

BUILDINGS ON CRAWFORD STREET, BOSTON-1870'S

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BUILDINGS ON COURT STREET, BOSTON, 1870'S



The Aristocrat of Orchestras

GOLDEN YEARS OF THE BOSTON SYMPHONY

KARL MUCK

Wagner LOHENGRIN: PRELUDE TO ACT III

PIERRE MONTEUX

Debussy NOCTURNES: NUAGES and FÊTES

SERGE KOUSSEVITZKY

Prokofieff CLASSICAL SYMPHONY
Satie GYMNOPIÉDIES Nos. 1 and 2

CHARLES MUNCH

Berlioz THE DAMNATION OF FAUST (Excerpts)

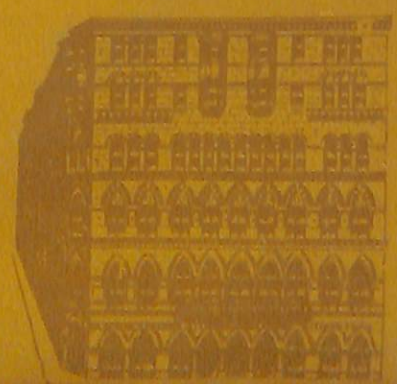
BUILDINGS ON WASHINGTON STREET,
BOSTON, 1870'S



BUILDINGS ON TREMONT STREET, BOSTON, IN THE 1870'S



BUILDINGS ON SCHOOL STREET,
BOSTON, 1870'S



The Boston Symphony Orchestra, publicly owned and supported as all orchestras must be in our present economy, was for its first thirty-seven years the property of one man. Major Henry Lee Higginson was a New England gentleman, an officer of the Civil War, a banker by inheritance, a lover of music by choice. He assembled his orchestra in 1881 with the symphonic performances he had heard in Vienna as his model. He brought from Europe the best musicians he could obtain and such conductors as Arthur Nikisch, Wilhelm Gericke and Karl Muck. Symphony Hall was built in 1900 to be the Orchestra's permanent home. It was an acoustical pioneer in its time and is still ranked among the most successful in this day of advanced study in the properties of sound. The Boston Symphony Orchestra grew through the years in proficiency and brilliance, and eventually became the model for orchestras in many centers of the United States. Under the meticulous and thoroughly schooled hand of Karl Muck it reached a special peak of perfection. In 1918 the Orchestra was incorporated as a public charge and a new era began.

Dr. Muck and three of his successors, each of whom has brought the Orchestra fresh glories according to his particular skill and outlook in an ever-changing musical world, are represented by recordings in this album. They are: Pierre Monteux, who was the conductor from 1919-1924; Serge Koussevitzky, who was musical director for twenty-five years (1924-1949); and Charles Munch, who succeeded him and retired after thirteen years at the end of the season in 1962.

This Orchestra as it sounded before the time of Karl Muck exists only in legendary accounts and in the memories of the few of us who have been living long enough to have heard it. Since then, with the exception of Pierre Monteux who has made records with this Orchestra only in recent years in the capacity of guest conductor, concerts under each leader are preserved in recorded sound.

The special qualities of Karl Muck's orchestra were difficult, almost impossible to capture faithfully, for orchestral recording was in its infancy—in fact the few recordings then made by the Victor Talking Machine Company were the first attempts to capture the sound of a great orchestra. Since electrical methods were not yet invented, Muck and his musicians had to be transported to Camden, New Jersey, crowded into a soundproof studio, and placed at appropriate distances from an acoustical horn for the sake of balance.

The term of Serge Koussevitzky included many recordings through the years, saw the beginnings of electrical recording, and ended at the beginning of the long-playing era. Koussevitzky's splendid performances of the works he introduced and made famous are still vividly remembered—especially the music of contemporary France and Russia. He often performed the *Gymnopédies* of Erik Satie, the patron artist of the French "Six"—slow and placid dance movements of exquisite delicacy. To make known Prokofiev's music was to Koussevitzky a mission, a privilege in which he rejoiced. He had followed Prokofiev's growth in Russia, published his music in his own *Édition Russe*, performed it in Russia and in Paris. When Koussevitzky came to the United States, Prokofiev's music was all but unknown in Boston or anywhere else in the new world. He introduced the Classical Symphony in Boston on January 28, 1927, and took it to New York and many cities on tour for a first hearing. Prokofiev's witty imitation of an eighteenth-century form, done freely in his own style with his own skill in brevity, point and humor, progressed from a Koussevitzky specialty to a general favorite.

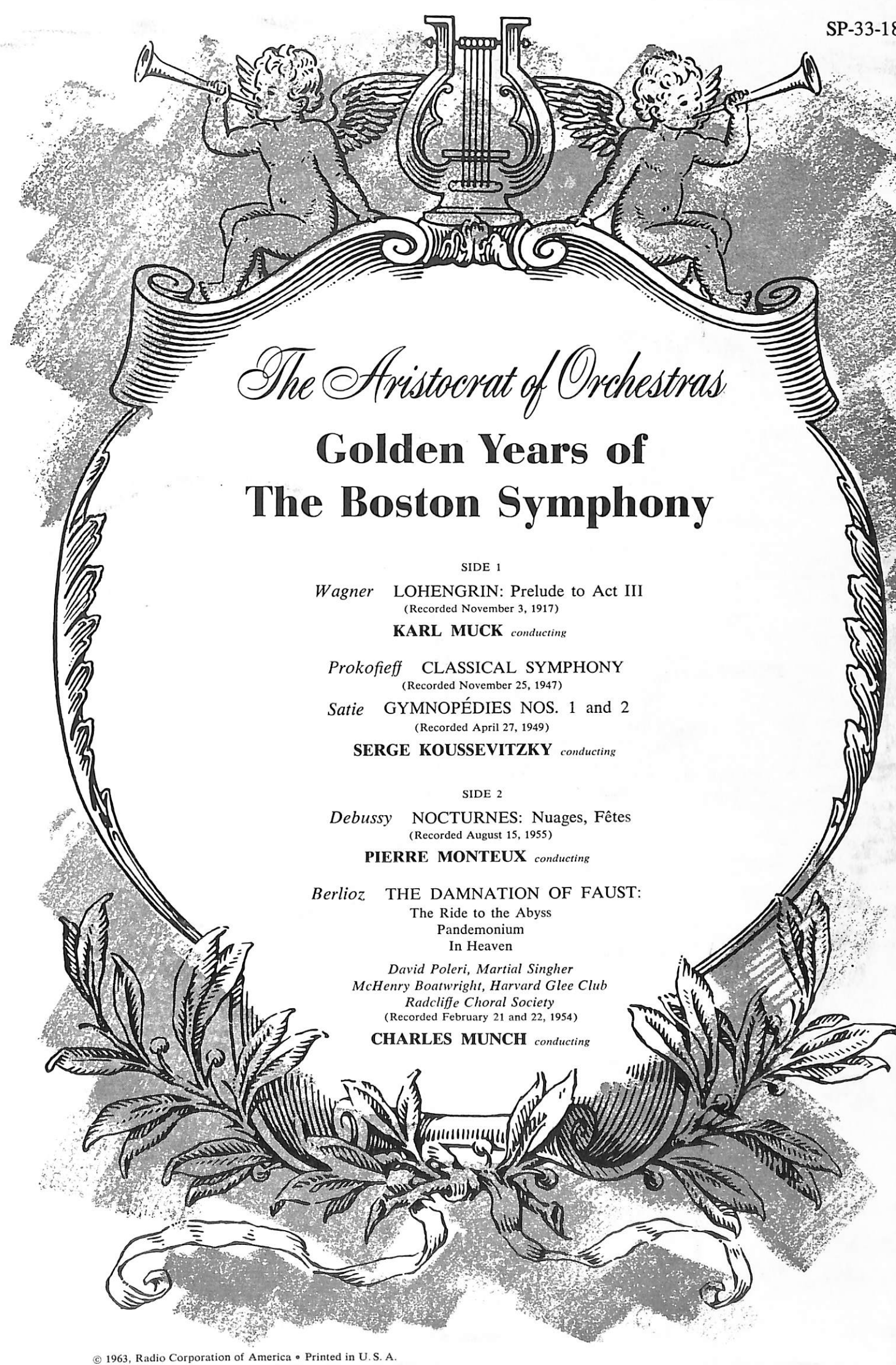
Pierre Monteux is now received by Boston Symphony Orchestra audiences as if he were still their own, although many years have passed since he was the nominal leader. Debussy's *Nocturnes*, which he recorded in Symphony Hall, first appeared in his Boston programs as long ago as October 7, 1921.

In somewhat the same way that the music of Prokofiev has come to be associated with Serge Koussevitzky, the music of Berlioz will long be especially associated with Charles Munch. All conductors, conscientious as they may be about offering their audiences a balanced and representative repertory, are apt to have their own predilections which they interpret with their own inner sympathy and understanding. Dr. Munch has led in Boston and likewise recorded all of the important orchestral and choral works of Berlioz in the course of thirteen years. *The Damnation of Faust* has been chosen as an eloquent representation of the lately retired leader. These are the three closing scenes. Faust is compelled by Mephistopheles, to whom he has sold his soul, to pay the price by galloping down to hell, where he is greeted by a host of demons in what the composer would like us to believe is the language of that region. Marguerite is redeemed and received in heaven by an angelic chorus. There could not be a greater contrast than these scenes of dire catastrophe and celestial beatification. But contrast is said to be the very life of the dramatic art, and of Berlioz' in particular.

— JOHN N. BURK

Mr. Burk is historian of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and program annotator of its concert bulletin. He is also the author of *Beethoven: His Life and Works* and *Mozart and His Music*.

Cover: Old Boston streets from original wood engravings in the T. J. Lyons Press collection



The Aristocrat of Orchestras

Golden Years of The Boston Symphony

SIDE 1

Wagner LOHENGRIN: Prelude to Act III
(Recorded November 3, 1917)

KARL MUCK conducting

Prokofiev CLASSICAL SYMPHONY
(Recorded November 25, 1947)

Satie GYMNOPÉDIES NOS. 1 and 2
(Recorded April 27, 1949)

SERGE KOUSSEVITZKY conducting

SIDE 2

Debussy NOCTURNES: Nuages, Fêtes
(Recorded August 15, 1955)

PIERRE MONTEUX conducting

Berlioz THE DAMNATION OF FAUST:
The Ride to the Abyss
Pandemonium
In Heaven

David Poleri, Martial Singher
McHenry Boatwright, Harvard Glee Club
Radcliffe Choral Society
(Recorded February 21 and 22, 1954)

CHARLES MUNCH conducting