

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.

Paray never solidly established himself as a composer, although he produced a number of substantial works before his Detroit appointment. These include two full symphonies (1935, 1940), sonatas for violin and cello, the ballet *Artémis troublée* (also performed as a symphonic poem under the title *Adonis troublé*), and a Mass for the 500th Anniversary of the Death of Joan of Arc, first performed in Rouen in 1931 and recorded in Detroit in 1956. His style was traditionally diatonic, and very much in the manner of the academically-oriented early twentieth century French composers, including D'Indy and his followers.



**SYMPHONY
IN D MINOR**

FRANCK

PAUL PARAY

CONDUCTING THE

**DETROIT SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA**

César Franck's fame and reputation rest largely upon a small number of compositions, most of them composed toward the end of his life. Of these, the Symphony in D minor was one of his last works. It was first performed only a year before Franck died.

The fact that Franck finally chose to write a symphony is itself unusual, given the rarity of the form in 19th-century France, which considered the symphony a mainstay of German music. It is likely that the genesis of the Symphony in D minor followed upon the success of his influential Symphonic Variations for piano and orchestra composed in 1885.

Like the earlier works of Saint-Saëns and Berlioz, as with his own compositions, Franck also made use of a cyclic structure in the composition of his symphony. Indeed, the Symphony in D minor remains the most outstanding example of cyclic symphonic writing in the Romantic tradition. However, Franck also used a typically "Germanic" sound, eschewing both the novelties of orchestration (with one notable exception) or nationalist thematic inspiration that Saint-Saëns and d'Indy had used to differentiate their own symphonic works. As a result, Franck's Symphony in D minor can be seen as the union of two largely distinct national forms: the French cyclic form with the German romantic symphonic form, with clear Wagnerian and Lisztian influences.

Due in part to this unexpected fusion, the piece was poorly received upon its first performance. More importantly, however, the reception of Franck's symphony was greatly affected by the politicised world of French music following the split in the Société Nationale de Musique, which had been founded by Saint-Saëns in 1871 in the anti-German spirit aroused by the Franco-Prussian War, to promote a French style of music. The 1886 split was driven by the Société's decision to accept "foreign" (i.e. principally German) music and an admiration for the music of Richard Wagner by some of its younger members (notably Franck himself and

D'Indy). This unacceptable betrayal of French music led several conservative members of the Société, led by Saint-Saëns, to resign; Franck himself thereon assumed the presidency. The resulting environment was poisonous.^[3] The controversy permeated the Conservatoire de Paris and made it very difficult for Franck to get his symphony premiered. His score rejected by the leading conductor Charles Lamoureux, Franck resorted to the conservatory orchestra which was obliged to play faculty works. Even then, rehearsals were desultory and reaction negative.

Politics continued to determine the popular reaction to the symphony's first performance. Critics saw the work as a clumsy attempt at orchestral writing that departed too stridently from the classical symphonic form and harmonic rules of Haydn and Beethoven. Contemporaries, mostly allied with the conservative faction of the Société Nationale de Musique, were unsparing. The noted music critic, a close friend and voluminous correspondent of Camille Saint-Saëns, Camille Bellaigue (1858-1930) dismissed it as "arid and drab music, without ... grace or charm," and derided the principal four-bar theme upon which the symphony expands throughout as "hardly above the level of those given to Conservatoire students." It is derived from the 'Muss es sein?' fragment from Beethoven's final String Quartet op. 135. The review *Le Ménestrel* called it "morose.... Franck had very little to say here, but he proclaims it with the conviction of the pontiff defining dogma." And Charles Gounod, also making implicit reference to the idea of a dogmatic German style, wrote of it: "incompetence pushed to dogmatic lengths."

Regardless, within several years of its composition, the symphony was regularly being programmed across Europe and in the United States. It received its American premiere in Boston on 16 January 1899 under the baton of Wilhelm Gericke.

Franck Symphony in D Minor

Paul Paray Detroit Symphony Orchestra

1 Lento; Allegro Non Troppo 16:00

2 Allegretto 8:51

3 Allegro Non Troppo 9:11

Total Time: 34:02

Recorded by Mercury Records 1961 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



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