
CDs ORCHESTRAL

Barber Symphony No. 2, Op. 19.

New Symphony Orchestra / Samuel Barber.

Pristine Audio mono (M) (D) PASC136 (27mins; ADD); rec. Kingsway Hall, London, 13/12/51.

In the autumn of 1950 Decca asked Samuel Barber to record three of his orchestral works, *Medea*, the Cello Concerto and the Second Symphony. This was an opportunity for him not only to promote his music, but also to explore the possibility of a conducting career. Barber had studied conducting in 1932 with Fritz Reiner, who was discouraging about his ability, but with encouragement from Koussevitzky and some lessons from George Szell, he started to conduct concerts and broadcast his own music.

When Decca's offer came Barber turned to Nicolai Malko for assistance and worked closely with him. Malko even made the Danish Opera Orchestra available for practice sessions. Barber also had advice from John Frandsen and the violinist Charles Turner. Both Malko and Turner attended all the recording sessions. Malko observed how well the orchestra responded and wrote that during the recording of the Second Symphony's finale, "The hall is very cold, but Barber makes the orchestra not only very hot, but even warm, which is much more difficult".

Barber's performance of the revised 1947 score does indeed sound warm and rich in this splendid new transfer. Significantly he is close to his usually disregarded metronome marks and this gives great lift and vitality to an adventurous score. While he denied that this work was programme music – it was written out of his experience of trainee pilots during the second world war and commissioned by the US Army Air Force – this performance certainly conjures the stresses and anxieties of war. The orchestra plays with great energy and enthusiasm, though sometimes at the expense of precise ensemble.

A deleted Pearl reissue also contained the *Medea* and Cello Concerto performances in addition to the Symphony and it is a pity that they are not included here; the Symphony only runs to 27 minutes. It is also a great pity that the Koussevitzky

recording of the original score, a live radio broadcast from 1944 made a month after the premiere (once available on the AS label) is no longer available. That was an electrifying and extremely moving performance. **Donald Ellman**

Beethoven Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125, *Choral*. Rehearsal segment.

Maria Stader (sop); **Grace Hoffman** (mez);

Waldemar Kmentt (ten); **Hans Hotter** (bs);

North German Radio Chorus; Cologne Radio Chorus; Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra / Otto Klemperer

Medici Masters mono (M) (D) MM031-2 (72mins; ADD); rec. Funkhaus, Cologne, 6/1/58.

When issued at the end of 1958 (Columbia mono (C) 33CX1574-5, coupled with one side of music from *Egmont*, denied to stereo collectors a year later), Klemperer's Kingsway Hall recording presented a Ninth which, with its extended Scherzo and quite fast Adagio, did not gain universal acceptance. There was, however, a consensus that the concert performance from 15 November 1957, issued in 1999 on Testament ((D) SBT1177), was altogether more persuasive (there is also a 1961 BBC broadcast on (D) SBT1332, which has far better mono sound but with some audience noise early in the slow movement). This Cologne version is from two months later and has the same male soloists, and an assembled chorus no less fine than the Philharmonia.

The mono sound is not as clean as the stereo Testament, but the disc has a unique rehearsal excerpt – albeit under two minutes in duration – with voices and piano, where we hear Klemperer singing! The Scherzo repeats are taken and the Adagio is 42" shorter than in the RFH – the Philharmonia wind chording is tidier but there's more animation here, a greater intake of anticipation at the horns/trumpets *ff* passages before Letters A and B, for instance. "Strong links in the structural chain" as Colin Anderson says in his note. Medici insert an extra track-point at Hans Hotter's entry. This is a high point in the performance (very different from the frequently heard assault on other recordings) and sung with