

Walter. At the age of 41, he made his conducting debut in Paris, thereafter conducting many French orchestras and making numerous French recordings. Munch's identification with German and Viennese music, as a conductor steeped in the style of such music, should come as no surprise. And his background as a well-schooled and experienced violinist registers in the translucence and glowing richness of the exquisite Boston string tone.

In live performances, Munch was known as a fiery conductor who could find inspiration "in the moment" and take the music in unexpected (and unrehearsed) directions, relying on the superb quality of his orchestra to follow him. This often made for exciting but not necessarily well thought-out interpretations. However, in recording sessions, he was quite conscious of creating a legacy, and his commercial recordings are often models of orchestral discipline and polish, while still generating excitement, with an organic, living quality to the phrasing that holds the listener enthralled. These qualities illuminate Brahms Symphony No. 2 in one of its greatest and most exciting recordings, now heard in its full glory in high resolution sound.

BRAHMS • Symphony No. 2 •

Boston Symphony Orchestra • CHARLES MUNCH



This glorious early stereo recording was released by RCA in 1956 in two formats, mono LP and stereo two-track 7.5 IPS reel-to-reel tape, which at the time was the only consumer format in which stereo recordings could be heard. With the advent of stereo LPs in 1958, many of RCA's great stereo recordings made prior to 1958 were issued on the legendary Living Stereo record label, but for an unknown reason this particular recording was never released on LP in stereo until after RCA's mid-priced Gold Seal label was established in 1975, some two decades after the recording was made. In the interim, on LP, this recording unaccountably existed only in mono.

This peculiar history may account for the general lack of recognition that this wonderful recording has been accorded over the years. There is certainly no audible or musical reason for RCA's failure to release it on stereo LP in the late 1950's. This recording, as originally released, does exhibit some imperfect tape splices, all of which have been repaired, but this situation did not prevent release of other recordings having similar small flaws.

Charles Munch (1891-1968) had the good fortune to preside over one of America's very greatest virtuoso orchestras, the

Boston Symphony, during a period of rapid progress in recording technology, encompassing the "golden era" of stereo recordings starting in the 1950's and continuing into the 1960's. He was Music Director in Boston from 1948-1962, and his many recordings for RCA during this period document what is also a golden era for this orchestra, setting a standard for tonal excellence that it has seldom surpassed since. Munch became known as a definitive conductor of French music, but he was much more than that, as demonstrated by the present recording.

Born in Strasbourg, Alsace, in the part of France that borders on Germany, he considered himself, as an Alsacian, to have as much German heritage as French. He was conscripted into the German army in World War I and wounded at Verdun. Subsequently he continued his studies as a violinist, studying with the great violin pedagogue Carl Flesch in Berlin and with Lucien Capet at the Paris Conservatoire. Thereafter he became professor of violin at the Strasbourg Conservatoire and assistant concertmaster of the Strasbourg Philharmonic. In the early 1920s he became concertmaster of the Gürzenich Orchestra in Cologne under conductor Hermann Abendroth and subsequently, from 1926 to 1933, concertmaster of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under both Wilhelm Furtwängler and Bruno

Brahms Symphony No. 2

Charles Munch / Boston Symphony Orchestra

- 1 Allegro non troppo 14:04**
- 2 Adagio non troppo 8:43**
- 3 Allegretto grazioso 4:58**
- 4 Allegro con spirito 8:50**

Recorded by RCA on December 5, 1955, at Symphony Hall, Boston

Producer: John Pfeiffer Recording Engineer: Lewis Layton

Transferred from original issue 1956 two-track reel-to-reel stereo tape.

Transfer by Robert Witrak, HDTT Chief Engineer;

restoration by Robert Witrak and John Haley, Harmony Restorations, LLC, 2023.



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info@highdeftapetransfers.ca
or visit our website:
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