

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 Fleisch 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).



HIGH DEFINITION TAPE TRANSFERS

Felix Mendelssohn Symphony No.4 Italian Symphony No. 5 Reformation

Charles Munch conducts the
Boston Symphony Orchestra



Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Felix. Fine Landscape of the Amalfi Coast

Mastered in DSD256



Facts about this Recording

Recorded by RCA 1958

Producer: Richard Mohr. Engineer: Lewis Layton

Transferred from a 15ips 2-track tape

The Symphony No. 4 in A major, Op. 90, commonly known as the Italian,[1] is an orchestral symphony written by German composer Felix Mendelssohn. The work has its origins (such as the composer's "Scottish/3rd Symphony" and "The Hebrides" overture) in the tour of Europe which occupied Mendelssohn from 1829 to 1831. Its inspiration is the colour and atmosphere of Italy, where Mendelssohn made sketches but left the work incomplete:

This is Italy! And now has begun what I have always thought... to be the supreme joy in life. And I am loving it. Today was so rich that now, in the evening, I must collect myself a little, and so I am writing to you to thank you, dear parents, for having given me all this happiness.

In February he wrote from Rome to his sister Fanny,

The Italian symphony is making great progress. It will be the jolliest piece I have ever done, especially the last movement. I have not found anything for the slow movement yet, and I think that I will save that for Naples.

The Italian Symphony was finished in Berlin on 13 March 1833, in response to an invitation for a symphony from the London (now Royal) Philharmonic Society; he conducted the first performance himself in London on 13 May 1833 at a London Philharmonic Society concert. The symphony's success, and Mendelssohn's popularity, influenced the course of British music for the rest of the century. However, Mendelssohn remained unsatisfied with the composition, which cost him, he said, some of the bitterest moments of his career; he revised it in 1834[4] and even planned to write alternate versions of the second, third, and fourth movements. He never published the symphony, and it appeared in print only in 1851; thus it is numbered as his 'Symphony No. 4', even though it was in fact the third he composed.

The piece is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings. It is in four movements.

The Symphony No. 5 in D major/D minor, Op. 107, known as the Reformation, was composed by Felix Mendelssohn in 1830 in honor of the 300th anniversary of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession. The Confession is a key document of Lutheranism and its Presentation to Emperor Charles V in June 1530 was a momentous event of the Protestant Reformation. This symphony was written for a full orchestra and was Mendelssohn's second extended symphony. It was not published until 1868, 21 years after the composer's death—hence its numbering as '5'. Although the symphony is not very frequently performed, it is better known today than it was during Mendelssohn's lifetime.

In December 1829, a year before the King of Prussia Frederick William III had even announced the tercentennial Augsburg celebrations, Mendelssohn began work on the Reformation Symphony. Mendelssohn hoped to have it performed at the festivities in Berlin which took place on 25 June 1830. He had intended to finish the composition by January 1830 and tour for four months before the celebrations began in June. However, his ill health caused the Reformation Symphony to take longer to compose than he had initially expected. In late March the symphony was still in a state of fabrication, and in an inauspicious turn of events Mendelssohn caught measles from his sister Rebecka. With a further delay of the composing and touring, Mendelssohn eventually completed the symphony in May. Unfortunately, it was too late for the Augsburg commission to recognize the symphony for the celebrations.

Some authorities have suggested that antisemitism may have played a role in the symphony's absence from Augsburg. But the successful competitor, Eduard Grell, had already established himself as a competent and successful composer who was gaining considerable popularity in Berlin. Grell was extremely conservative in his compositions; his piece for male chorus perhaps matched what the Augsburg celebrations demanded, in contrast to Mendelssohn's extensive symphony, which may have been thought inappropriate at the time. Mendelssohn resumed his touring immediately after he had completed the Reformation Symphony. In Paris, in 1832, Habeneck's orchestra turned the work down as 'too learned'; the music historian Larry Todd suggests that perhaps they also felt it to be too Protestant. He did not offer the symphony for performance at London. During the summer of 1832, Mendelssohn returned to Berlin where he revised the symphony. Later that year a performance of the Reformation Symphony finally took place. By 1838 however Mendelssohn regarded the symphony as 'a piece of juvenilia', and he never performed it again. It was not performed again until 1868, more than 20 years after the composer's death.

Felix Mendelssohn

Symphony No.4 Italian

Symphony No. 5 Reformation

Charles Munch conducts the
Boston Symphony Orchestra

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Symphony No. 4 in A Major, Op. 90 - 'Italian'

1. Allegro vivace
2. Andante con moto
3. Con moto moderato
4. Saltarello: Presto

Symphony No. 5 in D major/D minor 'Reformation'

5. Andante; Allegro con fuoco
6. Allegro vivace
7. Andante
8. Chorale

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