

Charles Munch Born: September 26, 1891 – Strasbourg, Alsace, France
Died: November 6, 1968 – Richmond, Virginia, USA

The eminent Alsatian-born French conductor, Charles Munch (originally, Münch), was the son of the Alsatian organist and choral conductor Ernst Münch (1859–1928). His elder brother was the choir-master and professor of music, Fritz Münch. Charles studied violin at the Strasbourg Conservatory and with Lucien Capet in Paris. At the outbreak of World War I (1914), he enlisted in the German army; made a sergeant of artillery, he was gassed at Peronne and wounded at Verdun; after the end of the war (1918) and his return to Alsace-Lorraine (1919), he became a naturalised French citizen.



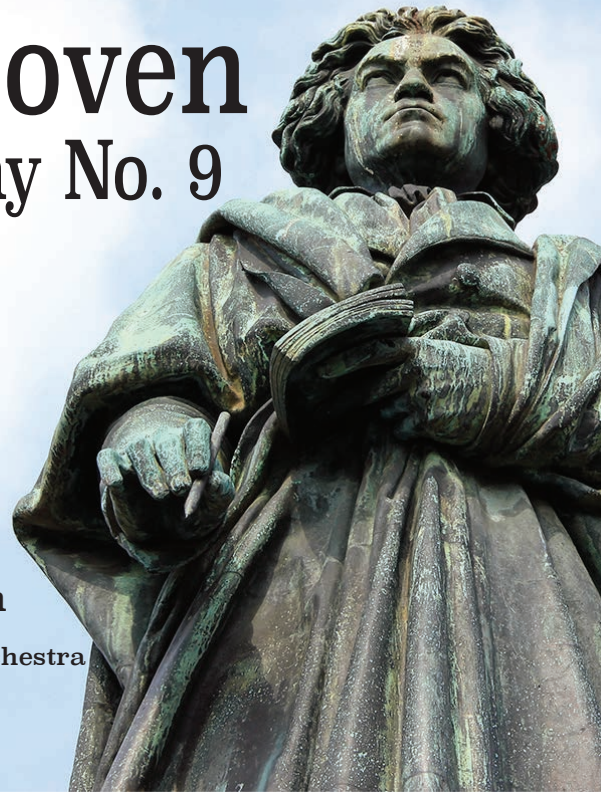
Having received further violin training from Flesch in Berlin, Charles Munch pursued a career as a soloist; was also professor of violin at the Leipzig Conservatory and concert-master of the Gewandhaus Orchestra there. In November 1932, he made his professional conducting debut in Paris with the Straram Orchestra. He studied conducting with Szendrei in Paris from 1933 to 1940. He quickly rose to prominence; was conductor of Paris's Orchestra de la Société Philharmonique from 1935 to 1938, and in 1936 became a professor at the École Normale de Musique. In 1938 he became music director of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire de Paris, remaining in that post during the years of the German occupation during World War II; refusing to collaborate with the Nazis, he gave his support to the Resistance, being awarded the Légion d'honneur in 1945.

Charles Munch made his USA debut as a guest conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in December 1946; a trans-continental tour of the USA with the French National Radio Orchestra followed in 1948. In 1949 he was appointed music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which he and Monteux took on its first European tour in 1952; they took it again to Europe in 1956, also touring in the Soviet Union, making it the first USA orchestra to do so. After retiring from his Boston post in 1962, he made appearances as a guest conductor; also helped to launch the Orchestre de Paris in 1967.

Charles Munch acquired an outstanding reputation as an interpreter of the French repertoire, his performances being marked by spontaneity, colour, and elegance. French music of the 20th century also occupied a prominent place on his programs; he brought out new works by Roussel, Milhaud, Arthur Honegger, and others. He wrote *Je suis chef d'orchestre* (1954).

Beethoven Symphony No. 9

Charles Munch
conducts the
Boston Symphony Orchestra



The Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125 (also known as "the Choral"), is Ludwig van Beethoven's final complete symphony. Completed in 1824, the symphony is one of the best-known works in classical music. Among critics, it is almost universally considered one of Beethoven's greatest works, and many consider it one of the greatest compositions in the western musical canon.

The symphony was the first example of a major composer using voices in a symphony (thus making it a choral symphony). The words are sung during the final movement by four vocal soloists and a chorus. They were taken from the "Ode to Joy", a poem written by Friedrich Schiller in 1785 and revised in 1803, with additions made by the composer. Today, it stands as one of the most played symphonies in the world.

In 2001, Beethoven's autographed score of the Ninth Symphony, held by the Berlin State Library, was added to the United Nations Memory of the World Programme Heritage list, becoming the first musical score so honored.

The Philharmonic Society of London originally commissioned the symphony in 1817. The main composition work was done between autumn 1822 and the completion of the autograph in February 1824.

The symphony emerged from other pieces by Beethoven that, while completed works in their own right, are also in some sense sketches for the future symphony. The Choral Fantasy Opus. 80 (1808), basically a piano concerto movement, brings in a chorus and vocal soloists near the end to form the climax. As in the Ninth Symphony, the vocal forces sing a theme first played instrumentally, and this theme is highly reminiscent of the corresponding theme in the Ninth Symphony (for a detailed comparison, see Choral Fantasy). Going further back, an earlier version of the Choral Fantasy theme is found in the song "Gegenliebe" ("Returned Love"), for piano and high voice, which dates from before 1795. According to Robert W. Gutman, Mozart's K. 222 Offertory in D minor, "Misericordias Domini", written in 1775, contains a melody that foreshadows "Ode to Joy".

Premiere

Although his major works had primarily been premiered in Vienna, Beethoven was eager to have his latest composition performed in Berlin as soon as possible after finishing it, since he thought that musical taste in Vienna had become dominated by Italian composers such as Rossini.^[7] When his friends and financiers heard this, they urged him to premiere the symphony in Vienna in the form of a petition signed by a number of prominent Viennese music patrons and performers.

Beethoven was flattered by the adoration of Vienna, so the Ninth Symphony was premiered on 7 May 1824 in the Theater am Kärntnertor in Vienna, along with the overture *The Consecration of the House* (*Die Weihe des Hauses*) and three parts of the *Missa solemnis* (the *Kyrie*, *Credo*, and the *Agnus Dei*).

This was the composer's first on-stage appearance in 12 years; the hall was packed with an eager audience and a number of musicians.

The premiere of Symphony No. 9 involved the largest orchestra ever assembled by Beethoven and required

the combined efforts of the Kärntnertor house orchestra, The Vienna Music Society (*Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde*), along with a select group of capable amateurs. While no complete list of premiere performers exists, many of Vienna's most elite performers are known to have participated.

Caroline Unger, who sang the contralto part at the first performance and who is credited with turning Beethoven to face the applauding audience.

The soprano and alto parts were interpreted by two famous young singers: Henriette Sontag and Caroline Unger. German soprano Henriette Sontag (1806–1854) was eighteen years old when Beethoven personally recruited her to perform in the premiere of the Ninth Symphony.

Also personally recruited by Beethoven, 21-year-old contralto Caroline Unger (1803–1877), a native of Vienna, had gained critical praise in 1821 appearing in Rossini's *Tancredi*. After performing in Beethoven's 1824 premiere, Unger found fame in Italy and Paris. Italian composers Donizetti and Bellini were known to have written roles specifically for her voice.

Although the performance was officially directed by Michael Umlauf, the theatre's Kapellmeister, Beethoven shared the stage with him. However, two years earlier, Umlauf had watched as the composer's attempt to conduct a dress rehearsal of his opera *Fidelio* ended in disaster. So this time, he instructed the singers and musicians to ignore the almost totally deaf Beethoven. At the beginning of every part, Beethoven, who sat by the stage, gave the tempos. He was turning the pages of his score and beating time for an orchestra he could not hear.

There are a number of anecdotes about the premiere of the Ninth. Based on the testimony of the participants, there are suggestions that it was under-rehearsed (there were only two full rehearsals) and rather scrappy in execution. On the other hand, the premiere was a great success. In any case, Beethoven was not to blame, as violinist Joseph Böhm recalled: "Beethoven directed the piece himself; that is, he stood before the lectern and gesticulated furiously. At times he rose, at other times he shrank to the ground, he moved as if he wanted to play all the instruments himself and sing for the whole chorus. All the musicians minded his rhythm alone while playing".

When the audience applauded—testimonies differ over whether at the end of the scherzo or the whole symphony—Beethoven was several measures off and still conducting. Because of that, the contralto Caroline Unger walked over and turned Beethoven around to accept the audience's cheers and applause. According to one witness, "the public received the musical hero with the utmost respect and sympathy, listened to his wonderful, gigantic creations with the most absorbed attention and broke out in jubilant applause, often during sections, and repeatedly at the end of them." The whole audience acclaimed him through standing ovations five times; there were handkerchiefs in the air, hats, raised hands, so that Beethoven, who could not hear the applause, could at least see the ovation gestures.

Beethoven Symphony No. 9

Charles Munch Boston Symphony Orchestra

1. Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso 14:11
2. Molto vivace 10:31
3. Adagio molto e cantabile 14:23
4. Presto - Allegro assai - Rezitativo:
'O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!' 23:55

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