Marche au supplice* comes a blatantly wrong chord (01:30; correct in all the other performances). With Munch and the *Fantastique*, it is hard to think past the theatrics of the last movement. Each of the two RCA albums is as inviting as the other. (At the time, LM-1900 was not released as an LSC, but in CD form it is in two-track stereo.) Except for the third movement, which is a minute longer in the later version, the timings are astonishingly close (in the *Marche au supplice*, 04:26 for the first and 04:29 for the second and, for the Orchestre de Paris reading, 04:30).

These are assured and experienced performances of the *Fantastique*, for their time entirely convincing. “Read the text,” he reminded his musicians: “It’s about a man on drugs.” As of this writing there are some half dozen circulating accounts, audio and video, of Munch leading the *Fantastique*. Here lies the most convincing evidence of all that he was seeking different things in the studio than in front of a live audience and cameras.


Easily the most significant of the Berlioz recordings, however, is *La damnation de Faust*: not merely because it was the definitive reading for a generation—unveiling the world beyond the *Fantastique*—but also for the circumstances of its recording. For *Faust* was also a turning point in stereo, where the promise and viability of the new process was proved to anyone who cared to think it through. Two sets of equipment and two crews were put to work: one for the commercial product and one for the experiment. The primary team was set up, as usual, in the Ancient Instrument Room on the second floor of Symphony Hall. John Pfeiffer and his associates were in the basement.

The stereophonists had decided on three microphones: one left and one right for orchestra and chorus, one in the middle, meant for the soloists, subsequently mixed into both left and right channels. There was no attempt to modify levels. “I got goose pimples,” said Pfeiffer of the “Ride to the Abyss.” “I’d never heard anything like that before.” He prepared a demonstration tape with the example (it has since been lost), but a second take has been preserved and also published in stereo. 

There were two takes of Marguerite’s aria, but for different reasons: “Everyone was embarrassed by the first take because Mr. Munch was so sensuous in his accompaniment to it that we sort of felt we’d have to classify this as x-rated if we put it out. He was of course very affected by the music and not totally unaffected by Miss Danco’s beauty, which was quite alarming.” (When I asked Miss Danco, toward the end of her life, about working with Munch, she simply blushed and changed the subject.³⁴)


Not many American singers were qualified for the Berlioz roles, and, of the imports, neither Suzanne Danco in *Faust* nor Victoria de los Angeles in *Les nuits d'été* is especially well cast. Danco, small and perky and high pitched, does not approach the deeply hued mezzo voice the composer envisaged for Marguerite and is consistently sharp. De los Angeles has range to spare and takes all six songs of the *Nuits d'été* at written pitch. But her heavy accent (in first-rate French poetry) and the ponderous tempi left listeners unconvinced as to the merits of the work, at that time still unfamiliar. The funereal pace may well be Munch's fault, and the hammering *ostinati* in the first song, missing the point entirely, certainly are. But then, at "*j'arrive du paradis*," where the orchestra swells and engulfs the singer, Munch clearly has the point.


The Harvard-Radcliffe singers seem perfectly cast for *Faust*, robust young soldiers and students, diaphanous nymphs. In the "Ride to the Abyss" the nuns sing a churchly E-flat-major "hah," where nowadays we shriek in terror as Faust and Méphistophélès gallop by. After *Faust* the New England Conservatory Chorus and alumni got the recording engagements, but Harvard-Radcliffe continued the traditional annual engagements and can be seen and heard in the video of *L'enfance du Christ* from Christmas 1966.


Harold en Italie with William Primrose may be the least revealing of the Berlioz recordings, in part because Primrose had already played and recorded it often enough that there might not have been much more to say, in part because of what some considered a fundamental mismatch of temperaments with Munch. At any rate, Boston's own principal, Joseph de Pasquale, was noted for his *Harold*, and there may well have been tensions on that account. The first two movements are so fast and so nonchalant as to be offhand, a point noted by the press. The serenade settles into place and becomes a good deal more solid, though the underlying rhythmic motive becomes imprecise toward the end. Once the "Brigands' Orgy" breaks out, however, the performance is altogether spectacular, the drive to peroration and following on a par with the very best Berlioz. 

It is clear that, aside from the three excerpts from *Roméo et Juliette* recorded with the Société des Concerts in July 1949 and played in Boston in March 1950, Munch first learned the work just prior to the concerts and recording of 1953. After the 1953–1954 season he did not take it up again until April 1961 for the second round of concerts and recording. *Roméo et Juliette* was also the work he chose for his last four concerts in Boston, in January 1968. As we have come to recognize about the pairs, the earlier one is the more extreme, the latter more expansive and tender—consider the athletic finale of the first alongside the more studied contours of the second. Another major difference between the


two is the choruses, Harvard-Radcliffe and New England. The men of Harvard are formidable in the preliminaries to the love scene, so similar to glee clubbing.


 Again there are remarkable similarities: The two *Mabs*, for instance, differ in duration by less than two seconds.

Munch was an acknowledged master of orchestral scene painting, and his second rendition of the tomb scene must have convinced many doubters of the strength of Berlioz's approach. Coping with the choral recitative and soloists did not come so naturally. In both renditions, the recitative choruses are delivered in an unrelieved martelato on every syllable, and only the tenor, Leslie Chabay (i.e., László Csabay, a Hungarian), sounds very French. Giorgio Tozzi, whose timbre suits the part of Père Laurence well, is too approximate in pitch content, moment of entry, and rhythm. Munch takes obvious (and, again, sensuous) pleasure in the *strophes* ("Premiers Transports") with Rosalind Elias, putting a very long final chord on the first strophe and a huge *soupir* before the second, rendering the cello obbligato in high relief. He is similarly nuanced at the crossover point in the funeral march  where the orchestra and chorus reverse roles, the orchestral fugue fading out in speed, as well as melody, and the Beethovenian dissolve at the end completes the process. This second *Roméo et Juliette* ends up seeming gentle and epic, hardly tragic at all.

There had been live Boston and Tanglewood performances of the Berlioz *Requiem* in 1951 and 1954 but so far no recording. The project had been delayed because of both logistical matters and Munch's health. Henry Cabot could hardly wait for that particular feather to be added to the orchestral cap. Despite its complexity, the enterprise was smoothly handled from beginning to end. The Canadian tenor Léopold Simoneau, at the time becoming an important Mozartian on the international scene, was a fine choice for the Sanctus; he and Munch appear to have met in the summer of 1955. The recording sessions fell behind at the beginning, when it was decided to relocate the chorus and reposition the three microphones, but eventually the project came in on schedule. For many this remains the revelatory performance, where the dense score comes to life in all its particulars: spectrum of volume, deployment, theretofore unimagined instrumental combinations. In the Hostias, Munch finds the same percussive style that troubles the recitatives in *Roméo et Juliette*, and once or twice the brass overwhelm everything. On the whole, however, the result comes marvelously close to what Berlioz must have had in mind, lacking only its basilica. 

A warmer and more personal atmosphere is found in Munch's only recording of *L'enfance du Christ*, which he had made a fixture of the Christmas season in

Boston. (Christmas was the only holiday he paid much attention to: He loved the trees and the gift giving and the carols—the New England way of doing it.) With Gérard Souzay as Joseph, Munch finds himself in the company of a kindred spirit, and there is nothing more moving in this discography than the Joseph-Mary duet (“Dans cette ville immense”), which grows ever more agonized as their door knockings are ignored.  In that scene Giorgio Tozzi, who earlier fails to find the character of Herod, provides a wonderful Père de Famille. (Tozzi and the tenor narrator, Cesare Valletti, were used again for the second *Roméo et Juliette*; Tozzi, for Beethoven’s Ninth.) Munch’s reputation with Berlioz rests largely on his delivery of the bigger works, but *L’enfance du Christ* embraces some of his subtlest conducting.

The Berlioz overtures were with him from beginning to end. *Benvenuto Cellini* was an important accomplishment, since it was almost unknown at the time and terribly difficult. *Béatrice et Bénédicte*, *Le Corsaire*, and the *Roman Carnival* Overture capture the Berliozian brio that the Bostonians had been making a trademark since Munch’s arrival: the shimmering third strophe of the aria from the *Roman Carnival*, for instance , where old Louis Speyer, nearly seventy, has the English horn solo. Taken altogether, the breathtaking scope of Berlioz in Boston is nothing less than epochal. What is difficult to recapture at this distance is the thrill of first discovering it, a pleasure shared by the conductor, players, and audiences in the concert hall and living rooms all over the world.

French Romantics

LM-1700	Saint-Saëns: <i>La princesse jaune</i> ov. (January 18, 1951); Lalo: <i>Le roi d’Ys</i> ov. (December 27, 1950); see also Berlioz, Ravel
LSC-2131	Franck: Symphony in D Minor (March 11, 1957)
LSC-2292	<i>The French Touch</i> . Dukas: <i>L’apprenti sorcier</i> / Saint-Saëns: <i>Le rouet d’Omphale</i> (November 4, 1957)
LSC-2341	Saint-Saëns: Symphony no. 3 (Organ, April 5–6, 1959)
LSC-2647	Chausson: Symphony; Franck: <i>Le chasseur maudit</i> (February 26, 1962)

This series includes the great French symphonies after Berlioz, except for Bizet’s, which Munch had recorded in 1947 with the London Philharmonic and would soon do again in London with the Royal Philharmonic. (Additionally, there is Vincent d’Indy’s *Symphony on a French Mountain Air*, a vehicle for Nicole Henriot.) While the Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony became the “spectacular” of


the stereo age, at least at RCA, Munch himself thought he had the most to offer with the Franck Symphony in D Minor. The group also includes the three French symphonic poems that figured in his core repertoire, as well as two favorite overtures. *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* had been popular in the United States since the American tour of the Société des Concerts in 1918, and the version in *Fantasia* was known to every classical record buyer by then—though possibly not to Munch. He leads a serious, rather careful rendition in which the orchestra's usual colors are supplemented with brilliant noises from the glockenspiel and a contrabassoon tone fatter and less comic than in *Mother Goose*. Franck's *Le chasseur maudit*, about the steep price of hunting when you ought to be at church, was a Munch favorite owing to its formidable display of the horn rank and the mad chase scene at the end. A broadcast version of October 1959 is more diabolical than the RCA stereo disc, with better registration of the percussion and a roar from the audience at the last chord.³⁵


Saint-Saëns remained a staple of the French repertoire, both symphonic and concerto, for much of Munch's career. The two single-movement works in this group, the overture to *La princesse jaune* and the tone poem *Le rouet d'Omphale* [Omphale's Spinning Wheel], are both short, at well under ten minutes in length. They share an atmosphere of speed and decorative filigree and, as it happens, subject matter—since both ladies are from the East. (Omphale and her maidens spin while the hero, Heracles [Hercules], her slave for a year, holds the basket of wool.) Munch revels in the harp-and-flute arabesques at the start of *La princesse jaune* and in the *Mikado*-like atmosphere with tam-tam; in *Omphale*, he focuses on the impish thematic material

and, at the end, a high, *pianissimo* dissolve.

His loyalty to the D-Minor Symphony of César Franck was not always shared in the United States. People found it old style and long-winded and on the whole preferred the novelties of the *Fantastique*. Yet his, who recorded the Franck four times, clearly considered it central to the tradition he represented. That being the case, the RCA album disappoints on many levels, from the failed initial attack, to the repeated loss of justness in tuning, to the curiously muddy engineering. The second-movement passacaglia is one of the few passages he leaves behind where the intended chord progression is difficult to parse, and even if one believes Franck caused this problem, one of the conductor's critical tasks is to smooth over the composer's limitations. The same is true of all the blaring: Lacking controls, the volume simply becomes vulgar. One would have hoped for a more convincing claim—and there are some—that this work deserved standing in the permanent repertoire.

Just the opposite holds for the Chausson Symphony, a work virtually unknown to Americans, where Munch and the players seem from the outset intent on proving its worth. Note the subtlety of approach to the first climax

(01:30), for instance, then the skyrocketing plumes of thirty seconds decorating the big treble theme.  The start of the last movement threatens to go overboard, but this is quickly contained, and one is soon convinced that this understated, undermarketed album (which includes, it should be remembered, the swashbuckling *Le chasseur maudit*) should be counted among the revelatory discs.


Still, the Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony earned its reputation as the best of the “hi-fi spectaculars” for good reason. Conductor, orchestra, and engineers are all at their best. Certainly this is the case with the second movement, an essentially flawless reading that captures the right meditative quality and the proper melodic path through the thick Wagnerian harmonies. The metric modulations in the last movement come naturally to this aggregation, and, as Munch whips up the conclusion, the short staccato style of the BSO brass comes into its own. 


Ravel and Debussy


- LM-1700 Ravel: *Rapsodie espagnole* (first of two, December 26, 1950),
La Valse (first of three, April 11, 1950)
- LM-1741 Ravel: *Pavane* (first of two, October 27, 1952)
- LSC-1893 Ravel: *Daphnis et Chloé*, complete (first of two, January
23–24, 1955)
- LSC-1984 Ravel: *Rapsodie espagnole* (second of two, January 23, 1956),
Boléro (first of two, January 23, 1956), *La Valse* (second of
three, December 5, 1955)
- LSC-2292 Ravel: *Mother Goose* suite (February 19, 1958)
- LSC-2568 Ravel: *Daphnis et Chloé*, complete (second of two, February
26–27, 1961)
- LSC-2664 Ravel: *Boléro* (second of two), *La Valse* (third of three),
Pavane (second of two, March 26, 1962)
- LM-1907 Debussy: *La damoiselle élue* / Victoria de los Angeles (April
11, 1955)
- LSC-1984 Debussy: *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* (first of two,
January 23 and February 27, 1956)
- LM-2030 Debussy: *Le martyr de St.-Sébastien* (January 29–30, 1956)
- LSC-2111 Debussy: *La Mer* (December 9–10, 1956); also Ibert: *Escapes*
(December 10, 1956)
- LSC-2282 Debussy: *Images for Orchestra* (*Gigues, Ibéria, Rondes de
printemps*, December 16, 1957; March 31, 1958)
- LSC-2668 Debussy: *Afternoon of a Faun* (second of two), *Nuages, Fêtes,
Printemps* (March 13, 1962)


In extent and influence the Debussy-Ravel legacy of Charles Munch is the equal of his Berlioz. The difference is that the orchestral work of the Impressionists was already familiar, and there were worthy competitors. Altogether from Boston and Paris there are five studio recordings of *Boléro* and *La Valse*, three of *La Mer*, and four of the *Symphonie fantastique*. Adding in easily available live and off-air recordings, the number is greater still, with, for instance, six recordings of *La Mer*. Furthermore, RCA worked aggressively to market Munch and the BSO as owners of that niche: LSC-1984, containing the central Ravel works (*Boléro*, *La Valse*, and *Rapsodie espagnole*) and Debussy's *Afternoon of a Faun*, was titled *The Virtuoso Orchestra*. Its successor, *The French Touch*, featured the lovely *Mother Goose* suite with symphonic poems of Dukas and Saint-Saëns: The album art showed a Morris column, a gendarme on a bicycle, and a little girl in a checkered dress with her *petit chien*. The coupling and packaging of *La Mer* with Ibert's *Escapes* [Ports of Call], re-released in 1959 as simply *The Sea*, is inspired all around: titled in big red letters against a blue-and-white photograph of surf roiling over dark rock outcroppings. One is more likely to see this scene off the Oregon or the northern California coast than in Étretat or Tunis, but the cover invites purchase nonetheless.

While Munch himself was more absorbed by Debussy, RCA was on the whole more interested in the splashier marketing possibilities inherent in Ravel. The essentially redundant Ravel disc LSC-2664 was to demonstrate the new process trademarked Dynagroove. *Daphnis and Chloé* got a second complete recording, though the original was also in stereo. Of Debussy, only *Afternoon of a Faun* was done twice.


For all the rapture Munch could stir up in a live audience with *Daphnis et Chloé*, he seems more naturally himself in *La Valse*, where ebullience vies for attention with the ongoing threat of the eventual collapse. What varies in these renditions is the underlying tempo and the ungluing at the end, in one wild and thrashing, in another simply accumulating a weight the work can no longer sustain. By far the most interesting account is LSC-1984, not just for its clarity—the biting of bow into double-bass string at the very top, for instance—and warmth, but also for the routine portamento in the strings, reminiscent of the old Paris Conservatoire style.  (In the wonderful Philadelphia recording of *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, there is a similar prestige of tone quality but much less slide.) The very end of the Dynagroove recording may be the more thrilling, especially with the plaintive last cry of the string ensemble (10:30 on the latter; 10:50 on the former). This moment is still more dramatic in the broadcast performance of February 1962, with braking to a near stop and strong portamento (and conductoral

groaning, which we hear on the records as well), followed by the chorus of bravos.  *La Valse* as presented on LSC-1984 was recorded in a single playthrough at the end of a long and unsuccessful recording; by contrast, the session for LSC-2664 lasted eighty minutes.³⁶

At first encounter, what seems remarkable about the 1956 *Boléro* is its brisk speed, the fastest of the preserved recordings by a considerable margin, but that is a single parameter of this bizarre, genuinely singular recording. It is nervous and drunken and piratical, from the nasality of the English horn statement to the inflated, percussion tattoo presaging the fatal *coup*.  Even the metric underpinning, the ostinato, is out of the ordinary: In bars two and four one hears the rebounding eighth notes in the pizzicato viola accompaniment, a detail usually buried; by the end the last eighth-note beat in each bar is as important as all the others. Even the scaffolding, then, is different from the customary *Boléro*.


Typically Munch seeks nobility and deliberation in his recordings. That is the case with his second *Boléro*, and the third, with the Orchestre de Paris, is more radical still. The *Rapsodie espagnole*, recorded a month before the first *Boléro*, is also considerably faster in all four movements than that of the Orchestre de Paris. The speed is refined, however, and the players are comfortable in this atmosphere, with Munch at his very best establishing the textures of each new dance, perhaps most graciously at the start of the “Malaguena”. 

The first complete *Daphnis et Chloé* (January 1955) was recorded in stereo but monitored and balanced in mono from the recording booth in Symphony Hall. The album included a twelve-page program booklet with five “original drawings by Andy Warhol.”³⁷ The second recording (February 1961) enjoys mature stereo engineering. Both performances use the New England Conservatory Chorus under Lorna Cooke de Varon. The primary difference is in the a capella chorus movement, track 12, where in the earlier recording the singers use the syllable “lu,” while in the second there are pure vowels. The wind machine in the previous movement goes all but unheard in the early recording, while on the second a new and much louder apparatus is heard to considerable effect. The CD tracking, with the ballet broken into twenty-three sections, is identical, allowing easy comparisons, for instance, of Doriot Anthony Dwyer as she handles the Pan scene, tracks 20–21 (note the flutter-tongued fall at the very start of track 21 in the first recording, abandoned for a simple slur in the second). *Daphnis et Chloé*, though Ravel’s longest work, is probably not his most significant for the simple reason that so much of the score repeats itself. However, it was as important to be able to buy and study the complete *Daphnis* as

the complete *Faust*, not least of all for the added dimension afforded by the singing. 

Munch's obsession with Debussy gathered with each passing year. His BSO recordings of three of the four canonical works (*Afternoon of a Faun*, *La Mer*, and *Images*; Monteux had done the complete *Nocturnes* in 1955) come from the height of the Living Stereo period, 1956–1958, and in the last recording sessions of 1962 there was another round of Debussy. His career-long engagement with Debussy's *envois* from Rome (*Printemps*, *La damoiselle élue*, the piano *Fantaisie*), each of them mildly problematic, was central to their establishment in the ongoing repertoire. In addition, RCA published significant accounts of two of these and of one of Debussy's last and most enigmatic works with orchestra, *Le martyre de St.-Sébastien*.

Victoria de los Angeles is better in *La damoiselle élue* than in Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été*, and from every perspective the performance has more to say. Debussy's response to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Blessed Damozel*, a poem oozing with opportunities for music, invokes the arsenal of orchestral materials Munch knew implicitly how to deploy—part *Daphnis et Chloé*, part Marguerite-in-Heaven. The four-minute orchestral episode at the beginning establishes the spell that carries to the end. Only the labored syllabic choral recitative is to be regretted, as well as what seem to be some distortions in the master tape.

It was Roger Voisin's idea (Voisin often said) to use Munch as the narrator for *Le martyre de St.-Sébastien*. "For the concerts we had an actor do it [in English]—Arnold Moss," he said, "but in the rehearsals Munch read the part [in French]."³⁸ The famous character actor was magnificent when he arrived but not, thought the musicians, anywhere near as appropriate to the work as what they had heard from their conductor at rehearsals. Voisin was friendly with the RCA producer, Richard Mohr, and suggested the switch, and thus one afternoon when the orchestra was playing in New York, Munch allowed himself to be spirited away to record the narration in an RCA studio. (He was amused enough by the episode to save a duplicate tape for Nicole Henriot, who was in France. Not to be outdone, Leonard Bernstein rendered the text into English and gave the role of St. Sebastian to his wife, Felicia Montealegre; the critics howled.) In what little narration is left on the CD, we are surprised by the lyric baritone register of the voice, notably in the scene at Christ's tomb: "*Quel est ce jeune homme tout blanc?*" (track 17) —so often is he heard barking in rehearsals in a deeper voice. The diction is in the splendidly inflected style of classical French theater.

The first of the two BSO readings of Debussy's *Prélude à L'Après-midi d'un faun* joins the Ravel masterpieces on *The Virtuoso Orchestra*. In the big orchestral

swell just after the beginning (03:10 for about a minute) we hear all the elements of the mature Munch/Boston sound: the personality of the individual players, the thrust and retreat, the warmth, the detail of the inner voices.

93 The much greater resonance of the second recording (for instance, the row of brasses surging forth at 03:40) masks some of the details, and the manner of attack and the tone quality come across as a notch harsher. This same “farewell” album, LSC-2668, features the surprisingly deliberate *Fêtes* from the orchestral *Nocturnes* and a bright reading of the early symphonic suite *Printemps*. Munch usually took *Fêtes* a good deal faster, but this tempo helps make the long crescendo of the approaching military brass all the more thrilling.

Images for Orchestra consists of the full *Ibéria*, a cornerstone of the Munch repertoire, plus *Gigues* and *Rondes de printemps*, which he performed less frequently throughout his career. Having the set on a single disc was a first, and it may have been something of a stretch for RCA. (The *French Touch* marketing continues, with for cover art a Montmartre-style watercolor evoking Paris, not Spain, on a parade day.) Inevitably, perhaps, the two lesser-heard movements seem less gripping than *Ibéria*, with its familiar castanet textures and an erotic, aromatic reading of the Habañera. Altogether more than a half-dozen accounts of *Ibéria* with Munch are around for the hearing, of which this one is by some distance the most exact. Only the NBC Symphony reading comes close, with the Société des Concerts a distant third. Not all the rapidly changing facets of *Gigues* and *Rondes de printemps* are successful, owing to scrappy or dubious articulations, but the close relationship of the two movements is easily sensed, as well as the kind of music painting that made people think of using the word “impression” to describe this sort of style.

“*La Mer*,” Munch famously and lugubriously said, “*c’est la mort*.” The purity of each gesture, the transparency, is what distinguishes this from all the other recordings, especially the live ones. In a way it predicts the kind of detachment Boulez sought shortly afterward in his recordings for Columbia. Real acuity of pitch informs even the most exotic chords and instrumental combinations, and not a hint of excess is heard. The theatrical strokes—the cello choir in the first movement (04:35) 94, the unleashing of the ostinato finish in the last (06:05), with all the triple-tonguing—are everything they should be, as is the ghostly ambiance into which the last movement gathers. 95 In the “Play of Waves,” movement 2, the orchestral frolicking after a golden flash of brass (03:45) 96 is the sort of thing that captivated a generation whether or not they had ever heard it live.



Roussel and Honegger

LM-1741	Roussel: <i>Bacchus and Ariadne</i> , suite 2 (October 27, 1952; March 23, 1953)
LM-1741	Honegger: Symphony no. 5 (October 27, 1952)
LM-1868	Honegger: Symphony no. 2 (March 29, 1953)



The substance of Munch’s reputation as an avatar of new music rested, of course, with his performances of Roussel and Honegger. Honegger’s Second was as much a signature work as the *Fantastique* and *Daphnis et Chloé*. With Roussel, he was not served well by RCA, which recorded only *Bacchus et Ariane* even though the *Petite Suite*, *Suite in F*, and *Le festin de l’araignée* [The Spider’s Banquet] were all in his core repertoire. The more significant Roussel discography, in short, comes from France.

With Honegger the situation is reversed: RCA produced the pioneer recordings of the Second and Fifth symphonies. The Fifth (*di tre re*, “with the three Ds”) was premiered in Boston in March 1951 and is dedicated to Munch and his players. It had had solid exposure for another full season before the recording of October 1952, and the playing reflects the long experience. But the Fifth is largely about agony and fear of death: Honegger, just turned sixty, suffered from multiple disorders, and his days were known to be numbered. The performance is hard, harsh, and loud, relieved mostly by the little scherzo with its charming timpani close (one of the “three Ds”).  Later in the same recording cycle came the historic reading of the Second Symphony, masked as the flipside to the Menotti Violin Concerto with Tossy Spivakovsky.

Munch was connected to the Second professionally and personally: For him it was about the Occupation and the liberation of Paris, with the trumpet chorale at the end signaling despair overcome. (His practice of quadrupling this line, of which he was quite proud, seems in retrospect a little flagrant.) Nothing on the RCA recordings is tenderer or more personal than the haunting solo viola at the start of Honegger’s Second, one of the composer’s best moments.

 The rich *mesto* movement and scrambling finale are likewise assured and well seasoned.  Together with his valedictory recording with the Orchestre de Paris (December 1967), this Honegger Second is a cornerstone of the Munch discography.



Roussel’s *Bacchus et Ariane*, suite 2, captures the flavor of a live BSO performance of another Munch favorite, with the ballet incidents clearly articulated (and individually tracked on the LPs and CDs) and building through trumpet-choir chromatics and tam-tam into wild Ninevan swirl to the end—more

Samson and Delilah than *Daphnis et Chloé*. A minute into the bacchanal, a sudden lurch forward takes the listener by surprise ; in live concerts this was part of the calculation that inevitably brought the audience to its feet in the last bar. The solo dances for Ariadne and Bacchus  (tracks 5 and 6) presage at least the speed if not the drunkenness. In truth the Orchestre National recording of December 1961 (Véga), part of Henry Barraud's tactic to lock Munch into the National after he was done in Boston, has a dash more spirit still. But that is fair enough: The work belonged to Paris even more than to Boston.


Poulenc, Stravinsky, and Milhaud

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| LSC-2567 | Poulenc: Concerto for Organ, Strings, and Timpani
(October 9, 1960); Stravinsky: <i>Jeu de cartes</i>
(November 7, 1960) |
| LDS-2625 | Milhaud: <i>La création du monde</i> (March 13, 1961),
<i>Suite provençale</i> (November 21, 1960) |

These two releases of the early 1960s, just after the impressive *Till Eulenspiegel* / *Romeo and Juliet*, represent the kind of “contemporary” repertoire Munch most preferred, and Vic Firth is correct that the Poulenc-Stravinsky disc preserves some of the BSO's best playing of that era. Making good sense of these works was no particular stretch for the musicians or their audiences, though there are elements of commercial daring in RCA's interest in publishing them. Orchestral musicians relish opportunities to break out of their canon to dabble in crossover repertoires. That was one point of the Boston Pops, after all, and several of the most interesting solos on these recordings are played by musicians who also excelled at the Pops. In the Poulenc, we have an opportunity to hear the Symphony Hall pipe organ in something other than the Saint-Saëns, thus many more ranks and mixtures and a bit of the swellbox.

Munch gives the Poulenc a vigorous, expansive accompaniment that sets out the winding episodes in high relief.  The timpani strokes, Poulenc's entirely successful notion of how to give the string ensemble extra weight and color, work well. *The Card Party*, as Stravinsky's suite was commonly called in English, is droll and speedy. In the First Deal, unusually, you can hear Munch stamping on his podium to urge things along.  The flurries of sixteenth notes that characterize this kind of neoclassicism are the sort of spots where Munch and his players liked to show off, and they take enormous delight in the sub-bass trombone hiccups in

the Third Deal (05:10) and other comedy. In that movement, the demands on the conductor in terms of changing beat patterns are nearly the equal of *The Rite of Spring* and other works Munch generally shied away from, but here he seems up to the challenge, enjoying both the clipped staccato style and (as in the Poulenc) the moments of salon music.

Milhaud's relationship with Munch was formal and correct but not, it appears, especially warm. Nor is there any evidence that Munch was spontaneously drawn to jazz idioms of the sort found in *La création du monde*. Yet he and the musicians make of Milhaud's great essay in symphonic jazz something of both good humor and substance, where the Pops and Gershwinism consistently peek through, and the solo players have a very fine time. Munch throws in his own trademarks, with superb retreat cadences and portamento at the "Good evening, friends" closure.  There is plenty of local color, too, in the *Suite provençale*. The *vif* movements in this Milhaud favorite bear the weight of the composition, though the neo-Baroque twists in the slow movement work nicely, too. The prevailing sonority, very loud, is also glistening, foreshadowing the Respighi and Offenbach discs shortly to come from London. "The sun over Provence smiles . . . Darius Milhaud smiles, Charles Munch smiles, the music critic smiles, we all smile," said *High Fidelity*.³⁹

Other Contemporary

LM-2083	Martinu: <i>Fantaisies symphoniques</i> (April 23, 1956); Piston: Symphony no. 6 (March 12 and 14, 1956)
LM-2105	Barber: Adagio for Strings (April 3, 1957; omitted from stereo LSC-2105)
LM-2197	Barber: <i>Medea's Meditation and Dance of Vengeance</i> (April 10, 1957)
LSC-2352	Blackwood: Symphony no. 1 (November 9, 1958); Haieff: Symphony no. 2 (November 30, 1958)

There is no particular correlation between the contemporary works that most interested Munch in Boston and those that made it to disc. Works like the Poulenc *Gloria* and Dutilleux's Second were declined by RCA and later done by Munch and another orchestra on another label or by another conductor altogether. Munch might well have been interested in recording the viola concertos of Piston and Walton and several works of Martinu and very likely was counting on a record of the symphony commissioned from Ibert. Still, these two pairs of

symphonies— Martinu/Piston and later Blackwood/Haieff—offer an excellent sample of how the new-music business functioned around Munch and the BSO in the 1950s.


Since Piston was the ranking aristocrat of Boston classical music, the Piston Sixth Symphony, for instance, demanded a position in the core repertoire, with a string of BSO first performances that went back to *The Incredible Flutist* in 1938 and the Pulitzer Prize-winning Third Symphony of 1946. Piston had been teaching at Harvard for twenty-five years before Munch became ensconced, and among his students were Boston favorites Leroy Anderson and Leonard Bernstein. Munch himself had a good history with Piston, extending back to his American program at the Sorbonne in 1939 and including the Toccata he had brought to America with the Orchestre National in 1948. Later he introduced the Second Suite and championed four of the Piston symphonies. The Sixth, with recognizably classical four-movement design, was chosen to represent America to Russia and Western Europe in 1956 and again to Japan in 1960. (The BSO's debut programs in Moscow and Tokyo, five years apart, were identical: the *Eroica*, the Piston, and *Daphnis et Chloé*). The panoramic aspects of the Sixth, which some would have heard as vistas of pioneer lands and barn dances, are well understood in this performance, and the second-movement scherzo is dazzling. The delineation of the long slow movement combats the charge of academicism sometimes leveled at Piston for movements like these; Munch makes it consistently interesting and approachable.

On the whole it is a better work than the Martinu, which was, however, more widely heralded as the first of the seventy-fifth-anniversary commissions to be completed. The retitling, to *Fantaisies symphoniques*, was meant to account for the free episodic layout of the forms; there is little but advertising in the suggestion that Martinu had meant to compose a "New Fantastic Symphony" (though that idea appears to have been planted by the composer himself). Olin Downes found the New York premiere off-putting because it came at the end of the first half, after both a Pfitzner overture and Schumann's Fourth Symphony, and, though he found it "interesting" and "arresting," he had understood "not a note."⁴⁰ But on the occasion of an unusual repeat performance in Manhattan three days later, Downes acknowledged that it was composed with "unconditioned earnestness, fearlessness, and with explosive sincerity." Looking as hard for suggestions of the composer's "ravished native land" as Europeans looked for the Wild West in Walter Piston, he concluded that Martinu had "returned in memory and emotion to his homeland. . . . Mr. Martinu is an American citizen and none better. At the root, we think, he is Czech to the bone and marrow."⁴¹

This would have mattered less to Munch and his players than the swirling atmospheres, part hornets' nest, part whirlwind, that so obviously anchor the structure. These turn, in the middle movement, into a brilliant tarantella, the

kind of orchestral display performers enjoy most and listeners most remember. All the midcentury angst finds resolution at the last minute in a neo-Brahmsian chorale line and religious cadence, an incongruous, disconcerting end.

Munch appears to have encountered the work of Samuel Barber during his first concert tour in the United States, when he learned the Cello Concerto to present with Raya Garbousova and the Chicago Symphony (April 1949). He went on to adopt *The School for Scandal* Overture, played very often during domestic and foreign tours in 1951 and 1952; in 1953 he introduced the Adagio for Strings in Boston. In November 1956 he began to play *Medea's Meditation and Dance of Vengeance*, excerpted from Barber's ballet for Martha Graham, *Cave of the Heart*. The *Dance of Vengeance*, a savage *tour de force* that evokes Medea consuming her own entrails, replaced *School for Scandal* as his customary homage to the American establishment, and he played it all over the world, including with the Orchestre de Paris in 1968. The Adagio for Strings, in its many reuses, became perhaps his biggest moneymaker for RCA. Both, interestingly, began as fillers: the Adagio for the album built around Tchaikovsky's String Serenade, and *Medea* to fill the disc with Nicole Henriot's Prokofiev Concerto.

Munch and Barber maintained a professional relationship and correspondence that speaks less of personal warmth than of the nuts and bolts of bringing the big new works to life. Barber conducted his own Boston performances of the Second Symphony, while Munch saw to the premieres of *Prayers of Kierkegaard* in December 1954 and *Die Natali* in December 1960, both of which he had commissioned. The Adagio for Strings and *Medea* were shorter and easier to program, and slow movements and bacchanals were his particular pleasures anyway. The approach to *Medea* seems in nearly every particular the same as that to *Bacchus et Ariane*, and what results is Munch's answer to the Sacrificial Dance of *The Rite of Spring*, without a hint that the shifting meters might be difficult. 

The singularly provocative recording of symphonies of Easley Blackwood (b. 1933) and Alexei Haieff (1914–1994)—both works premiered by Munch and the BSO in 1958—shows again how radical a boost postwar technology gave music composition in the United States. Recordings, even if unpublished, enabled wide circulation of new work within the profession and to the new class of audiophiles. The ease of duplicating reel-to-reel tape sped dissemination of work that was not commercially viable. Tape redefined how new music was produced and consumed.

Here, as in so many other areas of new music, the Koussevitzky Foundation led the way, with inducements meant to lead orchestras and their conductors to ambitious commitments to first performances. The Recording Guarantee Project was one of the several good works undertaken by the American International Music Fund, a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation administered by a board consisting of

familiar names such as Natalie Koussevitzky (president), Samuel Barber, Aaron Copland, Howard Hanson, Walter Piston, and Carleton Sprague Smith (affable librarian of the Music Division of the New York Public Library). The seed funding of \$27,000 had been secured from the Rockefeller Foundation. The idea was for professional orchestras to submit tapes of their premieres for scrutiny by a panel of judges. The worthiest were recommended to the major record companies for studio recording and commercial publication. Additionally, copies of the selected tapes were distributed to a half dozen major libraries across the nation.⁴²

The first year of the Recording Guarantee Project, 1957–1958, brought fifty-five entries from forty-five composers and twenty-nine orchestras. The panel of judges—Nadia Boulanger, Carlos Chávez, and Alfred Frankenstein, music critic of the *San Francisco Chronicle*—chose two BSO premieres as the best of the year: Easley Blackwood’s Symphony no. 1 and Alexei Haieff’s Symphony no. 2. (Munch had missed the Blackwood premiere owing to his health, and that had fallen to Burgin. Munch conducted the studio recording.) Frankenstein expressed the aspirations of his age by writing that many more works were worthy of commercial recording: “If continued annually, the award could become a kind of capstone for each season’s presentation of contemporary music for the orchestras of the entire nation.”⁴³

In fact, in November 1958 RCA did agree to record both prize-winning compositions (LM/LSC-2352, reading on the cover “Selected and Recorded under the 1958 Recording Guarantee Project of the American International Music Fund”). In the following season, 1958–1959, the works submitted from Boston were the Symphony of Chorales by Lukas Foss and Martinu’s *The Parables*, premiered on October 31–November 1, 1958, and February 13–14, 1959, respectively. All told, the project went on to recognize fourteen works premiered by Munch and the BSO and hence to place tapes of these performances in major American public libraries:

Piston: Viola Concerto	March 7, 1958
Barraud: Symphony no. 3	March 7, 1958
Haieff: Symphony no. 2	April 11, 1958
Blackwood: Symphony no. 1	April 18, 1958
Tcherepnin: Symphony no. 4	December 5, 1958
Martinu: <i>The Parables</i>	February 13, 1959
Dutilleux: Symphony no. 2	December 11, 1959
Martinu: <i>Fantasia concertante</i> for piano and orchestra	March 4, 1960
Schuman: Symphony no. 7	October 21, 1960
Barber: <i>Die Natali</i>	December 22, 1960

Poulenc: <i>Gloria</i>	January 20, 1961
Haieff: Symphony no. 3	November 10, 1961
Fine: Symphony 1962	March 23, 1962
Ibert: <i>Bostoniana</i>	January 25, 1963

The Blackwood and Haieff went directly to commercial recording, and the Tanglewood live performance of Irving Fine's Symphony 1962, conducted by the composer, was released as LSC-2829. The Barraud and Dutilleux were subsequently published in France with Munch and the Orchestre National.

Haieff and Blackwood both had Paris connections, listing, like much of the American establishment, Nadia Boulanger as a teacher. Haieff was the older of the two by a generation, and Munch in Boston also championed his Piano Concerto and went on to premiere a Third Symphony in 1961. Blackwood was twenty-five at the time, just back from Paris with his First Symphony, said to pay homage to Ives (Blackwood was a Yale alumnus) and to Messiaen, another teacher in Paris. It is a big, four-movement work in the New England modern tradition, coming well before Blackwood's turn toward microtonal theory and the Darmstadters, and it was successful enough to result in his appointment to the composition faculty at the University of Chicago, where he spent the entirety of his long professional career. The recording of the First Symphony was released on a retrospective CD in 1993.⁴⁴

Any composer would be proud of a first symphony rendered this beautifully at birth, and for a very young artist it must have been both thrilling and frighteningly precedent setting. The players have the point of the music well in mind, offering up the prominent brass and woodwind choirs in big splashes and taking great pleasure in the grotesque waltz scherzo. Munch does a good job of delineating the argument of the long, uninterruptedly slow and dour fourth movement. Codas to both the scherzo, with jungle drums (04:20), and the finale, at the ostinato with contrabassoon (08:20), show the young composer at his most attractive.

Understandably, RCA was reticent about pushing the envelope much further. The list of more or less contemporary, more or less American music published by RCA during the Munch years is nonetheless impressive. Koussevitzky's legacy had been left in capable hands.



Concertos

LM-122	Menuhin	Bruch: Violin Concerto no. 1 (January 18, 1951)
LM-1728	Rubinstein	Brahms: Piano Concerto no. 2 (August 11, 1952)


LM-1760	Milstein	Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto (March 29, 1953)
LM-1868	Spivakovsky	Menotti: Violin Concerto (November 8, 1954)
LM-1871	Brailowsky	Chopin: Piano Concerto no. 2 (November 29, 1954); Saint-Saëns: Piano Concerto no. 4 (November 24, 1954)
LM-1988	Oistrakh	Chausson: <i>Poème</i> ; Saint-Saëns: Intro- duction and Rondo Capriccioso (December 14, 1955)
LSC-1992	Heifetz	Beethoven: Violin Concerto (November 27–28, 1955)
LM-2073	Goodman	Mozart: Clarinet Concerto (Tanglewood, July 9, 1956)
LSC-2109	Piatigorsky	Walton: Cello Concerto (January 28 and 30, 1957); Bloch: <i>Schelomo</i> (January 30, 1957)
LM-2197	Henriot	Prokofiev: Piano Concerto no. 2 (February 13, 1957)
LSC-2237	Janis	Rachmaninov: Piano Concerto no. 3 (December 29, 1957)
LSC-2271	Henriot	Ravel: Piano Concerto; d'Indy: <i>Symphony on a French Mountain Air</i> (March 24, 1958)
LSC-2274	Graffman	Brahms: Piano Concerto no. 1 (April 9, 1958)
LSC-2314	Heifetz	Mendelssohn: Violin Concerto (February 23 and 25, 1959); Prokofiev: Violin Concerto no. 2 (February 24 and 25, 1959)
LSC-2363	Szeryng	Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto (February 9, 1959)
LSC-2468	Graffman	Chopin: Piano Concerto no. 1; Mendelssohn: <i>Capriccio brillant</i> (March 14, 1960)
LSC-2490	Piatigorsky	Dvořák: Cello Concerto (February 22, 1960)
LSC-2544	Richter	Beethoven: Piano Concerto no. 1 (November 2 and 3, 1960)


VICS-1033	Laredo	Mendelssohn: Violin Concerto (December 24, 1960)
VICS-1129	Laredo	Bach: Violin Concerto no. 1 (December 26, 1960)


“There is nothing much to concertos,” Munch was heard to have remarked.⁴⁵ Not, perhaps, if you are the conductor, and your project has more to do with marketing the star soloist of the season. The Russians, for obvious reasons, were all the vogue—and there was to have been a Schumann Piano Concerto with Van Cliburn, the icon of the cultural thaw.⁴⁶ Still, Munch could be a formidable collaborator, because he was not threatened by even the biggest names in the business, nor was he patronizing to them. Szell, by contrast, was harsh on soloists, and Reiner had said to Rubinstein, in the middle of a recording session (for the Rachmaninov *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, 1956), “We do not go into overtime for soloists.”⁴⁷ The young artists represented on the RCA discs—Byron Janis, Gary Graffman, and Jaime Laredo—found Munch supportive, collegial, avuncular, “everything,” said Laredo, that “working with genius should be.”⁴⁸ The young women soloists found him more attentive still, as was obvious to the spectators, but the only woman soloist represented on the studio recordings is Nicole Henriot.

Artistically the most significant of these discs is the Walton Cello Concerto with Gregor Piatigorsky, created and recorded in Boston in January 1957. It had been a difficult birth: The premiere was delayed when Mrs. Piatigorsky fell ill; then Toscanini died, causing postponements throughout the orchestral establishment. Still, there is little hint on the record of what everybody remembers as the most hellish recording sessions of the Munch era. Instead comes a proper unveiling of a fascinating major work, convincing in its shape (the return of the opening gestures from the first movement at the end of the last, for instance), patient with its length, and assured in mastery of the diabolical Allegro, movement 2.  Neither Piatigorsky nor any other cellist returned to Boston with this concerto, but when Munch came back from his winter “leave,” in March 1957, he continued his live programming with a first American performance of Walton’s *Johannesburg Festival Overture* and the Walton Viola Concerto as a vehicle for the BSO’s distinguished principal violist, Joseph de Pasquale, who gave it considerable play. Piatigorsky’s 1960 return engagement was for the most popular of cello concertos, that of Dvořák. 


Patrons who were there usually remember Jascha Heifetz as the most thrilling of all the soloists. Heifetz’s Beethoven Concerto of November 1955 had a phenomenal sale, leading to a second disc in 1959 with Mendelssohn and

Prokofiev concertos. Again the degree of his success was in part theatrical: Heifetz was as good looking as Munch (as well as Bing Crosby, with whom he had done some pop recording for Decca) and had been a bigger box-office idol for a longer time. He had much the same approach to phrasing as Munch, with a similar grasp of the power of softness and space and the thrill-of-the-moment view of live performance.  His obvious gaffe in the first movement of the Beethoven at 6:00 goes uncorrected (as does a false cello entry at 6:55). The elegant contours of the orchestral tutti in the second movement shows how important Munch could be to the outcome of a concerto.

Of the violin concertos, Milstein's Tchaikovsky of March 1953 is the most poetic, well outdistancing Szeryng's of February 1959 in tone quality, nuance, and perfection of technique. The later recording is nevertheless in rich stereophonic sound, and Munch is his expansive self in the second movement, proposing any number of nuances that Szeryng then gathers up. Both finales embrace the Munch sprint-to-finish (Milstein: 06:53; Szeryng: 08:32): the former irregularly and vaguely disorganized in the orchestra, the latter more exact (and including the dazzling orchestral swell  cut entirely by Milstein), with Szeryng—clearly spurred along by the conductor—catching up at the end.

The linking of Munch and the French Romantics was behind the less-than-consequential repertoire chosen for David Oistrakh, the Chausson *Poème* and Saint-Saëns Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso (with, as filler, excerpts from Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette*). Oistrakh's visit to the United States in 1955–1956 was a political and cultural blockbuster, as the BSO's trip to the Soviet Union was soon to be, but Boston had a meager share of the action. Oistrakh appeared live only for a pension fund concert on December 15, 1955, with Mozart and Brahms—an add-on, that is, the day after a recording session that cannot have been much rehearsed, either. (RCA LM-1857, Oistrakh's recording on December 9, of the Prokofiev First Violin Sonata, broke the record for the least time between recording and release.) With the Philadelphia, four concertos were put down for Columbia, and Mitropoulos and the New York did the first recording of the Shostakovich Concerto in January 1956. Still, the Chausson brought Oistrakh's celebrated lyric gift to the fore, and the Saint-Saëns was good, clean fun. 

In October 1949 Byron Janis, at age twenty-one, had appeared with Munch in the Rachmaninov Second Piano Concerto, the second pair in the first Boston season. The first real student of Vladimir Horowitz, he was the obvious choice when in 1957 Munch was at length persuaded by RCA to record a concerto by Rachmaninov, whose work remained fabulously popular in the United States.


The music was easy to understand, and Rachmaninov himself was one of those good Russians who had reaped the rewards promised by American capitalism, Hollywood included. Munch, who did not much like the Rachmaninov saga, acquiesced to “anything but” the wildly popular Second. Janis went on to make the Third Concerto his signature work. His subsequent visit to Russia in 1960, the first American concert pianist after Van Cliburn, was recognized as a turning point in the official cultural exchange. His exchange partner was Sviatoslav Richter, who came to Boston in November 1960 and recorded Beethoven’s First Piano Concerto with Munch and RCA , following a brilliant debut in Chicago with Leinsdorf.

Who is in charge in the first movement of the Janis/Munch Rachmaninov is open to question, as conductor and soloist vie, unusually, for control. The first movement in particular lacks the effortless ensemble we are accustomed to hearing in the concertos. But I do not agree with Philippe Olivier’s “strong reservations” as to Munch’s comprehension of “the Russian soul . . . a taste he never acquired.”⁴⁹ The evidence suggests he comprehended it just fine.

It was with Gary Graffman that Munch and the BSO recorded the Brahms D-Minor Piano Concerto in 1958. Though not widely regarded as rising to level of contemporaneous recordings of the same work (notably Serkin, Szell, and the Cleveland Orchestra), the disc provides another good example of the convincing sweep Munch was able to bring to epic compositions—as do several transcriptions of live performances. Graffman treasured his long and cordial association with Munch, which he said “consisted mainly of large smiles.”⁵⁰ A second Graffman disc for RCA, with Chopin’s First Piano Concerto and the Mendelssohn *Capriccio brillant*, comes from March 1960.

Nicole Henriot was at the peak of her exposure in the United States when she made her two records with the BSO: the Prokofiev Second Piano Concerto in 1957 and the Ravel/d’Indy pair in 1958—taking her married name, Henriot-Schweitzer in the interim. All three works were central to her repertoire, along with Liszt, the Debussy *Fantaisie* for Piano and Orchestra, and the Fauré *Ballade*. In the case of the Fauré and the Debussy, she served as a surrogate for Marguerite Long, who never made the trip. (Long had noted of her protégée that “they only come that gifted once a century, maybe twice.”⁵¹) The Prokofiev, Henriot said, was her idea, and it had taken her some time to persuade Munch even to have a look. It is not so clear which of them decided to cut the orchestral exposition in the first movement.

They do play well together. She is fleet of hand, transparent, even dry, in her passagework, with a kind of metronomic strictness not often heard in Munch and his soloists. Velocity is her stock in trade, and this serves the best

interests of the Prokofiev , but she has an innate feel, too, for the kind of *décor* and filigree that flavors the French repertoire. At the start of the fourth movement of the Prokofiev one can hear Munch urging the *tempestoso* along, then taking great satisfaction in the climax with cymbals (09:10). Everybody seems to enjoy the Ravel concerto (more than the Parisians seem to in September 1968), and the result is brilliant if not especially deep. Henriot's long second-movement solo starts light of hand and colorless and gathers substance as it goes along, with a Munchian closure-and-fade as the orchestra enters (02:20).


Many dozens of other recorded sources need factoring in if we are to grasp the full measure of Munch's work in the United States. In principle nearly every program he conducted in Boston was recorded in some fashion, something over three hundred concerts. Although fire destroyed the studios of WGBH in October 1961, taking with it the bulk of the master tapes, copies at Symphony Hall and off-air recordings by enthusiasts make up for a good deal of the loss. Duplicates circulated widely at the time: programs for the Boston Symphony Transcription Trust distributed to the major metropolitan radio stations, material for the Voice of America, projects for blind people, which include several tapes of Munch rehearsing, the tapes for the Recording Project. Perhaps the most curious and the most anachronistic is the 7-inch, 78-rpm recording of "The Star-Spangled Banner" done for the American Heritage Foundation in October 1957. As these materials are digitized and made generally available, they greatly enhance our concept of what orchestral life in the 1950s and early 1960s was all about—though none of it comes close to the sound quality of the RCA recordings. What they do show is the much greater latitude in the quality of live performance, including the disasters, and all that is left to us of some defining repertoire: Barber's *Die Natale*, Bernstein's *Kaddish* Symphony, the Bruckner and Fauré requiems, to cite only material already in circulation.

By Munch's fifth season, 1953–1954, television broadcasts were routine, and these were preserved in kinescope (in which a film camera is pointed at the television screen), later in conventional analog videotape. In one of the first televised programs (November 9, 1951), Ben Grauer sits nervously in the balcony at Symphony Hall, explaining how Richard Burgin would conduct the *Egmont* Overture and Munch the *Rapsodie espagnole*, while probably knowing the truth about the *maitre's* heart attack and wondering whether he would make it to the end of the show. Among the commercially available DVDs from Munch's tenure as music director in Boston are the BSO's first concert in Japan (May 1960) and Munch's farewell to Sanders Hall at Harvard in April 1962. In

the last Munch telecast from Boston, *L'enfance du Christ* on December 13, 1966, fifteen years after the first, the aristocratic voice of William Pierce introduces an ordinary event in television viewing, with its own logotype and familiar production values. The Boston Symphony Orchestra, like Munch himself, seems invincible.

Actually, classical music was fast reaching the end of its run, at least on commercial radio and TV. Pop music—the Beatles were on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1964—was well embarked on its conquest of audiences, money, and the mass media. By the time Munch left Boston the stereophonic vinyl disc had been perfected and would, in fundamental technology, improve no more. The BSO radio broadcasts continued sturdily on; the exclusive recording arrangement with RCA was in effect broken in the early Ozawa years in part because RCA had declined as a superpower faster than the orchestra. Munch's departure coincides with the end of the megacorporate rivalries in American classical music and the ultimate victory of Columbia Artists Management as boss of the national scene.

We must not leave the RCA recordings without pausing to admire Munch's work with the main competition, Columbia Records and the Philadelphia Orchestra, a few months after leaving Boston. Columbia MS-6523, recorded in March 1963 during a two-set engagement that included runouts to Baltimore and New York, offered Munch and the Philadelphia in Fauré's *Pelléas et Mélisande* suite, the *Valses nobles et sentimentales* of Ravel, and the three famous excerpts from *La damnation de Faust*: the Ballet of Sylphs, Minuet of Will-o'-the-Wisps, and Hungarian March. This would have been an immensely significant recording on the strength of the program alone, since neither the Fauré nor the Ravel would otherwise have been left on commercial disc—nor for that matter, that form of the *Faust* excerpts. Moreover, the artfulness of this unique encounter of record company, legendary orchestra, and acknowledged master of the literature is very nearly unparalleled. (Munch was obviously in good physical shape: Less than a month later he was in London, making another top-quality record with the Royal Philharmonic.) We have noted the dreamy atmosphere they find at the beginning of *Pelléas*. Length, space, and retreat similarly haunt the end of the last movement, "Mort de Mélisande," the violin trill and cadence at the end of the minuet from *Faust* is along the same lines. The way the strings blend is very different from what is heard on the Boston records, with much less focus on the inner voices and a corresponding sheen in the first violins that is never far from our attention. Perhaps there is less articulation of the constituent parts: The center point of the Hungarian March, just before the bass drum, seems momentarily uncertain. The Ravel waltzes, so indispensable a companion to *La Valse*, scintillate and uplift in a perfect, and perfectly Ravelian, mingling of

Viennese froth and French décor: the many thin and gilded leaves of no. 4 (*assez animé*), the *molto rubatos* in no. 6 (*assez vif*) , and the closely controlled crescendos to the big *La Valse*-like climaxes in no. 7 (*moins vif*, 01:20 and 02:50). It is difficult to imagine a single album so frequently prompting thoughts of what might have been.

THE LATE RECORDINGS

Waiting for Charles Munch in France was a monolithic arts establishment, a musical culture still dominated by the state and its ministers. It was altogether natural for him to settle over it as emperor, at the same time profiting from the dazzling fees CAMI had made customary in the United States. Theoretically, anyway, he could work when and where he liked and do so with a repertoire of a scant dozen works now more closely associated with him than with anybody else in the world.


With Orchestre National

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| G.I.D. SMS-2494 | Albéniz: <i>Ibéria</i> (November–December 1966);
Debussy: <i>Ibéria</i> (February 1968) |
| G.I.D. SMS-2495 | Bizet: Symphony, <i>Jeux d'enfants</i> , <i>Patrie</i> (November 10–11, 1966) |
| G.I.D. SMS-2511 | <i>Jewels of Russian Music</i> : Rimsky-Korsakov: <i>Russian Easter ov.</i> ; <i>Le coq d'or</i> excerpts; Mussorgsky: <i>Khovanchina</i> excerpts; Borodin: <i>On the Steppes of Central Asia</i> (November 1966) |
| G.I.D. SMS-2579 | Debussy: <i>La Mer</i> , <i>Nocturnes</i> (February 10–16 and 28, 1968) |


With Rotterdam Philharmonic


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|-----------------|--|
| G.I.D. SMS-2519 | Franck: Symphony in D Minor (March 19, 1967) |
| G.I.D. SMS-2527 | Beethoven: Symphony no. 6 (March 18, 1967) |

There are no recordings of Debussy with the Orchestre de Paris despite the fact that *La Mer*, the obsession of his last months, figured in the inaugural concert and was featured on the American tour. That is because the Orchestre National had just released two commercial discs of Debussy with Munch: first, an attractive coupling of Debussy's *Ibéria* with Albéniz's, then *La Mer* and the *Nocturnes*. (It was during the Debussy sessions in February 1968 that the National had been petulant and jealous of the Orchestre de Paris, the occasion on which

Munch remarked, “They are my friends; you are my family.”⁵²) These readings constitute nearly as poignant a farewell as the Orchestre de Paris discs. If the overall result is not so interesting as the Boston version of *La Mer* (LSC-2111)—for one thing, the intonation in the oboe and English horn is rather less just—it is something a good deal more ominous than an ordinary seascape. The start of the third movement, for instance  is as eerie as the unveiling of the last scene in the *Fantastique*. The French journalist Sylvie de Nussac found the reading “somber, tormented, stamped with anguish and a kind of mysticism.”⁵³

The *Guilde Internationale du Disque* was a record club directly descended from the world’s first venture along those lines, David and Samuel Josefowitz’s Concert Hall Society, established in New York just after World War II. Their ventures were yet another manifestation of the music-for-everyone dream, where budget pricing and technological advances (vinyl and stereo) were married to phenomenal result. Decorating Samuel and his son Paul with the Legion of Honor in 2005, the French minister of culture, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, noted that the guild “favored the discovery and then the love of good music by making it possible for thousands of French citizens to acquire a record for the first time in their lives. With the advent of the LP microgroove disc and electronic playback of high quality, you thus figured in granting a huge public access to musical culture.”⁵⁴ Four of the six discs Munch prepared for the guild were with the Orchestre National; two—Beethoven’s Sixth and the Franck Symphony—were with the Rotterdam Philharmonic. The Rotterdam accounts are straightforward readings of ordinary repertoire by a smallish, thin-toned group with minimal surprises.

The Bizet disc with the Orchestre National, on the other hand, preserves a major corner of the Munch repertoire: the gangling *Patrie* Overture, for example, which was often offered up for chauvinistic reasons. *Jeux d’enfants* is very elegant, the spinning figures in “La Toupie” [The Top] are as good as one will hear anywhere, and the “Duo: Petit mari, petite femme,” is charming for its give-and-take of meter and dynamic level.  The Bizet Symphony is rendered to better effect on the Royal Philharmonic / *Reader’s Digest* recording considered just below; even so, a side-by-side listening gives a very good sense of how Munch performances differed in spur-of-the-moment decisions and shapes.

Of the “Jewels of Russian Music,” the revealing moment comes in the *Russian Easter Overture*, with a genuinely terrifying scramble into the Allegro theme, routing any number of the players in a classic case of Munch whipping the musicians up at whatever the cost in nicety.  The recording conditions bespeak the low budgets involved, with flagrant splices (less than half a minute

into the *Russian Easter Overture*, for instance) and elsewhere more than one suggestion of a quick playthrough. Everywhere there is the rattling of chairs and stands.

Nearly all the other recordings with the Orchestre National are from the vault of tapes transcribed for the radio broadcast: That is, they are products of the CD age and were not originally commercial pressings. A good number of them come from the orchestra's tours (naturally, since that is what Munch did with the group). This means, as noted earlier, that on the one hand both the technical and artistic conditions are less studied; on the other they have a true-to-life character, and the repertoire is very much wider, including, for instance, both Smetana and Sibelius.

With Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Reader's Digest


RDA 15A Bizet: Symphony; Tchaikovsky: *Francesca da Rimini* (April 5 and 9–10, 1963)


With New Philharmonia Orchestra


Decca PFS-4096 Offenbach: *Gaité parisienne* (December 10–11, 1965)
 Decca PFS-4127 Bizet: *Carmen*, *L'Arlésienne* Suites (January 4, 1966)
 Decca PFS-4131 Respighi: *Fountains of Rome*, *Pines of Rome* (January 4–5, 1966)


The book-clubbish trend toward the lighter classics is obvious from the records made with the British orchestras in the period between Boston and the Orchestre de Paris—in engineering and overall modernity of sound, among the most attractive of that era. Munch was one of twelve conductors in a *Reader's Digest* twelve-LP, twenty-one-work set, *Treasury of Great Music*, recorded for the magazine by RCA in London with the Royal Philharmonic.⁵⁵ Charles Gerhardt, producer of the wildly successful *Reader's Digest* series, had admired Munch since his first appearances in Los Angeles and later wrote that he enjoyed these recording sessions as much as any in his career. Munch had touched on only a few details of *Francesca da*

Rimini in the morning rehearsal before the recording session that afternoon. Overhearing a musician complaining to Gerhardt that there had not been enough rehearsal, Munch volunteered lightheartedly: “Then you’ll just have to watch me, won’t you?” The reading was fine, with only one short retake. Munch was pleased with the sonority, thinking it competitive with the Boston recordings.

When later re-engineered from the master tapes as an “audiophile quality” vinyl disc—later still, a CD—by David Chesky, the Royal Philharmonic performances took their place alongside the best of the Boston Symphony. The Bizet Symphony, which Boston did not record, is fast and brilliant, shorter by several minutes than the Orchestre National’s less interesting performance of 1966. More to the point, it is convincing as to the work’s particular merit, showing how Bizet’s lyric gifts compensate for the pedestrian structures. Munch brings individual voice (and the London players have their particular sound), elegantly crafted textures, and above all speed into something that ends up sounding more like a ballet than a symphony. A faster tempo for the finale it is difficult to imagine.  *Francesca da Rimini*, authoritative and virtuosic but so loud that the reeds are at length swallowed up, rivals the Boston reading of some years earlier. If the Boston sonority is more complex and hence more attractive (though note the perfection of the London tam-tam strokes), each version is close to faultless. The conducting appears to revel in the differences between the two orchestras, not to try to refashion the Boston approach for London.


With the New Philharmonia recordings of 1965 and 1966 we are given still more light repertoire and a glimpse of the boyish glee Munch could bring to untroubled works like *Gaité parisienne*, Manuel Rosenthal’s 1938 ballet drawn from Offenbach scores.  The Philharmonia of London was originally the house orchestra of EMI; the New Philharmonia was the result of an effort led by Otto Klemperer and others not to let it die, and dates its beginning as a freestanding, self-governing orchestra from 1964–1965. Munch, sympathetic to a project that amounted to saving jobs for working musicians, agreed to conduct concerts in London during its first season—yet another orchestra and public won over after Boston. The recordings, with Decca/London, were meant to demonstrate the merits of Decca’s proprietary engineering system, called “phase 4 stereo,” or PFS, where ten channels, later twenty, were used with the specific goal of highlighting the separation of the orchestral instruments. Or, as the promotional materials put it: “The effect is more sound—more interest—more entertainment—more participation—more listening pleasure: PHASE 4 STEREO is not background music.”⁵⁶ The targeted consumer was a member of the public at large: Light classical titles and film music headed the billings.


It comes as no surprise that Munch's conception of the Bizet suites is entirely symphonic: Neither the Gypsy Song nor even the Habañera from *Carmen* recognizes the sung traditions but rather take a fundamentally orchestral course. 

The Respighi pair—the only Italian music in the recorded legacy—evokes Munch's long association with that composer, built on their mutual interest in Bach. He had played Respighi's transcription of the Bach Passacaglia and Fugue since the 1930s, later adding *Ancient Airs and Dances* and *The Pines of Rome* to his Boston repertoire. These are luminescent performances, sparkling with Mediterranean decor and memorable for the stereophonic nightingales. 


With the Orchestre Lamoureux


Erato STU-70255	Saint-Saëns, Lalo: Cello Concertos (André Navarra, April 1965)
Erato STU-70256	Roussel: Symphonies nos. 3 and 4 (April 1965)
Erato STU-70278	Roussel: Suite in F; Dutilleux: Symphony no. 2 (February 1965)

Good product came from the alliance of Charles Munch with the Orchestre Lamoureux in the form of the three discs recorded for Erato in 1965, including the only studio recording of Munch leading Dutilleux's Second. The Roussel symphonies, which he had promoted for most of his career, were in the mold he preferred: traditional four-movement structures with progressive orchestration and spectacular climaxes and always a tonal resolution. Like the other Erato recordings, these are long on post-production and thus somewhat compromise the orchestral ideal, but they are important artifacts owing to what a very good case Munch makes for each of the works. Roussel's Third, often considered his masterpiece, was a Koussevitzky commission for Boston. The industrial first movement—suggesting many parallels between Roussel and his admirer, Prokofiev—is so dominated by the brass as to drive the strings essentially out of the picture, but the wolfing French horn chromatics in bars 2 and 4 are worth the price, as are the climaxes in the middle and at the end. Woodwind and string playing is easier to enjoy in the Andante, but again the two huge climaxes (05:30, 07:40) get swamped in brass, and the wandering episodes threaten more than once to grow tiresome. The performance takes off with the merry scherzo, then concludes in the finale with admirable passagework from the woodwind section  and a superb interlude for violin solo.

An authoritative account of the Fourth Symphony in A Major leaves us convinced of its strength, too, and also wondering why the Third is so much more popular. The slow movement teems with attractive melodies and blends. 

The third and fourth movements are of less consequence than the first two, a short tarantella and a galop, the latter with a gracious opening for solo oboe and harp over string pizzicato. It seems the reverse of the Third Symphony, where the second half dominates. Both symphonies have also been published from live broadcasts of the Orchestre National (August 1964, September 1966), and once again the comparison is instructive, with the road performances so approximate in accuracy as to be off-putting and the studio treatment of the Lamoureux, which was the lesser orchestra, resulting in real polish across the board.

We have seen that Dutilleux was pleased with the Lamoureux recording of his Second Symphony, which he had helped edit. The ensemble has mastered its material: The fiendish passages are more accurate than in the Orchestre National's live performance (of 1962, when the work was brand new)—and the separating out by stereo channel of the second orchestra succeeds tolerably well. It is a fine performance of an obvious masterpiece, where Dutilleux established his mature style of ravishing new orchestral colors unveiled with every passing phrase—from the dark solo clarinet in the first movement to the glistening gesture that opens the last. 

Munch has thoroughly understood the work and dedicates all his artistry to this enterprise in a taut, perfectly paced, and delineated interpretation. The patient, note-for-note folding up of the *calmato* at the very end  makes for a close as captivating as the maddest dash to the end of the *Fantastique*.

André Navarra (1911–1988) was fifty-four and a professor at the Conservatoire when he came to record the two celebrated French cello concertos with Munch and the Lamoureux. He had appeared with Munch and the Société des Concerts in these same works almost three decades earlier, in 1938. Though not flawless performances on anybody's part, the record is historic in what it brings together: Saint-Saëns, Lalo, the Lamoureux players, Munch, and Disques Erato—the French company, now a subsidiary of Time-Warner, founded in the 1950s to focus on the most serious classical music.


Erato STU-70400

Honegger: Symphony no. 4; Dutilleux:
Métaboles (June 28, 1967)

This record continues Erato's focus on Munch as champion of the modern French school of symphonists. Honegger's Fourth Symphony, subtitled *Deliciae basiliensis* [Pleasures of Basel], said to be a holiday reminiscence, was composed in 1946 and first performed in Basel early the following year. It is an accessible work, a welcome counterfoil to the brooding Third and Fifth, with some of Honegger's most attractive melodies. The recording, done in the ORTF studios, is overly engineered, bringing featured instruments to and from the foreground like moving-picture close-ups, thus clouding Munch's ideas of orchestral counterpoint and doubtless Honegger's. Still, the textures can be memorable, for instance, the many layers that have coalesced over the continuo-like bass in the second movement by the time a soaring violin theme finally settles over it (04:40).  The third movement, referencing in its trumpet-and-drum work the kinds of outdoor festivals we hear so often in Debussy and Ravel, was stock in trade to conductor and players alike.

Easily the most significant recording with the Orchestre National is that of Dutilleux's *Métaboles*. By the time Munch had left Boston the Second Symphony was a well-recognized commodity in the city and, owing to his repeated performances, in Europe as well. *Métaboles*, said to take its beginning from the last bars of the Second Symphony, was composed in 1964 for George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra, who premiered it first thing the next January. The work soon became Charles Munch's new—and last—passion. He was, it would appear, Dutilleux's first choice to do the recording, and *Métaboles* with the Orchestre National (1967) won the Grand Prix du Disque that year. Dutilleux writes of the sessions with great affection in the orchestra's *livre d'or*.⁵⁷

One can hear why. However distant this crisp, angular score was from Munch's customary idiom—the third movement, *Obsessionnel*, embraces a serial component, and the whole is given to complex mutations of structural elements through the sections of the orchestra, coalescing again in the last movement—it more than met his fundamental criteria in craftsmanship and brilliance. One is taken, too, by the technical accuracy the musicians bring to this difficult score, especially its rhythmic fabric. The clarity of the woodwind and percussion flutterings over a low-register stasis in the fourth movement, *Torpide*, describes a nocturnal spell not unlike other hypnotic, slow movements in the Munch canon.

 From this the fast finale, *Flamboyant*, breaks away, its furious passagework well under control from the podium and within the ranks.

Dutilleux's next major work, *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement*, subtitled *La nuit étoilée* after the famous painting by Van Gogh, was dedicated posthumously to Munch in thanks for this first recording of *Métaboles*, as well as to Rostropovich, who commissioned and first performed it:


I was thinking a lot about Charles Münch, who had died suddenly in 1968 during a splendid American tour with the Orchestre de Paris. I wanted this work to be dedicated to his memory on the tenth anniversary of his death. And I had another reason: Münch was passionate about painting and possessed some wonderful pictures by the great Dutch painter.⁵⁸

Rostropovich and the Orchestre National gave the French premiere on December 9, 1978, in the course of a memorial concert for Charles Munch.

Of the big four modernist composers practicing in France—Messiaen, Dutilleux, Boulez, and Xenakis—Munch knew and played a little Messiaen but nothing by the two younger composers. Dutilleux he saw as a natural descendent of Berlioz and Roussel, and he can fairly be said to have established both the Second Symphony and *Métaboles* through insistent programming wherever he conducted. He played Dutilleux's Second Symphony not only in Boston and New York and the BSO runouts but also at the Strasbourg, Lyon, and Besançon festivals, with the Philadelphia Orchestra and with the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. He learned *Métaboles* for this recording, then programmed it for the Besançon Festival of 1966 and included it in his Marguerite Long memorial concert in 1966. He meant to take it to the United States in 1968.

With Bavarian Radio Orchestra and Chorus

DGG 139264/65 Berlioz: *Requiem* (July 6–8, 1967)

Munch's reading of the Berlioz *Requiem*, as recorded in 1967 by Deutsche Grammophon, should by all rights be more important than it ends up being. Here, after all, was a major work Munch helped to define for the twentieth century and with which he had been associated for most of his career. It was recorded in anticipation of the 1969 Berlioz centennial celebrations at a time when more and more concertgoers were feeling an obligation to learn it. However, the kind of leisure that is so revealing in his last recordings—Brahms's First and Ravel's *Boléro*—here has a way of emphasizing how difficult Berlioz can be. The *Lacrymosa* seems so elephantine that it fails to take wing into the whirlwind of terror that Berlioz had on his mind—and that Munch was said to have had on his own mind as he contemplated death.  The choral sound seems small for the orchestra, and the force often separates. In the fugues the contrapuntal lines are by turns convincing, then so unbalanced that the sense is lost. The Boston recording remained the better solution for a time; then Colin Davis's

epoch-defining recording of November 1969 took its place as cornerstone of the Berlioz centenary (primarily an English undertaking). From that point on, the Munch recordings of Berlioz began to have serious competition.




There were other commercial publications here and there, ranging from the Barraud/Roussel recording produced for Vêga by Claude Samuel even before Munch left Boston, to a *Fantastique* published in 1964 by Trianon in a series of “Classics for Everyone,” both with the Orchestre National. All told, the discography after Boston, however unwieldy by comparison to the convenient and definitive clutch of Living Stereo products, is an impressive achievement for a man who was supposed to have been retiring. The list of titles goes well beyond the narrow repertoire Munch was now offering on the road, and, from *Pines of Rome* to *Métaboles*, they announce a bold departure from the RCA style.



With Orchestre de Paris


VSM CVB-2037	Berlioz: <i>Symphonie fantastique</i> (October 23–26, 1967)
VSM CVB-2085	Brahms: Symphony no. 1 (January 8–12, 1968)
VSM CVB-2281/82	Honegger: Symphony no. 2 (December 28, 1967); Ravel: <i>Boléro</i> , <i>Rapsodie espagnole</i> , <i>Daphnis et Chloé</i> , suite 2, <i>Pavane pour une infante défunte</i> , Piano Concerto in G Major (September 26–28, 1968)






Munch left four discs with the Orchestre de Paris: a *Symphonie fantastique* prepared in the first weeks to serve as a sample of proffered wares; the Brahms First; and a Ravel cycle with, poignantly, Nicole Henriot-Schweitzer as soloist in the G-Major Concerto, coupled after his death with an earlier reading of Honegger’s Second Symphony. The engineering values of these Voix de Son Maître / EMI recordings—with the same team that made the great recordings of the Société des Concerts and André Cluytens: René Challan and Paul Vavasseur—are very strong, though the greater reverberation tends to mask some details that are clearer in RCA’s approach, where the acoustic of Symphony Hall figures prominently. The Ravel and the Honegger takes, minus Nicole’s concerto, were chosen by EMI as a constituent of its corporate retrospective, *Great Recordings of the Century* (2001).

Each of these accounts is in its own way haunting, together leaving an apt portrait of the artist Charles Munch had become since Boston. The *Fantastique*, artifact of the earliest days of the new orchestra, is competent and, like


its leader, contagious in its enthusiasm.  On occasion the players are not quite ready to meet his demands: Compare the precise woodwind playing from Boston as heard in the difficult last sixty seconds of the *Fantastique* with the results from Paris—a good juxtaposition of the French *esprit* with Bostonian *savoir faire* , compare with .

The choice of Brahms's First Symphony for these inaugural recordings of the Orchestre de Paris shows once more its centrality in the Munch repertoire and gives the set a certain valedictory quality: Together the four composers—Berlioz, Brahms, Ravel, Honegger—topped his list of career-long favorites. It is a captivating achievement, leaving the sensation, in the long introductions of the first and last movements, of a soliloquy suspended over the passage of time: all lyric, with very little beat and almost no footfall at all—so drawn out as inevitably to suggest the conductor's unwillingness to bid the work a last farewell.   The outer movements are noticeably longer than the BSO versions. The famously sentimental close of the second movement features Luben Yordanoff in his prime.



 Munch probably overslows the “alphorn call” toward the beginning of the fourth movement, but flutist Michel Debost responds in a way that confirms an icy stasis. The warm C-major theme begins slowly, too, but the heroism is soon straining to get loose.


For Honegger's Second, the big string sections offer a resonance not heard in any of the other four preserved readings , and the trumpets in the third movement are more affirmative and regal than the blaring, military versions before.  Here there is pageantry rather than program: Invasion and Occupation have settled, with the passage of time, into an ambiance of reflection. Likewise, the Ravel accounts are broad and unhurried, noticeably longer than the Boston versions. , Boston; , Paris. The slow pace of the *Boléro*  renders each strophe as a new facet of a great panorama: The sensation at the end is much like the collapse of *La Valse*, regrettably omitted from these sessions: a rhetorical summing up of bygone time.


One critic holds that “Munch's 1968 EMI recordings of Bolero and Rapsodie with the Orchestra of Paris are far superior in sound as well as interpretation” to the precedent readings,⁵⁹ and while others would not go that far, it is true that the plump sound of the new Orchestre de Paris leaves a fine impression. The familiar climactic sunrise in *Daphnis* is exquisitely wrought with grandeur, glamour, and sheen: Note, for instance, the lovely bass clarinet playing


followed by the flute and violin-harmonic birdcalls just toward the beginning (00:35).  This is the sound Karajan summarized in New York: *fa - bu - leux!* What draws us back again and again to these particular readings is their deliberate pace: not tired so much as wise. Munch achieved this breadth and depth of expression with no other Paris aggregation.

VIDEOS

Symphonie fantastique,  *La Mer, Daphnis et Chloé*,  BSO, April 17, 1962 (farewell concert)

Dardanus Suite,  *Royal Hunt et Storm, Valses nobles et sentimentales, La Valse*, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, February 27, 1963

Brahms's First  (movts. 2–4), *Daphnis et Chloé*, Orchestre National, Tokyo, October 8 and 20, 1966

La Mer, interview with Vic Firth, rehearsing *Daphnis et Chloé* with Hungarian State Orchestra, *Daphnis et Chloé* with BSO,  from *The Great Conductors*

L'enfance du Christ,  BSO with Harvard-Radcliffe, December 13, 1966

See also releases of ICA Classics Legacy beginning in early 2011; these are included in the discography.

Two of the video recordings now widely available—*L'enfance du Christ* with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in December 1966 and the Brahms First Symphony and *Daphnis et Chloé* with the Orchestre National, playing in Japan the previous October—leave us with a poignant souvenir of Charles Munch, at seventy-five, in all his majesty. (This latter Brahms First is different from the one we considered at the beginning of this appendix, which was with the Japan Philharmonic in 1962.) His appearance has not changed much from the first televised broadcasts to the last, but in the familiar look—the silver hair, animated expression, long baton, impeccable costume—there is now a full measure of all of wisdom's virtues: *gravitas, pietas, dignitas, justitia*. Perhaps there is growing resignation to his career's end. Self-doubt, as he savors the riches of a few favorite scores, is a thing of the past.

Of the two programs, *L'enfance du Christ* best describes Munch and the Berlioz experience as he created it in Boston. The members of the Boston Symphony play with control, assurance, and still great interest in what they are doing. The earnestness of the young singers from Harvard and Radcliffe is infectious; their French is better than that of the soloists. Florence Kopleff, the *doyenne* of his soloists, had been appearing with Munch since 1953 and since the

first *L'enfance du Christ* in 1956. Munch, with his new big-frame glasses, looks at the score frequently. The hall is packed with an attentive audience. It is a family affair, as though he had not already been away for four seasons.

Munch does in fact seem tired, occasionally falling behind his orchestra and often using his left hand to support himself on the music desk. But the beats are very clear when they are needed, assuring the players of what they already know. There is also wonderful spontaneity to the music, with all of the Munch trademarks: the stretching at the end of the prelude to part II, how much slower the second verse of the Shepherds' Farewell is than the first. (He skips the third verse, and the repeats, in the flutes-and-harp trio.) The trio is a best-of-Boston moment, with Munch beaming at Dwyer, Pappoutsakis, and Zighera, who have been repositioned on the crowded stage during the interval. So, too, is the close of part I, with the Harvard men onstage and the Radcliffe women off, an angel chorus that evaporates into the mist as the midstage door is slowly closed—exactly the solution Berlioz specifies. Munch omits the last string chords so as not to compromise the effect.

It is in the three preserved movements of the Brahms symphony that we come closest to penetrating his legendary reserve and grasping his universe at end of career. Any number of passages in this performance demonstrate the exquisite pacing and control of climax points, the ways he establishes structural pillars, which we have so often encountered in the audio recordings. He does not, for instance, allow much release between the third and fourth movements, anxious (as Brahms is) to return to the deeper inquiry that begins the finale. The repertoire of gestures is by now familiar: the left index finger used to point a passage out and bring it to the fore, but again and again coming to the lips to calm and soften; the long baton waiting behind his head in anticipation of the next thing, the energy pent up in the preparation, and the release often accompanied by guttural exclamation (last movement, 16:35 of the DVD). Aspiration, suspense, and point of attack are under his detailed control; authority for much of the rest is willingly transferred to the musicians.

In part owing to historical accident—the tape of the first movement has been lost—and in part owing to the camera work, which focuses almost exclusively on Munch, we are drawn above all to the beauties of the slow movement, so different in substance from the orgies and bacchanals the public savored. Here, and in like movements from Mendelssohn and Schumann to the *Pathétique*, we find Munch at his most contemplative and, I have consistently argued, his best. He comprehends the essential fluidity of time passing, the spontaneity with which the mind is diverted into its recesses. As early as the second bar, the ebb and flow is established, forward momentum always yielding to dwell and ponder. In the fourth bar the cadence is protracted; when it happens again (01:05), he lets the motion slow to eighth notes, and after the oboe solo, as

though on the spur of the moment, he lets the music nearly stop again (01:50), urging the musicians' attention to the magnitude of the nuance, then acknowledging the result with a contented smile.

Now he lets the movement grow in speed and volume, soon becoming full-bodied and momentarily dark; by the recapitulation the *pianissimos* have been altogether forgotten. For a moment he rests his left hand on his hip (05:45), thus signaling the beginning of the retreat. The final cadences are of rare beauty. Freed now even of meter, the music simply lifts out of the room. At the end his open left palm sweeps the orchestra out early to leave the concertmaster suspended over the last barline. The effect is one of dwelling for an instant in a parallel universe, somewhere near the soul of music. One thinks for an instant of the long life spent almost entirely in the symphonic milieu—since very nearly the decade in which this symphony was composed. Munch, for his part, smiles in beatific contentment.

NOTES

- * Recordings are listed in chronological order by first day of recording. The forward slash indicates a span of 78-rpm discs (e.g., Gramophone DB 2577/79 indicates the three records DB 2577, 2578, and 2579). Gramophone recordings in this period are sometimes identified as VSM and HMV (Voix de Son Maître, His Master's Voice).
1. Let. AS to Hans Hickmann, c. 1960, in *Albert Schweitzer, Letters, 1905–1965*, ed. Hans Walter Bähr (London: Macmillan, 1992), 296.
 2. CM, responses prepared (in English) for interview by Martin Bookspan, WBMS, Boston, February 1, 1950, NJJS.
 3. *Liszt: Piano Concerto no. 1 / Brahms: Symphony no. 1*, DVD (Fuji Television Exton OVCB-00017, 2003).
 4. Albert Goldberg, "The New Life, Freedom of Charles Munch," *Los Angeles Times* (Jan. 26, 1964).
 5. Recording dates assembled or confirmed principally from Michael Gray's database of recordings by Charles Munch and, for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, from James H. North, *Boston Symphony Orchestra: An Augmented Discography* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2008). I am deeply grateful to both Gray and North for their collaboration.
 6. Interview with Michael Steinberg, Dec. 1, 2004.
 7. See Philippe Morin, "Une nouvelle politique discographique pour la France," in *La vie musicale sous Vichy*, ed. Myriam Chimènes (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 2001), 253–68.
 8. José Bruyr, "Bonsoir, Monsieur Charles Munch," *Guide du concert*, no. 537 (Nov. 23, 1968): 9. Bruyr was an early (1947) biographer of Honegger.
 9. William McNaught, "Gramophone Notes: Prokofiev's 'Classical Symphony,'" *Musical Times* 89(1269) (November 1948): 336.
 10. I take the recording date, September 13–14, from Jan van Bart, *Discografie van het Concertgebouworkest* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1989), sec. 48.1. The date given on one CD reprint appears incorrect; see <http://www.pristineclassical.com>.
 11. Broadcast recordings of the Orchestre National concerts in the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées of May 8, 1962 (Debussy centennial), and June 5, 1962 (Roussel, Honegger, Dutilleux), are included in the 9-CD *Charles Munch Edition* (Audi-dis Valois, 1998), vols. 4 and 6.
 12. CM, responses prepared (in English) for interview by Martin Bookspan, WBMS, Boston, Feb. 1, 1950, NJJS.
 13. *Ibid.*
 14. Three half-hour broadcasts of 1931 by Karl Straube with the Thomaner singers and Gewandhaus Orchestra list Karl Münch as soloist (BWV 17, 97, 177) and are preserved as tape transcriptions by the RRG (Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft); see <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/performers/straube-karl.htm>.
 15. "Address of Charles Munch, Director of the Berkshire Music Center, at the opening exercises of the Berkshire Music Center, Tanglewood, 3 July 1953," NJJS.

16. Let. George Judd to Richard Mohr, Sept. 28, 1949, BSO. The correspondence, primarily between Judd and Mohr, continues with letters of Oct. 10, 11, and 17, 1949, and Mar. 20, 1950.
17. Used for RCA advertisements and record jackets from 1952; see, for example, Moss Hart, "Recipe for a Conductor," BSO programs 1951–1952, 655. This had been preceded by a similar text provided by Thurber on Koussevitzky: James Thurber, "Old Thunder and Lilacs," BSO programs 1950–1951, 339.
18. John Pfeiffer, in a 1994 intermission-feature interview with Nathaniel S. Johnson, included as tr. 11 of CD 2 of *The Age of Living Stereo: A Tribute to John Pfeiffer*, 2 CDs RCA 09026-68524-2, 1996.
19. Liner booklet for *The Age of Living Stereo: A Tribute to John Pfeiffer*, 21.
20. Press release: "Announcement of RCA Red Seal's Living Stereo Series on SA-CD," quoting BMC vice president Gilbert Heatherwick, Aug. 29, 2004; posted, for example, at <http://www.sa-cd.net>.
21. Liner booklet for *The Age of Living Stereo*, 8.
22. John Pfeiffer, "The Age of Living Stereo," in liner booklet for *The Age of Living Stereo*, 21.
23. John Pfeiffer, in a 1993 intermission-feature interview with Elliott Forrest, included as tr. 5 of CD 2 of *The Age of Living Stereo: A Tribute to John Pfeiffer*.
24. "Announcement of RCA Red Seal's Living Stereo series on SA-CD."
25. Claude Samuel, "Charles Munch, vingt ans après," *La lettre du musicien* 65 (November 1988): 11.
26. Interview with Margo Miller, May 19, 2005.
27. Irving Kolodin, "Classical LPs," *Saturday Review* (July 26, 1952).
28. "Editor's Note," *Saturday Review* (Aug. 30, 1952).
29. B. H. Haggin, "Review of The Damnation of Faust (RCA)," *San Francisco Chronicle* (Sept. 12, 1954); rpt. in BSO programs 1954–1955, 51–52.
30. Interview with Sylvia Sandeen, Sept. 8, 2005.
31. The first RCA recordings of the Munch era (Beethoven's Seventh, *Beatrice and Benedict* Overture, Schubert's Second, Beethoven's Gratulation-Menuet, Brahms's 4th, Haydn's 104th, and *La Valse*) were released in 78-rpm, 45-rpm, and LP. For simplicity's sake, I use the LP catalogue numbers here. Similarly, some early stereophonic recordings were published first (or only, for the stereo version) on tape, but again I cite the more familiar LM/LSC numbers.
32. See North, BSO Discography, 30; photograph of the trumpet in *RCA Victor Record Review*, March 1947.
33. *Arturo Toscanini / All Berlioz Concert / Romeo & Juliet*, etc. (Swarthout / Garris / Moscona), "the complete concert and rehearsals, including soloists, chorus, and orchestra, February [9, 16,] 1947," 3 CDs (Guild Historical GHCD 2218–20, 2002).
34. Interview with Suzanne Danco, Apr. 23, 1993.
35. Broadcast of Oct. 10, 1959, rpt. as CD 3, track 1, of *Boston Symphony Orchestra: Symphony Hall Centennial Celebration, from the Broadcast Archives 1943–2000*, 12 CDs (Boston Symphony Orchestra / IMG Artists CB 100, 2001).
36. See North, BSO Discography, 66.
37. See the curious history of the stereo release, in *ibid.*, 50.
38. Interview with Roger Voisin, Apr. 6, 2006.

39. Review in *High Fidelity*, 12(12) (December 1962): 97.
40. Olin Downes, "New Symphony by Martinu . . . Conducted by Charles Munch," NYT (Jan. 13, 1955).
41. OD, "Martinu's 'Fantaisies Symphoniques' Given in Impressive Interpretation by Munch," NYT (Jan. 16, 1955).
42. "The Recording Project," BSO programs 1958–1959, 195, 203. The recordings were placed in the public libraries of Cincinnati, Dallas, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and New York and in the Library of Congress.
43. Ibid.
44. *Easley Blackwood / Symphony no. 5 / Symphony no. 1*, CD (Cedille CDR 900000 016, 1993).
45. Int. with Sandeen.
46. See North, BSO Discography, 64.
47. John Pfeiffer, in a 1992 intermission-feature interview with Robert Cowan, included as tr. 5 of CD 2 of *The Age of Living Stereo: A Tribute to John Pfeiffer*. The biographies of Fritz Reiner tell various versions of the rupture with Rubinstein, all traced to these recording sessions.
48. Interview with Jaime Laredo, Feb. 17, 2008.
49. Philippe Olivier, *Charles Munch: Une biographie par le disque* (Paris: Belfond, 1987), 176.
50. Gary Graffman, *I Really Should Be Practicing* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 109.
51. Gaby Pasquier, *Chère Marguerite Long (1874–1966): Souvenirs personnels de Gaby Pasquier* (Nogent-le-Rontrou, 2001), 53.
52. Gilles Cantagrel and Claudette Douay, *L'Orchestre National de France: L'album anniversaire, 1934–1994* (Paris: Radio-France / Van de Velde), 60.
53. Sylvie de Nussac, "Triomphe et mort de Charles Munch," *L'Express* (Nov. 11, 1968).
54. "Discours de Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres prononcé à l'occasion de la remise des insignes de Chevalier dans l'ordre national de la Légion d'Honneur à Samuel et Paul Josefowitz," presented at the Mission du Mécénat, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Paris, Oct. 24, 2005, <http://www.mecenat.culture.gouv.fr>.
55. See Robert E. Benson, "A Four-Decade Friendship with Charles Gerhardt," *Classical CD Review*, c. 2000, <http://www.classicalcdreview.com>. The other conductors were Barbirolli, Danon, Dorati, Fistoulari, Horenstein, Kempe, Krips, Leibowitz, Reiner, Prêtre, and Sargent.
56. Liner notes for Phase 4 recordings; see Tony Maygarden, "London Phase 4 Stereo," *The Endless Groove*, <http://www.endlessgroove.com>.
57. Orchestre National *livre d'or*, II, 377, from late 1967; also a second entry, just following, dated July 11, 1982. Documentation Musicale, Radio France.
58. Henry Dutilleux, *Music—Mystery and Memory: Conversations with Claude Glayman*, trans. Roger Nichols (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003), 74.
59. Robert E. Benson, "RCA SACDs," *Classical CD Review* (February 2005) <http://www.classicalcdreview.com>.