

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).

Debussy **IMAGES FOR ORCHESTRA**

Gigues / Iberia / Rondes De Printemps

Boston Symphony Orchestra / Charles Munch



The three works which collectively form Claude Debussy's *Images* for orchestra, not to be confused with the two sets of piano works that go by the same title, are among the more immediately accessible and directly expressive of his later pieces. Although intended to be performed in succession, the *Images* are frequently heard independently of one another, especially the second, "Iberia," which remains among the composer's most frequently played orchestral works. The three works, which continue to be published as separate titles, were initially released at different times, with the first being composed and published several years after the second and third.

"Gigues" was written from 1909–1912, and has a decidedly English flavor. Debussy quotes the English folk tune "The Keel Row" throughout as the tune ebbs and swirls in the colored orchestral texture, surfacing in one instrument, fading back into the texture, and then resurfacing on another instrument. Debussy makes striking use of the oboe d'amore in the opening "Gigues" -- indeed, it can be said that this unique instrument constitutes more of a musical "theme" than does any actual melody. A plaintive tone predominates; the few hints of joyfulness are clearly the product of wistful fantasy.

The central "Iberia" (1905–1908), itself divided into three movements, is more outgoing in nature (as French representations of Spanish music and culture almost invariably seem to be). The celebratory yet undeniably aristocratic atmosphere of "Iberia" owes a great deal to the earlier *Fêtes* from the *Nocturnes*, which rides the same fine line between the vernacular and the high-minded. Debussy's score even calls for guitars and castanets, a

remarkable request at that time. There is a decadent flavor to "Parfums de la nuit," whose nocturnal activities form the center of the piece dawn arrives with the feeling that nothing has actually happened. The last movement of "Iberia" is kaleidoscopic in feel: Debussy presents a series of disconnected, seemingly random (but actually not so in any sense) musical ideas in a manner that foreshadows his *Jeux* (1912) and the processes used by many later composers, including so-called aleatoric music. The raw exuberance of a Spanish celebration drives the music to heights of a strained passion, and at times seems to be an attempt to conceal a great melancholy.

The last of the *Images*, "Rondes de printemps," was composed between 1905 and 1909. It is a product of the same turn-of-the-century French obsession with spring that encouraged Diaghilev to commission Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps*. Debussy had himself composed an orchestral work entitled *Printemps* as a young man, and countless musical and literary works from the period go by similar titles. In *Images* however, spring has nothing in common with Stravinsky's famous work. "Rondes de printemps" is an unassuming work based on one of Debussy's favorite nursery tunes, "Nous n'irons plus au bois," a melody he incorporated into a number of compositions. Like "Gigues," "Rondes de printemps" is introspective and nostalgic, short on activity and long on tone-color. "Debussy spreads color throughout the ensemble in a masterly, and deceptively simple display of orchestration, rather than focusing on a single instrument as he did in "Gigues."

Debussy IMAGES FOR ORCHESTRA

Gigues / Iberia / Rondes De Printemps

Boston Symphony Orchestra / Charles Munch

Images For Orchestra : Gigues

1 Gigues 6:26

Images For Orchestra : Ibéria

2 Par Les Rues Et Par Les Chemins 6:57

3 Les Parfums De La Nuit 8:00

4 Le Matin D'Un Jour De Fête 4:26

Images For Orchestra : Rondes De Printemps

5 Rondes De Printemps 7:15

Total Time: 33:04

Recorded December 16, 1957 by RCA

Producer: Richard Mohr Recording Engineer: Lewis Layton

Venue: Boston Symphony Hall



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