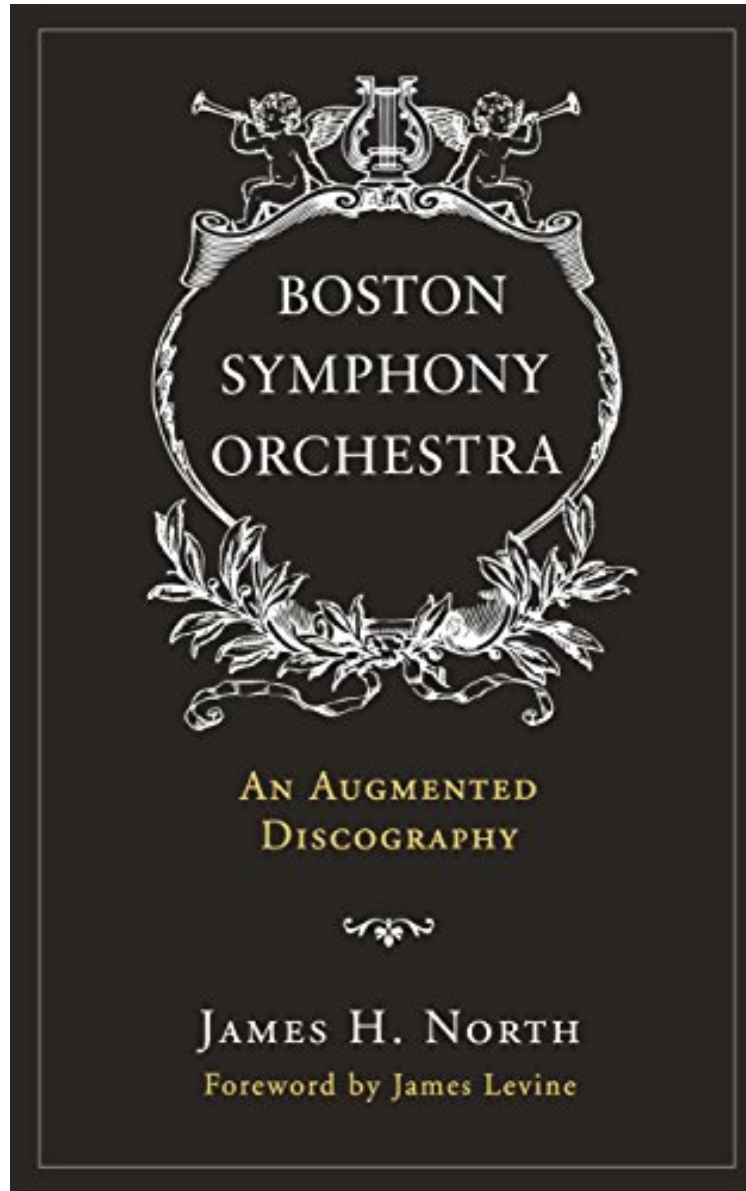


# Boston Symphony Orchestra: An Augmented Discography

*James H. North*

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#3656427 in Books 2008-10-09 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.46 x 1.22 x 6.371, 1.35 #File Name: 0810862093340 pages | File size: 65.Mb

**James H. North : Boston Symphony Orchestra: An Augmented Discography** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Boston Symphony Orchestra: An Augmented Discography:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A collector's delightBy DiscophageHave you ever considered how narrow the gamut of music directors in charge of the Boston Symphony Orchestra has been? Think of it (in

chronological order): Muck, Monteux, Koussevitzky, Munch, Leinsdorf, Ozawa, Levine. It goes only from K to O. Do the BSO trustees have a problem with the alphabet?(No, this is a spoof. It works only because I've omitted some of the music directors, including some that have made recordings and are listed in James H. North's discography - but I'll let you find out who). Three years after his invaluable discography of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra (New York Philharmonic: The Authorized Recordings, 1917-2005), James H. North does it again, now with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. I've published a (very) long and detailed review of the previous book (thanks for letting me overstep the length limits!), with many lauds - and a few criticisms. While I accepted the rationale of listing only the recordings whose release had been duly authorized by the orchestra and made under its full name (which excluded all the "pirate" issues of live, broadcast performances), my criticisms had to do, a. with the decision to cross-reference the entries from the main (chronological) discography, in the indexes by composers, conductors and soloists, by session date and not by page, which upon usage turns out to be quite unwieldy; b. with the absence of an index of labels, which made it difficult to find out the companion pieces on disc of a given recording, and even impossible in the case of larger collections; c. with North's inconsistent treatment of the foreign CD releases, sometimes mentioned, sometimes not, and not always with a perceptible logic; d. and, in the same vein, with what appeared as a not always consistent treatment of the "unauthorized" CD reissues of recordings officially released on LP or 78rpm. Three years later, North has improved things.... somewhat. The principles of presentation remain the same: the main list is ordered chronologically, by date of recording, which provides a nice history of the Orchestra's recording activity. But there are three indexes, by conductor, composer and soloist, so if you are looking, say, for all the Bartok recordings made by the orchestra, or all those made by Koussevitzky, or Munch, or Monteux, it is easy... relatively, because again, in those appendixes North refers to the main list only by session date and not by page, which doesn't make it entirely convenient to find the main entry. Ultimately, I find myself pencilling in all those page numbers in the conductors index, and I wish North had done it for me. And there is still no index by label, making it still as inconvenient to find disc-mates, especially with the big, 12-CD commemorative set of broadcast performances released in 2001 by the orchestra, with recordings that run throughout the orchestra's history, from 1943 to 2000 (Boston Symphony Orchestra - Symphony Hall Centennial Celebration, From the Broadcast Archives 1943-2000). North has done again the mammoth job of sorting out the recording dates, venues, label number of the various issues, matrix numbers in the case of the 78rmps, and all the trivia info that avid collectors just love to read; many of the entries are graced with illuminating comments on the circumstances of the particular recording... or the reasons why it wasn't released after all (like: the December 31, 1937 recording of the Brahms Violin Concerto by Heifetz and Koussevitzky; it is their remake from April 11, 1939 that came out). From the Koussevitzky era North has unearthed two unreleased recordings not previously attributed to the BSO - Micaela's aria from Bizet's Carmen and a Louise Aria from Charpentier's opera, conducted by Koussevitzky and sung by his recent Tanglewood discovery, the African-American singer Dorothy Maynor - because RCA Victor's recording log was in the soloist's folder (page 20 - it is not entirely clear if North's comment refers only to the Bizet or to both arias). He points out that Pearl's CD reissue of Koussevitzky's Brahms third is too slow, "the transfer engineers seldom understanding that [the BSO under Koussevitzky] played at an elevated pitch" (again it is not clear if North's comment extends to the Dante Lys reissue). One big and much appreciated improvement over North's previous discography is that his references to CD releases seem more thorough than with the NYPO... but that I think is because there have been less, the many bootleg or semi-bootleg labels having concentrated principally on releasing early recordings from the New York Phil (foremost the mono recordings of Walter, Toscanini, Stokowski, Stravinsky and Mitropoulos). The BSO's recording activities were really almost monopolized by Koussevitzky between 1928 and 1950, and the reissues of those Koussevitzky years have themselves been monopolized by RCA (a little), Biddulph and Pearl massively (bless them!), but North also duly and commendably lists the French United Archives set, and the relevant releases by Dante LYS, Andante, Naxos Historical, Rockport Classics, Dutton, Preiser, Arkiv, EMI... or the BSO itself. Double checking on Benot Duhoux' great online Munch discography, I did locate a few omissions here on the part of North, like the 2005 reissue on Naxos historical of Bruch's Violin Concerto with Menuhin from January 18, 1951, Bruch/Mendelssohn: Violin Cto (p. 44). On the other hand I'm not so happy with North's treatment of the Japanese RCA reissues of Munch in their great "The Art of Charles Munch" series. Granted, his principle is to list foreign releases only in the absence of US issues. Consequently, he does mention those Japanese Munch when there are no available Western CD reissue (as with Beethoven's Symphonies 6 to 8, Brahms' first Piano Concerto and Mendelssohn's Capriccio Brillante with Gary Graffman, Tchaikovsky's 4th Symphony, Strauss' Till Eulenspiegel, Stravinsky's Jeux de Cartes, Prokofiev's Romeo Juliette excerpts and second Piano Concerto with Nicole Henriot, Menotti's Violin Concerto with Tossy Spivakovsky, Piston's 6th Symphony and Martinu's 6th Symphony). But then, why does he omit mentioning the CD reissues under Ravel's G-major Concerto with Henriot (page 64), Schubert's 2nd Symphony, Beethoven's Creatures of Prometheus (both page 71) and Overtures to Leonore I II (page 55), Wagner's Rhine Journey from Gtterdmmernung (page 58)? Reading North's discography, you think these were still unreissued on CD. They're not. Since these CDs were issued a couple of years before North's book, the omissions seem simply to be the result of an oversight. Furthermore, even when there are competing US releases, North is NOT consistent in his treatment of those Japanese Munch reissues:

following his principle he usually doesn't mention them (examples include but are not limited to Brahms' Symphonies 2 4, page 53 and 65; Dvorak's 8th Symphony and Cello Concerto, page 71 72; the 1953 Berlioz Romeo Juliette and 1954 Symphonie fantastique, page 46 49; and you won't know that Munch's Beethoven 6th Symphony, listed since it is the sole CD reissue, is paired in Japan with the 5th, not listed as it has been reissued in the West with other pairings), but sometimes he does (Brahms 1st Symphony and Tragic Overture, page 65 53, Debussy's Martyre de Saint Sbastien, page 54). So what's the logic here? In fact, North should have systematically listed them, because they are an important series, a major source on Munch's Boston years on CD (thank God we've got the Japanese to do this and likewise with the similar Ormandy collection, and the Internet to make the world the market); also, if I had been anybody at the Scarecrow Press I would have considered that the Japanese market of music lovers and buyers of those Munch and Ormandy reissues (and there are obviously many more than in the US) would be one of my main selling targets. Principles should never be carried through against simple common sense. As concerns the recordings of Munch, the discography of B. Duhoux provides an indispensable complement to North, as it lists much more comprehensively the CD reissues. In his New York discography North added a much appreciated commented list of the videos of Bernstein's fabled Young People's Concert series, as well as an appendix on an obscure pedagogical collection from the 1920s. Here he offers much more of these enjoyable lagniappes: a list of RCA Victor's BSO two-track reel-to-reel tapes (appendix D), of the video recordings (appendix E; they are also mentioned in the main discography), a list of the recordings made by the BSO players, officially and duly contracted, but NOT under the orchestra's name (appendix G; these were the New Orchestral Society of Boston, the Zimmler Sinfonietta, the Arthur Fiedler's Sinfonietta - NOT the Boston Pop's, whose discography, even more abundant than the BSO's, North doesn't tackle - and the Columbia Symphony Orchestra: only three were made under the label's generic name, which was used for a number of orchestras, including the NYPO, the Cleveland Symphony and the Los Angeles Philharmonic), and a list of recordings by the Boston Symphony Chamber Players (appendix H). But the main improvement (and again a much appreciated one) in North's BSO discography over the previous one is that, now, we get a special appendix (I) with all the "pirate" recordings, those broadcast performances released without the orchestra's consent. Maybe that was made possible because there are less of those than with the NYPO... or maybe the management of the BSO was more lenient on this chapter than their counterparts at the NYPO. In the latter case, that would be a dramatic change... for the better. It still bites when I remember the controversy that arose in 1990, after the Italian AS Disc had released a big Koussevitzky/BSO series of broadcast performances, after similar collections from Music Arts devoted to broadcast performances of Monteux, Munch and Barbirolli. The BSO took immediate legal action, resulting in the withdrawal of these discs, at least in the US, and their rejection into the "grey" market of forbidden substances. I've retrieved from my shelves the July/August 1990 issue of Fanfare, in which writer, record collector and Sibelius and Stokowski specialist William R. Trotter wrote an incensed letter damning the BSO management for it. To which Kenneth Haas, managing director of the orchestra, bravely attempted to respond. I'll quote him to give the gist of his argument: "if recordings of performances such as those under consideration are to be circulated, this must be done only under such conditions as best preserve and reflect their quality. (...) Furthermore (...), the performances under consideration remain the property of the BSO, and the manufacture or distribution of unauthorized recordings of those performances (...) would be (...) violative of U.S. and applicable foreign law. In addition, we must consider the rights of the performers (...) to be compensated for their services in making the recordings". Haas added that the BSO "would be happy to see some of these recordings released for general circulation through legally authorized channels", and that there were ongoing projects with BMG to release some of the Koussevitzky material. In fact, read carefully, Haas contradicted NONE of Trotter's irate accusations that the BSO management was wantonly keeping their archive in the vaults and depriving the music lovers from hearing "how glorious the orchestra sounded under its most famous conductor", in whatever sonic condition, bad being better than nothing; on the contrary, he confirmed that the BSO would rather have these broadcasts NOT heard and kept in the vaults than heard in inferior sonic conditions, and (probably an even more decisive consideration) than not being paid for their release (the reference to the rights of the performers to be compensated makes me laugh, too. Haas probably meant: the estates of those performers). As for the plans to issue all that Koussevitzky material in superior sonic conditions, well, twenty years hence, we are still waiting. OK, I've been needing to vent that for the last twenty years, now I can move on. Back to North's inclusion of the pirate recordings, I note that this laudable decision leads him to some regrettable omissions in his listing of CD reissues: namely, those CD releases of broadcast performances that once were unauthorized/pirate, but one day became official by dint of the BSO officially releasing them on some of their commemorative collections. A good case in point is Koussevitzky's premiere performance of Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra - a performance of invaluable historical significance, and a crime against generations of music lovers that it had to wait more than 50 years to get an official release, on the orchestra's 12-CD set commemorative release of broadcast performances mentioned here above. Now, until that release, that broadcast was indeed available on CD, not on AS Disc but from another Italian pirate, Stradivarius (Interprets Bartok Brahms and bless them), where it was paired with another invaluable Koussevitzky broadcast performance of Brahms' first (a piece the Russian conductor never recorded "officially"). Well, North duly lists the Brahms in his discography of pirates (it has also been issued by Music Arts, Serge Koussevitzky Conducts

Brahms) - but not the Bartok, neither there nor in the main discography (only the BSO and Naxos releases are referenced), so you'll never know that it was indeed the companion-mate of that Brahms. The same is true with other recordings from that BSO 12-CD set: in 1987 and 1988 Music Arts released a two CD-set and two individual CDs of BSO broadcast performances by Munch (Franck-Faur CD 236(2), Debussy CD-277, Ravel CD 278 - I haven't found an entry on this website), that rapidly disappeared for the same reason as the AS discs. Those performances and CDs are duly listed in the pirate's list... except those that, subsequently, were officially released on the BSO set: they are now listed in the main discography only with the BSO-set's reference: Faur's Penelope-Overture and Franck's Chasseur Maudit, Ravel's Valse, Debussy's La Mer; and whatever became of the third piece on that Debussy disc, the complete Nocturnes from February 1962? It is not on the BSO set, but it is not listed either among the pirates as it should. Is that an implicit comment that it wasn't the BSO as MA claimed it was (how 'bout a note of explanation, then?), or simply an oversight? In any case it is all the more regrettable, as it is the only COMPLETE Nocturnes of Munch with the BSO, including Sirnes. But really, North should have listed in his main discography the previous "pirate" CD releases alongside the BSO set, just as he did with the Biddulph and Pearl reissues of Koussevitzky recordings, even when they competed with "official" RCA releases. One valuable side-product of North's decision to list the pirates, and another major plus over his NYPO discography, is his inclusion of yet another appendix (G) devoted to the "semi-official" "Government issues" made during WWII and after. As North explains, these were recordings issued by various branches of the US Government, reproduced either from broadcast performances or from commercial releases, for the consumption of the armed forces abroad, either directly with the famous "V-discs" or in the form of acetate and vinyl discs used for radio broadcasts of the Armed Forces Radio Services (AFRS, later adding "and Television" to its title) or Voice of America. The orchestra wasn't paid for it, but it was done with their consent, "initially as part of the "war effort" during WWII, and later as a contribution to America's relations with the rest of the world" as North puts it. In my review of his NYPO discography I complained that North hadn't included them, and even treated as a pirate and excluded from his discography a Cala release of a Stokowski broadcast retrieved from a V-disc, so I can only rejoice in his change of mind here. The list of broadcast performances from those ARFS discs held at the library of congress or in the BSO archive and hot for CD reissue, official or pirate, is simply tantalizing. Like: when do we get to hear Koussevitzky's premiere performance of William Schuman's Fifth Symphony, from Nov. 13, 1943? AS Disc, where art thou? A last point on those "pirates" and other CD reissues. The fate of all discographies, of course, is to become outdated, and the sooner they do, the better it is, since it shows that the record companies are still ploughing that furrow. So, North's appendix I doesn't list the contents of the latest West Hill Radio Archive Pierre Monteux and Charles Munch sets (respectively 8, 11 and 6 CDs), WHRA 6022, 6034, 6027, published between 2008 and 2010, not commercialized in the US and not listed here, with hours of "unauthorized" broadcast performances including compositions for which no other recordings by the respective conductor exist. Same with Bruckner's 7th by Munch, a live recording from 8 feb. 1958 and Munch's only extant recording of a Bruckner symphony, released in 2008 by Memories, Mozart Symphony No. 31(2/april/1954 Boston Live Recording), Symphony No. 41(26/december/1952). West Hill also released a set devoted to violinist Ruth Posselt, WHRA 6016, which includes a couple of BSO recordings, among which the premiere of the rare Violin Concerto of Edward Burlingame Hill (famous mainly for being Bernstein's teacher at Harvard) conducted by no less than Koussevitzky in November 1938. B. Duhoux' Munch discography was (regrettably) last updated in October 2008, but it helps (painstakingly) correct a few other omissions of North. North should have asked me to proofread his manuscript. There are a few typos, like an "LP" that should have been a CD (p. 298, Faur's Ballade), a Dante LYS reissue inconsistently listed only as LYS (page 28), another Dante Lys without a number that seems to have been left there by mistake (page 309). Page 86 a note by North under Leinsdorf's recording of Berg's "Le Vin" using Baudelaire's original poems in French rather than the German translations by Stefan George that Berg set to music, types the original German title as "Der Wien": nice (literally, it means "The Vienna"), but not what Berg wrote: it is "Der Wein". All those are petty details. A more important slip is that either I'm blind, or Munch's Berlioz Requiem is missing from the conductors' index (it would have come at the bottom of page 185, so I suspect that some computer botched its page turn; it is duly listed in the chronological discography, page 70). Despite my few (or numerous?) criticisms, I hope it is clear that they are far outweighed by the lauds. What this discography has done is to have sent me on a frantic spending spree to purchase many of those CDs which North lists and that either I wasn't aware of, or had lost sight of. Thanks to North I am well on the way of completing my Koussevitzky collection - I already had most of the Munch to munch on (sorry for this one, I couldn't stop myself!), thanks to the Japanese collection. And this is, really, what a discography should do, and I can think of no greater homage to North's work. And now, as a postscript, I have a program of activities for North and the Scarecrow Press for the next ten years. It spells "Chicago", "Cleveland" and "Philadelphia".

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars  
By Arthur Wilson  
A must for all fans of the Boston Symphony Orchestra!  
6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A comprehensive and well-organized reference  
By BKBA  
With North's recent discography of the New York Philharmonic, this discography is conveniently laid-out. The main section of the book lists the recordings chronologically, with date, venue, session producer, matrices and issue numbers included, along with annotations for selected entries. Then, the author helpfully includes appendices that list the recordings by

composer/work and by conductor. Also included are sections covering reel tape and video issues by the orchestra, and an appendix devoted to "Government Issues:" the V-Disc and Armed Forces Radio Service programs that were supplied to the military during and after World War II, Voice of America Discs, and the like. Recordings by groups made up of BSO members, operating under pseudonyms such as the Zimblar Sinfonietta, are listed, as are ones made by the Boston Symphony Chamber Players. Unlike the New York Philharmonic discography, this book includes an interesting section on "pirate" recordings of the Boston Symphony, unauthorized issues drawn mostly from radio broadcasts. For any classical recording enthusiast, the book is a valuable and useful compendium of the recorded legacy of a great musical institution.

In *Boston Symphony Orchestra: An Augmented Discography*, James H. North gathers all the information about Boston Symphony musical recordings into one volume, capturing over 90 years of recorded history. Similar to his earlier New York Philharmonic volume, this discography contains a chronological list citing complete details of the recording sessions, such as works performed, the soloists and choruses, session dates and venues, recording companies and producers, first release dates, and information related to master copies and all issues of the recording, including 78- and 45-rpm discs, Long-Playing records, and Compact Discs. The material is cross-referenced in indexes and organized alphabetically by composer, conductor, and soloist, referring the reader to the appropriate entry in the main listing. Works by more than 100 composers, 30 conductors, and 250 soloists are included. Two additional appendixes list two-track tapes and video recordings by the BSO. In addition to commercial recordings, this volume contains separate sections on recordings issued by the U.S. government, recordings made by other ensembles consisting solely of Boston Symphony musicians, and a complete, self-enclosed discography of the Boston Symphony Chamber Players. A final appendix presents an extended list of unauthorized "pirate" issues, documenting BSO live performances and broadcasts from the 1930s to the present day. With a foreword by James Levine, this valuable resource is beneficial for collectors, fans, and anyone interested in recorded classical music and the history of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

North's work provides a fascinating history on the orchestra.... Highly recommended for all academic and public libraries, and is a must purchase for devotees of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. (American Reference Books Annual) This is a distinguished, immensely useful piece of discographical work. We already have James H. North to thank for the New York Philharmonic discography and this book improves on that excellent effort in many ways. (Classical Record Collections, Summer 2009) Whatever you want or need to know about the discography's sources of information, its organization, or the variety of media on which the recordings have been issued, you will find here... There is an immense amount to be learned from North's work, and much fun to be had simply perusing it. (ARSC Journal, (Association For Recorded Sound Collections)) For those aspiring researchers seeking to tackle these and other orchestral lacunae, North's format and approach are well worth poaching there is an immense amount to be learning from North's work, and much fun to be had simply perusing it. May the author be challenged to undertake at least one more - or maybe even more! (ARSC Journal, Fall 2009) A marvelously complete discography of the orchestra.... The highly readable comments on the recording... make browsing such a pleasure. (Fanfare Magazine, February 2009) As author James H. North points out in his impressively detailed introduction, this book actually consists of two discographies: the first being the authorized (mostly commercial) recordings of the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO), and the other consisting of recordings of the Boston Symphony Chamber Players. Users will enjoy perusing the accompanying comments, which are often anecdotes or details that afford a fascinating glimpse into the recording. In addition to being potentially useful for libraries, researchers, and students, this volume may also be enjoyable for fans of the BSO and anyone fascinated with historical audio collections. (Music Reference Services Quarterly) About the Author James H. North is a free-lance journalist and music critic for Fanfare and Classic Record Collector. He is the author of *New York Philharmonic: The Authorized Recordings, 1917-2005. A Discography* (Scarecrow Press, 2006).