

In the 1950s, Mercury records established its musical reputation largely with two intense, exciting European conductors performing miracles in the American provinces: Antal Dorati in Minneapolis, and Paul Paray in Detroit. With the less potent Howard Hanson advocating American music in Rochester, Dorati took most of the Austro-German, Hungarian, and Russian repertory, with Paray treating the French literature as far more than leftovers. Paray's interpretations were generally faster and more sharply pointed than those of the period's two other great French conductors, Charles Münch and Pierre Monteux. His Mercury recordings are the high point of a long, distinguished career spent largely away from the world's most prominent podiums.

Paray had made his U.S. debut in New York in 1939, and it would be in America that he achieved his greatest renown. In 1952 he was named music director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, where he remained until 1963. Though not one of the world's sleekest ensembles, the Detroit Symphony under Paray's hands became noted for its snap and fire, especially through the recordings it made for Mercury. These LPs focused largely on French music, although Paray acquitted himself admirably with other works, including a Schumann cycle. The recorded performances tended to be bracingly fast (especially the Saint-Saëns "Organ" Symphony and Franck D minor Symphony), yet Paray's phrasing was supple and witty, and the orchestra played with great precision, high energy, and light heart. For decades these 1950s recordings, particularly of Ravel and various light overtures, inspired great affection among collectors.

After his departure from Detroit and return to France, Paray continued to conduct sporadically. At the age of 91 he led a concert in Nice to celebrate Marc Chagall's 90th birthday, and at 92 he made his last American appearance, with the orchestra of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

BERLIOZ SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE



PAUL PARAY DETROIT SYMPHONY

Symphonie fantastique is a piece of program music that tells the story of an artist gifted with a lively imagination who has poisoned himself with opium in the depths of despair because of hopeless, unrequited love. Berlioz provided his own preface and program notes for each movement of the work. They exist in two principal versions – one from 1845 in the first score of the work and the second from 1855. From the revised preface and notes, it can be seen how Berlioz, later in his life, downplayed the programmatic aspect of the work.

In the first score from 1845, he writes:

“ The composer’s intention has been to develop various episodes in the life of an artist, in so far as they lend themselves to musical treatment. As the work cannot rely on the assistance of speech, the plan of the instrumental drama needs to be set out in advance. The following programme must therefore be considered as the spoken text of an opera, which serves to introduce musical move-

ments and to motivate their character and expression.”

In the 1855 preface, a different outlook towards the work’s programmatic undertones is established by Berlioz:

“ The following programme should be distributed to the audience every time the Symphonie fantastique is performed dramatically and thus followed by the monodrama of L elio which concludes and completes the episode in the life of an artist. In this case the invisible orchestra is placed on the stage of a theatre behind the lowered curtain. If the symphony is performed on its own as a concert piece this arrangement is no longer necessary: one may even dispense with distributing the programme and keep only the title of the five movements. The author hopes that the symphony provides on its own sufficient musical interest independently of any dramatic intention.

BERLIOZ SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE

PAUL PARAY DETROIT SYMPHONY

- I. Rêveries – Passions 11:30**
- II. Un bal 5:34**
- III. Scène aux champs 14:36**
- IV. Marche au supplice 4:25**
- VI. Songe d'une nuit du sabbat 8:59**
- Total Time: 45:04**

Recorded by Mercury Records 28 November 1959 in the Cass Technical High School Auditorium, Detroit
Engineer – C. R. Fine Engineer [Co-Engineer] – Robert Eberenz
Producer [Musical Director] – Harold Lawrence Producer [Recording Director] – Wilma Cozart