

## Great Conductors Of The 20th Century Vol.22 - Charles Munch



CD1 1. *Camille Saint-Saëns - La princesse jaune, Op. 30 – Overture* Beethoven - Symphony no 9 in D minor, Op. 125 "Choral"

2. I. *Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso* 3. II. *Molto vivace* 4. III. *Adagio molto e cantabile* 5. IV. *Presto – Allegro assai – Recitativo – Allegro assai* 6. *Berlioz - Le corsaire Overture, Op. 21*

Boston Symphony Orchestra (1-5) New England Conservatory Chorus (5) Orchestre de la Société du Conservatoire Paris (6) CD2

1. *Mendelssohn - Octet for Strings in E flat major, Op. 20 – III. Scherzo – Allegro leggierissimo* Bizet - Symphony in C major

2. I. *Allegro vivo* 3. II. *Adagio* 4. III. *Scherzo. Allegro vivace* 5. IV. *Allegro vivace* Martinu - Symphony no 6 "Fantaisies symphoniques"

6. I. *Lento – Andante moderato – Allegro – Lento* 7. II. *Poco allegro* 8. III. *Lento – Poco vivo – Adagio – Andante – Allegro – Moderato – Lento*

Prokofiev - Romeo and Juliet Suite nos 1 & 2, Op. 64a/b

9. *Op. 64a: no 7, Death of Tybalt* 10. *Op. 64b: Montagues and Capulets* 11. *Op. 64b: Dance* 12. *Op. 64b: Romeo and Juliet Before Parting*

Boston Symphony Orchestra (1, 6-12) French National Radio Orchestra (2-5) Charles Munch – conductor

This 2CD set of recordings conducted by Charles Munch features the work of another significant figures in 20th century music. In his interesting insert note, Marc Mandel points out that Munch succeeded Koussevitzky at the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Not an easy act to follow, to be sure, but the fact that Munch remained in his post for fourteen years, from 1949 to 1962, tells its own tale. It is no surprise, therefore, that the music collected on these two well filled discs contains a majority of Boston performances.

The opening item is a rarity, recorded in 1951 in the early stages of Munch's career in Boston. Saint-Saëns' opera *La Princesse jaune* hardly holds the stages of the world's theatres, but its

lively overture is well worth the occasional outing. Munch brings out the music's innate vitality, and while the sound is somewhat thin, and far from the best on offer here, the performances exudes vitality.

Altogether more compelling, however, is Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, which follows on disc 1. The performance has a compelling vision and sweep, and the recording is rich and warm. The Boston Symphony Orchestra confirms its legendary credentials as a major international ensemble, and this is a hugely enjoyable experience, worth the price of the two discs on its own. The chosen tempi always feel absolutely right, allowing the music to breathe at the same time as providing an intense sweep of momentum in the faster sections. In the solo quartet, including the young Leontyne Price, work particularly well as team, although it is a pity that the booklet note neglects them (who will know the credentials of the tenor David Poleri or the bass Giorgio Tozzi, I wonder?). Also there are no texts or translations, which should have been included too. The recorded sound is generally pleasing, but in the finale the balances are sometimes odd, the chorus recessed in the perspective, wind solos sometimes too loud. In general, however, this is a really fine performance.

Disc 1 concludes with the earliest of the recordings, a sparkling Corsaire Overture by Berlioz, in sound which has stood the test of time better than we might have expected. It isn't hi-fi, though. Disc 2 opens with the sparkling gossamer textures of Mendelssohn's Octet, the Boston strings showing their excellent calibre, and the more recent recording (1960) pays dividends too.

Bizet's Symphony in C is played by the French Radio Orchestra, and Munch shapes and phrases the music with great affection. The recorded sound is acceptable enough, making this an enjoyable performance, if not one to eclipse memories of Beecham's recording with the same orchestra a few years before.

Martinu wrote his Sixth Symphony for Charles Munch and the 75th anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra: 'There is one reason for this work which is clear and certain for me. I wished to write something for Charles Munch. I am impressed and I like his spontaneous approach to the music where music takes shape in a free way, flowing and freely following its movements.' What we have here, therefore, is the symphony's first-ever recording, made in Boston in 1956, a year after the same forces had given the premiere. Munch recorded the piece again eleven years later in Prague, but the sound from Boston in 1956 has come up well in this remastering, helped by what seems a rich and warm acoustic. Returning to the score a year after the premiere, orchestra and conductor play it as though they know and love it to a man. For this is a truly satisfying interpretation of a great symphony. -- Terry Barfoot, MusicWeb International

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