

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of reissues and archive recordings

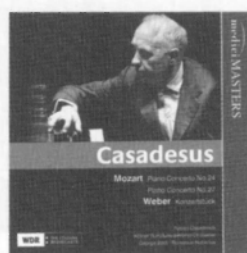
Memories of the Maestro and his peers

Fifty years after his death, at least one company is keeping the Toscanini flame alight

Given **Arturo Toscanini's** immense significance, it seems shameful that more hasn't been done to mark the 50th year since his passing, even though there has been some useful activity on the CD front. Pristine Audio has been especially productive, with sundry Toscanini titles receiving their digital debuts either as downloads or as specially ordered discs, none more valuable than a 1935 New York Philharmonic Bruckner Seventh, the last in a run of performances that the maestro gave in that particular season and something of a revelation. Recording-wise, I can affirm that Pristine's Andrew Rose has achieved minor miracles, lending depth and lustre to sound that although still conspicuously "historical" is far more palatable than it might have been. As to the performance, which incidentally is as yet our only available sampling of Toscanini's Bruckner on disc, the string lines are "sung" very much *con amore*, with generally broad tempi and a good deal of flexibility tempo-wise. Score-watchers will balk at one or two instances of re-scoring – an added timpani roll in the first movement (from 4'58") whereas in the fourth the big chorale theme (at 1'04") is given to the brass instead of the strings – but the many interesting points of illumination will likely hold listeners captive. Perhaps the oddest interpretative gesture is the work's close, which is shockingly abrupt, and there are one or two gaps where the original recording is missing, but viewed overall this is without doubt a major historical release. Pristine's impressive trawl, which seems to be growing by the day, also includes a superb NBC Wagner concert (November 28, 1943), with possibly the best available Toscanini-led *Tannhäuser* Overture and Venusberg Music and *Tristan* Prelude and Liebestod, and a "Barber Premiere Concert" which includes amazingly accomplished world premiere performances of Barber's *Adagio* and First Essay, as well as Graener's *Die Flöte von Sanssouci*, Debussy's *Ibérica* and Dvorak's *New World*, the only Toscanini performance that I know of that includes the first-movement exposition repeat.

Istituto Discografico Italiano has given us the "the first complete edition including the original broadcast account of the event" of Toscanini's Farewell Concert at La Scala, September 19, 1952. The all-Wagner programme is as thrilling as you'd expect (all items feature in Toscanini's NBC discography), even if the sound is comparatively cramped.

Tahra has released a well recorded "In memoriam" double-pack, in effect two radio concerts that include, in addition to Beethoven (Eighth Symphony), Verdi, Schumann and Rossini, a burning intense Dvorak *New World* from January 31, 1953 (made just days before the famous if generally cooler RCA record) and an energised 1952 romp through the *Tannhäuser* Overture and Venusberg Music, previously available on Vol 49 of RCA's much-missed "Toscanini Edition". Collectors with



fairly long memories may recall a "private" LP release of Toscanini conducting the NYPO in Brahms's Second Piano Concerto with **Robert Casadesus**, a prime contender for refurbishment, though were I to nominate a CD that represents Casadesus at his greatest it would almost certainly be a new coupling of Mozart's Concertos Nos 24 and 27 with the Cologne RSO under Szell. As to the playing, Charles Rosen's infinitely wise phrase "appearing to do nothing while achieving everything" just about says it all. A wonderful pairing, supplemented by a dazzling account of Weber's *Konzertstück*.

Rosen's epithet fits **Clara Haskil's** Mozart just as snugly and another disc brings a first-release of a Haskil favourite, Concerto No 19, from the 1956 Besançon Festival, centred and crisply phrased as ever though a rather acidic-sounding Paris Conservatoire Orchestra under Jerzy Katlewicz marginally compromises one's enjoyment. Karajan and the Philharmonia are palpably superior (and better recorded) on a Salzburg Concerto No 20 from the same year, where pianist and conductor are in obvious artistic accord.

An invaluable broadcast recording of **Alfred Cortot** playing Beethoven's First Piano Concerto (which he never recorded commercially) with the Lausanne CO proves to be both a unique document and a rewarding musical experience. Yes, there are slip-ups, but the elegance, lightness of touch, expressive warmth and sheer style are all truly inimitable – though be warned, there's no first movement cadenza (or the passage leading into it, which would suggest it was never actually played). The couplings, also musically satisfying if not quite so interpretatively revealing, feature Vlado Perlemuter: the Ravel Piano Trio and the two Liszt *Legends*, taken from rare Lumen 78s.

The Recordings

- **Bruckner** Sym No 7 NYPO / **Toscanini**
▶ www.pristineclassics.com
- **Wagner** Orch Wks **NBC 50** / **Toscanini**
Istituto Discografico Italiano/Priority © ② IDIS6524/5
- **Dvorak, Wagner, etc** Orch Wks **Toscanini**
Tahra © ② TAH624/5
- **Mozart, Weber** Pf Concs **Casadesus**
Medici Masters © MM010-2
- **Mozart** Pf Concs Nos 19 & 20 **Haskil**
Tahra © TAH628
- **Beethoven** Pf Conc No 1 **Cortot**
Tahra © TAH610