

---

**DOWNLOADS**


---

**Pristine Audio downloads**

Richard Strauss made his initial visits to a recording studio in 1917. In December 1921 he directed members of what is now thought to be the New York Symphony Orchestra in two excerpts from the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* Suite and "Dance of the Seven Veils" from *Salome*, and he was already duplicating repertoire recorded four years earlier. Then in January 1922 he conducted yet another "Dance of the Seven Veils", plus the Act 2 waltzes from *Der Rosenkavalier* and a slightly cut *Don Juan* in Columbia's London studio with a reduced London Symphony Orchestra. All these acoustic items, very well transferred by Mark Obert-Thorn, are partnered by the suite from the film version of *Rosenkavalier* recorded electrically by Strauss and London's "Augmented" Tivoli Theatre Orchestra in April 1926. This performance has been transferred to CD several times, and so is of less interest than the very rare acoustics, but all show the combination of clarity, elegance and directness of expression that was a feature of Strauss's conducting (© PASC175, 72mins). (This issue and all those that are discussed below have been heard in the form of CDRs supplied direct by Pristine Audio.)

More excellent Obert-Thorn transfers feature in two revelatory issues. In *CRC's* Autumn issue (page 74), Graham Silcock reviewed the first volume of the complete recordings by Alfred Hertz and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. A second volume now offers a 1928 Liszt *Les préludes*, acoustic 1925 excerpts from Wagner's *Parsifal*, early 1926 electric of the *Tristan* Prelude and "Liebestod", and two 1927 Brahms *Hungarian Dances*. The playing is very good throughout, and Hertz's conducting has an aristocratic, warmly expressive character. Clearly he was a much more gifted interpreter than his present reputation suggests (© PASC195, 61mins).

Those who know Leo Blech's conducting only through his rather sleepy contributions to early electric concerto recordings by Fritz Kreisler will surely have to revise their opinions of his ability if they hear his 1930 Tchaikovsky Fifth Symphony with the ubiquitous Berlin State Opera Orchestra.

This often variable ensemble shows remarkable fire and subtlety here and Blech's fluid, highly communicative account of the score is richly rewarding. Fill-ups consisting of a grievously cut *Capriccio italiano* and two movements from the *Serenade for Strings* are of no importance but again show Blech in a good light (© PASC181, 57mins).

Collectors will recall Testament's three four-disc sets of concerts given by Guido Cantelli and the NBC Symphony Orchestra between December 1949 and December 1951. Now Pristine have issued three more of these concerts. From December 1951 comes a programme of Brahms's Third Symphony, Roussel's *Sinfonietta* for Strings and Berlioz's "Marche hongroise". Cantelli's mentor Toscanini always found this Brahms symphony difficult to bring off satisfactorily, but the younger man offers a superlative performance, finely judged and balanced. The Roussel is played with great fire and urgency. The recordings are a bit constricted (© PASC173, 51mins). From January 1953 comes a Schubert *Unfinished* Symphony, beautifully and affectionately presented, though the first movement has a fairly brisk tempo. There follows a stark, intensely felt account of Britten's *Sinfonia da requiem*, the extraordinary tension of which is only relieved by a rip-roaring, shamelessly uninhibited performance of Wagner's *Rienzi* Overture. The sound is better on this disc, as it is in a February 1953 concert which comprises Rossini's *Siege de Corinthe* Overture followed by a performance of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony notable for both its power and its clarity of expression (© PASC166, 53mins). Yes, I know that most of the above works are in the conductor's commercial discography, often in better sound, but live NBCSO/Cantelli has something special to offer.

Pristine have in fact made one of Cantelli's studio recordings available, the only one he made for US Columbia and with the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, in March 1955. Played by a full string orchestra, with John Corigliano (senior) playing the solo part well, Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* seems unusually lush, and some of the movements sound a bit heavy. It's interesting to hear a virtuoso conductor in this repertoire, and of course no full symphony orchestra string section would

dare to play this work now. Again, good mono sound quality is obtained by Mark Obert-Thorn (© PASC176, 44mins).

"Stokowski – the Acoustic Recordings, Vol. 1" collects a group of mostly short pieces recorded between 1917 and 1924, though a slightly cut Wagner *Tannhäuser* Overture and the first of the conductor's eight versions of Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* are also included. This disc is of specialist interest only, but it shows how Stokowski, with his interest in sound quality, always managed to get the best out of an available recording process. The diverse content also demonstrates his early grasp of contrasting styles, from Mozart to Gounod (© PASC192, 70mins). From 1948 comes a live Stokowski recording of Falla's ballet *El amor brujo* with the NYPSO, mezzo-soprano Nan Merriman sounding appropriately earthy in her solo contributions. It's an exciting performance, but some of the tempi are pretty fast and as a whole it doesn't really sound idiomatic. Nor does William Kapell's account of the solo piano part in the same composer's *Noches in los jardines de Espana*, again with Stokowski and the NYPSO. It's vigorous, emphatic and dramatic, but not very atmospheric or subtle. Fair mono sound in both works (© PASC174, 44mins).

Vladimir Horowitz and Toscanini combine in a 1945 performance of Brahms's Second Piano Concerto, successfully transferred by Andrew Rose from the only available source, a slightly damaged acetate. Any performance by these two great musicians is of interest, but those who know their more familiar 1940 recording will find the newcomer much more brusque and lacking in depth of feeling (© PASC171, 43mins). Dimitri Mitropoulos's 1953 US Columbia coupling of Mendelssohn's *Scottish* and *Reformation* symphonies always seemed to get a bad press, and I admit to approaching Pristine's new transfer with some prejudice. It is true that tempi are often on the fast side, but there's lots of character and subtlety in Mitropoulos's conducting, and I enjoyed the well-recorded performances very much. Morton Gould's inconsequential *Philharmonic Waltzes* complete the disc (© PASC187, 69mins). Gould as conductor and pianist features in his own arrangement of Tchaikovsky's piano work *The*

*Seasons*. Alexander Gauk and others have tried their hand at orchestrating this charming suite, but Gould's version for piano and orchestra is effective enough. On this disc Gould also directs the Rochester "Pops" Orchestra in two lightweight works, *Family Album* and *Tap Dance Concerto*. The latter would sound a little more effective if the "soloist" Danny Daniels has been exercising his skills a little nearer to a microphone (© PASC191, 69mins).

Felix Slatkin was a fine conductor, but his abilities are not always shown to best effect in Ibert's *Divertissement*, superbly played by the Concert Arts Orchestra, but over-driven to the extent that the humour of the piece is mostly lost. Saint-Saens's *Carnival des animaux* is much more successful, for although still played brilliantly much more of the work's personality and wit is allowed to come through. The odd coupling is a group of five short pieces by Delius. Here the American woodwind timbre sounds very strange, and although the *First Cuckoo* and *Irmelin* Prelude come off not too badly, the solo cellist Eleanor Aller is insensitive in the *Caprice and Elegy* and the disc as a whole can't really be recommended, despite decent 1952-54 mono sound (© PASC190, 66mins). Sir Adrian Boult's 1954 Decca recordings of shorter British works with the London Philharmonic Orchestra have not been available for some years, and it's good to have a selection of them back, especially since Sir Adrian didn't re-record Arnold's *Eight English Dances* or Walton's *Siesta*. Good performances of Bax's *Tintagel*, Holst's *The Perfect Fool* ballet music, Elgar's *Bavarian Dances* and the two *Chansons* plus Butterworth's *Shropshire Lad* and *Banks of Green Willow* complete an enjoyable disc in good mono sound (© PASC193, 79mins). Even more desirable is Moeran's Symphony in G minor in its first (1942) recording by the Halle Orchestra under the mortally ill Leslie Heward (© PASC180, 43mins). Heward had conducted the work's premiere four years previously and in producer Walter Legge's words, "...although he was tired, limping and in great pain at the time of the recording he summoned up enormous strength and vitality to give that superb performance".

Alan Sanders