

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 Orchestre 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).

RAVEL

Daphnis Et Chloe

Complete Ballet

Charles Munch • Boston Symphony Orchestra



Many consider *Daphnis et Chloé*, a symphonie chorégraphique in three scenes to be Maurice Ravel's greatest work. The label may not really be a fair one; there were so many different Maurice Ravels throughout his life, each with a different set of musical goals, each exploring different musical worlds, that it is not right to assign the label of life masterpiece to the top work of any one of those periods, over the top works of all the others, just because it happens to be longer, more ambitious, and easier to access. But *Daphnis et Chloé* is certainly one of the most colorfully, intricately, and in a very immediate, almost physical sense, beautifully scored works ever written; if one were to assign pre-eminent status to any of Ravel's works solely on the basis of orchestration, this ballet would, without a doubt, be the one selected for the honor. There may be no more skillfully orchestrated work in all the twentieth century repertoire (Stravinsky's work included) and whole shelves of orchestration textbooks could be eliminated without loss by simply replacing them with an astute examination of this score.

Daphnis et Chloé was composed between 1909 and 1912, after a commission by Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, and is a setting of a scenario adapted by Mikhail Fokine from the Greek work of the same name by Longus. It was premiered on June 8, 1912. The performance was not well prepared, and few people took note of Ravel's piece. Two orchestral suites derived from the score, however, did make a splash

when Ravel brought them out just a short time after (especially the Suite No. 2, which is probably still Ravel's most often-played work).

Ravel was always far more interested in reproducing traditional musical forms and structures than he was in achieving the kind of sonic soundscapes that get rather callously lumped together as impressionist music; *Daphnis et Chloé* is, section-by-section, built along firmly classical lines (Ravel was extremely proud of the fact). Even the famous sunrise music at the opening of the third scene, with its scintillating thirty-second notes strewn about the orchestra and bright chirrup from the flute and piccolo flute and ecstatic, rising melody, has nothing in it that might be called progressive or even especially innovative in a technical sense, though certainly nothing written before it sounds even remotely like it. This was the essence of Ravel's genius: the ability to take the old and make it somehow sound completely new and different. Whether *Daphnis et Chloé* is Ravel's greatest achievement may be an irrelevant question: from the very first call of the backstage choir, distant and brought forth from an ancient world of shepherds and nymphs, to the rhythmic revelry of the final dance, it is proof on paper of Ravel's astounding capacity to fuse diverse elements into an astonishing new whole.

RAVEL

Daphnis Et Chloe

Complete Ballet

Charles Munch • Boston Symphony Orchestra

1. Part I: 24:46
 2. Part II : 29:28
- Total Time: 54:14

Recorded by RCA 1955 at Boston Symphony Hall
Engineer – Leslie Chase Producer – John Pfeiffer



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