

**LUCERNE  
FESTIVAL**

HISTORIC  
PERFORMANCES

**audite**

# André Cluytens

**Franck Symphony in D minor  
Khachaturian Violin Concerto**

**Igor Oistrach | Philharmonia Orchestra**



# André Cluytens

audite

César Franck (1822–1890)  
Symphony in D minor (1886–88)

- I. *Applause* 0:19
- II. *Lento – Allegro non troppo* 16:45
- III. *Allegretto* 9:34
- IV. *Allegro non troppo* 10:19

Aram Khachaturian (1903–1978)  
Violin Concerto in D minor

- I. *Allegro con fermezza* 13:08
- II. *Andante sostenuto* 12:05
- III. *Allegro vivace* 8:46

Igor Oistrach violin  
Philharmonia Orchestra  
André Cluytens



André Cluytens conducts in Lucerne for the last time, 1966  
© J. Koch / Archive Lucerne Festival

## Gentleman and Perfectionist: André Cluytens in Lucerne

### Hungry for Music

“André... who?” Lips tighten, brows furrow – the strain of recollection is evident. Few today experienced him in person, and even dedicated collectors no longer invariably rank him among the great musical legends of the twentieth century: André Cluytens has, in many respects, become the great unknown on the conductor’s podium. This is all the more surprising given that the Belgian-born musician, later a French citizen, was regarded in the 1950s and 1960s – alongside senior colleagues Charles Münch and Ernest Ansermet, and the slightly younger Jean Martinon – as one of the foremost interpreters of the French repertoire.

Yet Cluytens was by no means a “specialist” in any narrow sense. On the contrary, he appears to have been almost insatiably curious about music of every provenance. In his biography *André Cluytens. Itinéraire d’un chef d’orchestre* (Wavre, 2009), Erik Baeck lists no fewer than 125 stage works and 520 orchestral compositions spanning all periods, from Johann Sebastian Bach to Henri Dutilleux, that Cluytens studied over the course of his all too brief life. Under his direction, the Berlin Philharmonic recorded the complete Beethoven symphonies for the first time up to 1960 – well before Herbert von Karajan undertook his own cycle. Long before Pierre Boulez, Cluytens also became the first French conductor to appear at the Bayreuth Festival. He was equally committed to the Russian repertoire, championing works from Tchaikovsky to Shostakovich, the latter recording his piano concertos with Cluytens on the podium. These three pillars – France, Germany and Russia – likewise shaped the programmes of Cluytens’s six appearances at the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern, today’s Lucerne Festival.

Cluytens himself once described the festival in a newspaper interview as “one of the traditional strongholds of music in Central Europe”, though he noted that its audiences tended to be rather conservative. At his debut in the summer of 1951, he therefore “wisely” preceded two works by Maurice Ravel with a symphony by Joseph Haydn and a piano concerto by Ludwig van Beethoven – a caution he abandoned at his second guest appearance in 1952. With the ballet music *Bacchus et Ariane* by Albert Roussel, the First Violin Concerto by Sergei Prokofiev (featuring the soloist Isaac Stern),

# André Cluytens

audite



André Cluytens in Lucerne, 1957  
© Roland Reiter / Archive Lucerne Festival

the Fifth Symphony by Arthur Honegger, and Ravel's dance poem *La valse*, Cluytens presented a programme consisting entirely of twentieth-century works. "For an audience so devoted to tradition, that was almost a revolution", the conductor later recalled. Yet protests and requests for changes from the organisers in advance failed to deter him: Cluytens conducted his programme as planned – and was rewarded with *une ovation inoubliable*.

## **The Versatile Musician**

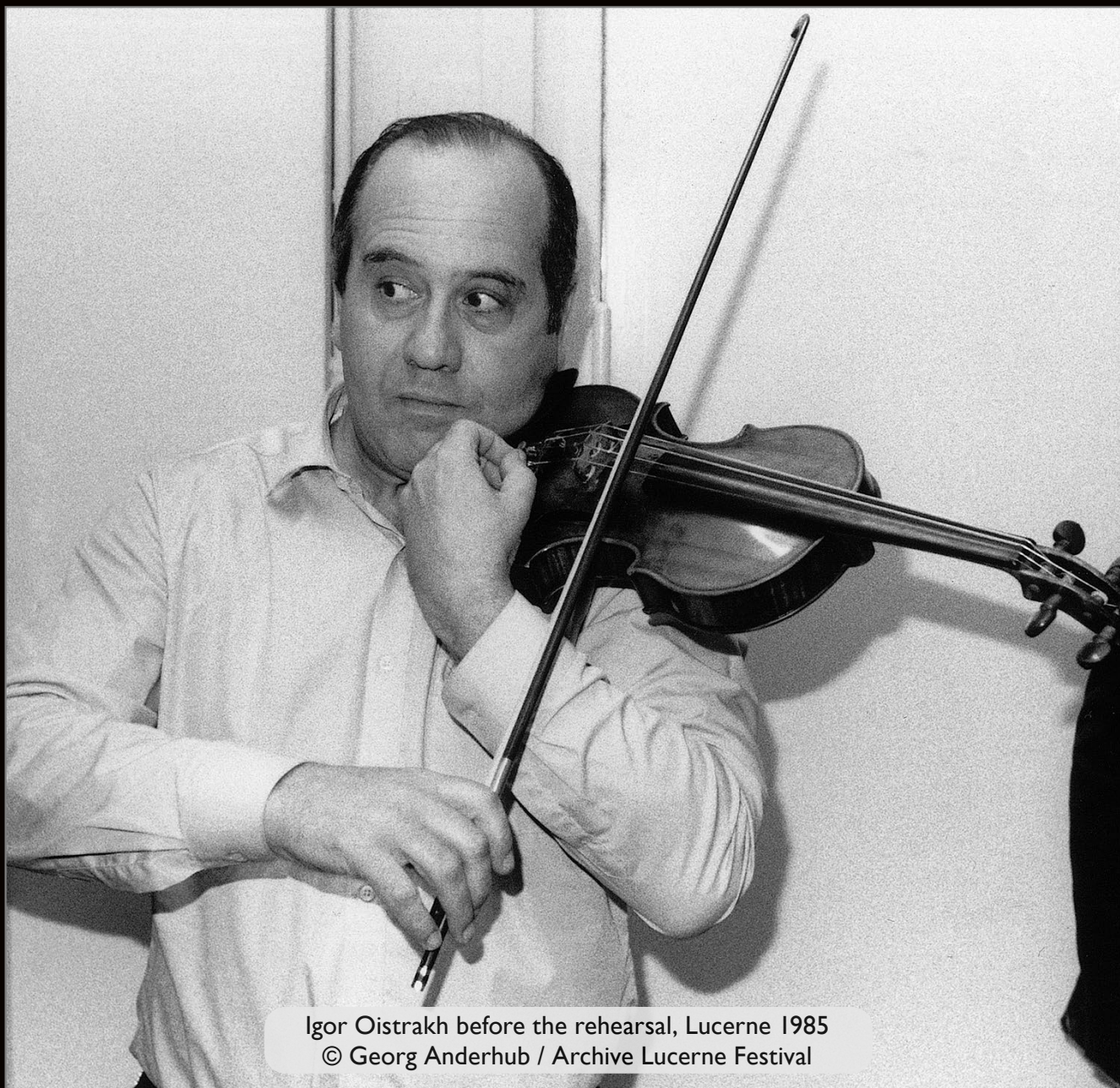
The breadth of his repertoire and his curiosity for the unfamiliar were hallmarks of Cluytens, who quite literally breathed music and subordinated any notion of work-life balance to his meteoric career. Born on 26 March 1905 in Antwerp, he grew up in a Flemish family in which everything revolved around music. "My grandfather was a conductor, and his four sons all became musicians: my father was Kapellmeister at the Royal Flemish Opera and later at the French Theatre in Antwerp; my uncle Léopold was a professor at the Royal Conservatory in Brussels; Émile was a violinist in Ostend, and Joseph a flautist in Paris." His mother, a singer at the Dutch Theatre, died when Augustin – his birth name – was just one year old.

At the conservatoire in his native city, he trained as a pianist, while his work as a répétiteur provided him with a thorough grounding in operatic practice. At the age of just 23, he was appointed principal conductor at the Théâtre-Français (today's Boule Theatre). The cultural climate of Antwerp proved formative. While conducting primarily French and Italian repertoire at his own theatre, the newly built and imposing Flemish Opera house was developing into Belgium's stronghold for Richard Wagner. In Cluytens's own interpretations, a sense of flowing elegance and clarity of line was thus balanced with meticulous attention to detail and a keen dramatic impulse. His conception of orchestral sound likewise reflected a synthesis of traditions: he consistently favoured the refined, expressive yet lean timbre of French wind playing, while in the strings he sought the fuller, warmer sonority associated with the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic.

In 1932, Cluytens moved to France, where he worked as a conductor and music director at the opera houses in Toulouse and Lyon, and from 1938 in Bordeaux. There he adopted the first name André and acquired French citizenship. During the years of the Vichy regime under Marshal Philippe Pétain, which collaborated with the German occupation, Cluytens appears to have reached an accommodation with the authorities – a circumstance that led to legal proceedings after the war. Following his acquittal, his career gathered momentum in Paris: in 1946 he became chief conductor of the venerable

# André Cluytens

audite



Igor Oistrakh before the rehearsal, Lucerne 1985  
© Georg Anderhub / Archive Lucerne Festival

Orchestre de la Société des concerts du Conservatoire, a post he held for fourteen years, and a year later he assumed the musical direction of the Opéra-Comique, later also that of the Belgian National Orchestra.

Cluytens – the “gentleman on the podium”, as Tully Potter once described him – conducted without outward show, yet with a technical assurance that ensured impressive results even with limited rehearsal time. At the same time, he demanded the utmost commitment from his orchestras and, when dissatisfied, could adopt a distinctly authoritative manner. His workload was immense: concert tours took him as far as New York, Japan and the Soviet Union; he made countless recordings and remained active in the opera house. His recordings of Georges Bizet’s *Carmen* with Solange Michel in the title role (Paris, 1950), and of Claude Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* with Victoria de los Ángeles, Jacques Jansen and Gérard Souzay (Paris, 1956), have long since attained legendary status. His acclaimed Bayreuth debut in 1955 with *Tannhäuser* was followed by further appearances on the “Green Hill”, during which time he became romantically involved with the soprano Anja Silja – a relationship that placed his marriage under considerable strain. The final years of his life were overshadowed by cancer: he was forced at times to withdraw from musical life and died on 3 June 1967 at the age of just 62.

### **Conflict at the Lake**

The resounding public success of his second concert, together with his advocacy for musical modernism, soon established Cluytens as a regular and much-valued presence at the Lucerne Festival. In 1954 he returned once again with a programme combining Russian and French repertoire. Alongside Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* in the orchestration by Maurice Ravel, the two works documented on this recording were performed: the Violin Concerto composed in 1940 by Aram Khachaturian and the Symphony in D minor by César Franck.

Yet this particular season was far from business as usual. For some time, dark clouds had been gathering over the summer festival on the shores of Lake Lucerne, casting a shadow over the collaboration between the festival committee and the Swiss Festival Orchestra. Since 1943, an elite ensemble had been assembled annually for the festival by the Swiss Musicians’ Union – an orchestra comparable in function to the Bayreuth Festival Orchestra and exclusively responsible for the orchestral concerts in Lucerne (with which Cluytens had also appeared on his first two visits). However, tensions soon arose between the festival organisers and the musicians’ union over artistic control of programming, escalating

# André Cluytens

audite



André Cluytens in conversation with former NATO General Hans Speidel, Lucerne  
© Paul Weber / Archive Lucerne Festival

in 1953 into an open dispute concerning radio broadcasting fees for the orchestra. As neither side was willing to compromise, the festival management eventually pulled the emergency brake and began seeking an alternative orchestra for the 1954 season.

The choice fell on the Philharmonia Orchestra – originally a recording ensemble founded shortly after the war by EMI producer Walter Legge. Under the artistic guidance of Herbert von Karajan (a frequent guest in Lucerne), the orchestra had developed into a powerful force within London’s fiercely competitive orchestral landscape. The invitation to Lucerne was ultimately accepted by a distinguished roster of guest conductors that year, including Wilhelm Furtwängler, Rafael Kubelík, Ferenc Fricsay, Karajan and Cluytens.

## **Guest from the Soviet Union**

At the opening of the final concert on 28 August 1954, Cluytens placed at the centre of the programme the major symphonic work by César Franck, who – like the conductor himself – originated from what is now Belgium and built his decisive career in Paris, where he worked as a celebrated organist and teacher. The Symphony in D minor, completed in 1888, is, with its stylistic affinities to Mendelssohn, Brahms and Wagner, highly characteristic of its time: its three movements (without a scherzo) are permeated by recurring thematic material, from the darkly introspective opening to the jubilant finale, evoking a Romantic dramaturgy of redemption – “through night to light”. Cluytens and the Philharmonia Orchestra draw from the score a maximum of colour and atmosphere; unsentimental tempi (particularly in the briskly paced “Allegretto” second movement) and a near film-like alternation between solo “close-ups” and orchestral widescreen effects create a gripping symphonic panorama – entirely free of the perfume-and-pathos haze in which this symphony is often enveloped.

For the following performance of Khachaturian’s Violin Concerto, the soloist engaged was the just 23-year-old violinist Igor Oistrakh – a choice that was in more than one respect a delicate one. On the one hand, cultural exchange between the Soviet Union and Switzerland remained difficult even after Stalin’s death in 1953, due both to Moscow’s restrictive exit policies and to Switzerland’s stringent entry regulations in the climate of anti-communist sentiment. On the other, the Violin Concerto by Armenian-born Khachaturian was one of the signature works of Igor’s father and teacher, David

# André Cluytens

audite



André Cluytens rehearses with the Swiss Festival Orchestra for his final Lucerne concert, 1966  
© Paul Weber / Archive Lucerne Festival

# André Cluytens

audite

Oistrakh, who had given the work its world premiere in Moscow in 1940 and subsequently recorded it several times as a benchmark interpretation.

One might well ask why David Oistrakh never appeared in Lucerne, whereas his son was invited to the festival on several occasions later on. It is possible that the Philharmonia Orchestra, following a recording of the Khachaturian concerto at the end of 1953 under Eugène Goossens, had actively advocated for Igor Oistrakh. In any case, in terms of violinistic mastery and complete identification with the Armenian-influenced rhythms and the warmth of the lyrical themes, the son was scarcely inferior to his father. The verve and dazzling precision of Igor Oistrakh's playing come across in the Lucerne mono recording with equal intensity, as does his broad tone and speech-like phrasing in the slow movement. For the first movement, the violinist contributed his own large-scale cadenza, which even surpasses Khachaturian's original – and the father's more frequently performed version – in its technical demands.

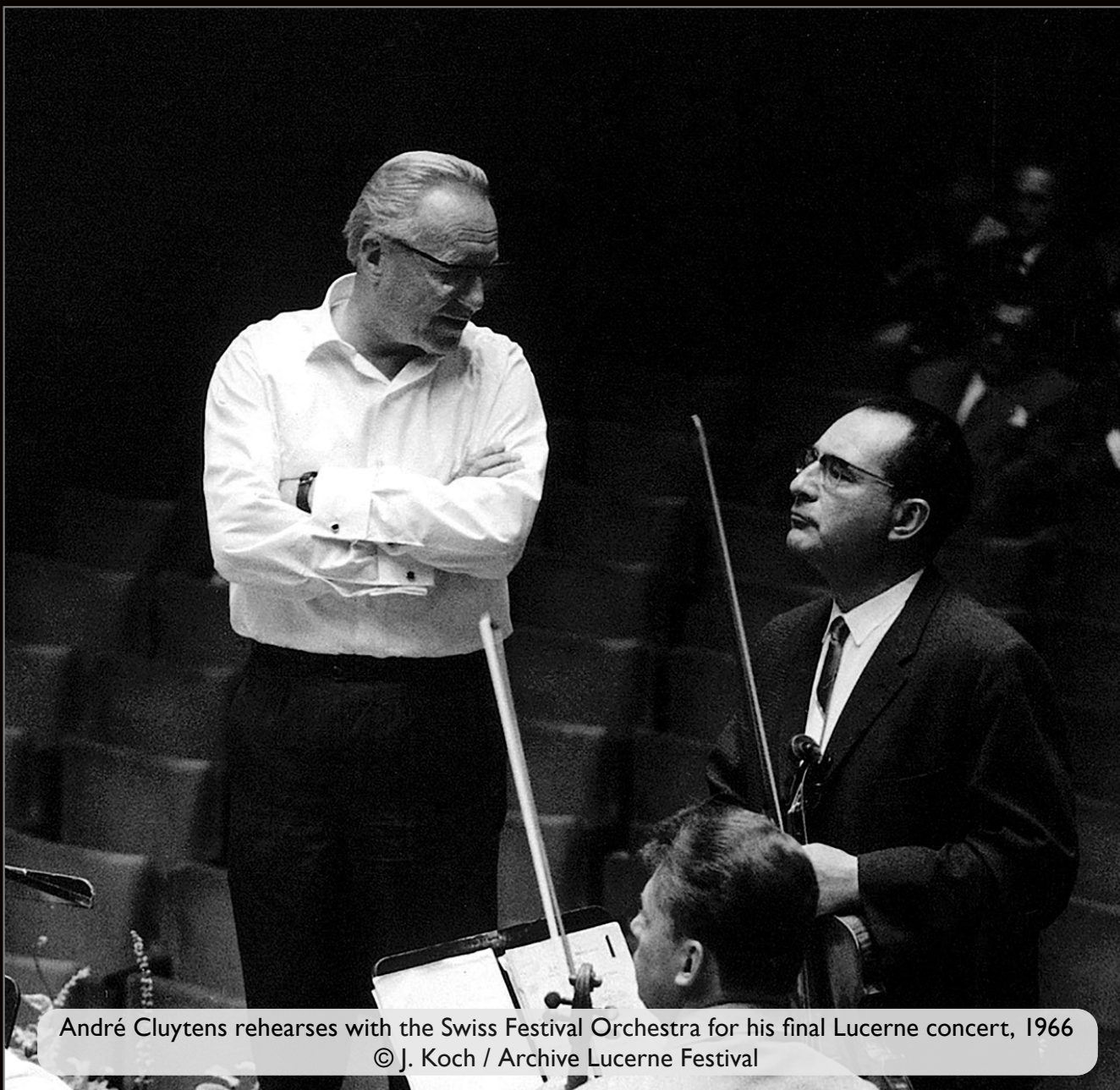
It is equally admirable how André Cluytens was able, at the end of an ex-hausting festival marathon in Lucerne, to draw from the Philharmonia Orchestra uncompromising tempi without ever losing sight of detail or large-scale architecture. This combination of technical rigour, fidelity to the score, and dramatic shaping would go on to recommend him for further appearances in Lucerne: in 1957 he came with the Vienna Philharmonic, and in 1963 with the Berlin Philharmonic. On his final visit, Cluytens again conducted the Swiss Festival Orchestra – this was in August 1966, ten months before his death.

*Michael Struck-Schloen*

Translation: *audite*

# André Cluytens

audite



André Cluytens rehearses with the Swiss Festival Orchestra for his final Lucerne concert, 1966  
© J. Koch / Archive Lucerne Festival

# André Cluytens



André Cluytens in Lucerne  
© Anthony Altaffer / Archive Lucerne Festival

audite

*recordings:* live recordings at Lucerne Festival  
(Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern)  
Recording courtesy of Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen (SRF)  
The original concert recording has not survived.  
For this release, a copy from the  
Institut national de l'audiovisuel (INA) was used.

*recording date:* August 28, 1954  
*recording location:* Kunsthaus, Lucerne

*rights:* audite claims all rights arising from copyright law and  
competition law in relation to research, compilation and  
re-mastering of the original audio tapes, as well as the  
publication of these tracks. Violations will be prosecuted.

*cover:* Archive Lucerne Festival  
André Cluytens in Lucerne © Anthony Altaffer

We have made every attempt to clear rights for all material  
presented here. Should you nonetheless believe that we  
have accidentally infringed your rights, please let us know  
at your earliest convenience. We will endeavour to resolve  
any issues immediately.

*research & booklet editor:* Malte Lohmann  
*art direction & design:* AB•Design  
*remastering:* Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

audite

e-mail: [info@audite.de](mailto:info@audite.de)

(LC)04480

© 2026 + © 2026 Ludger Böckenhoff

# André Cluytens

audite



André Cluytens in Lucerne, 1950s  
© Paul Weber / Archive Lucerne Festival