



Great Conductors • Toscanini

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8.110877



BEETHOVEN

**Symphony No. 6
'Pastoral'**

BRAHMS

Tragic Overture

MOZART

Die Zauberflöte Overture

BBC Symphony Orchestra

Arturo Toscanini

(Recorded 1937-38)

Great Conductors · Arturo Toscanini

Beethoven (1770-1827): Symphony No. 6 'Pastoral'
Brahms (1833-1897): Tragic Overture
Mozart (1756-1791): Die Zauberflöte Overture

Together with Beethoven's *First* and *Fourth Symphonies* and *Leonora Overture No.1* (Naxos 8.110854), these Toscanini performances with the BBC Symphony Orchestra complete the commercial releases sanctioned for issue by the Maestro at the time of his visits to London at the invitation of the BBC in the middle and late 1930s. Although several other works set down mainly during his first visit in 1935 remained unused for many years, these recordings made in 1937 and 1938 have rarely been out of the catalogue.

Inaugurated in the spring of 1933 as a concentrated end of season showcase for the burgeoning talents of their house orchestra, the BBC initially saw the festival as an opportunity to extend its public profile beyond the studio onto the concert platform. It also very quickly realised the advantages of engaging some of the most prestigious international conductors to develop the versatility of the orchestra as a rival to the top European and American orchestras.

Koussevitzky, Walter and Weingartner appeared in the early seasons to supplement the more regularly heard principal conductor, Adrian Boult, but despite the excellence of execution, the first two festivals met with a lukewarm response mainly owing to indifferent programming. Thus it was with considerable anticipation and a genuine sense of a coup that the agreement of Toscanini was secured to conduct the orchestra at the 1935 festival. His only previous visit to Britain had been with the New York Philharmonic in 1930 and this was the first time he had conducted a British orchestra. The engagement signalled not only a huge vote of confidence in the growing reputation of the orchestra itself, but also the Maestro's awareness and admiration for the training and interpretative standards of Boult, with whom he shared a similar high regard for the letter of the score and structural span. Given the notoriety of Toscanini's temperament, apprehension amongst musicians and administration ran high. In the

event, matters could hardly have gone better. The four concerts met with an ecstatic reception from the public, critics, players and not least the conductor himself, who declared the orchestra, in a press statement, one of the best he had ever conducted.

After unsuccessful bureaucratic and financial wrangling trying to engage Toscanini for the following year, the 1936 festival was cancelled at the last minute. He was successfully contracted, however, for the 1937 event, which coincided with the coronation of King George VI, for which Owen Mase at the BBC was able to secure seats for the Maestro and his family at Westminster Abbey. Toscanini's repertoire for the five concerts dwelt safe in a collection of orchestral showpieces, but with a core of symphonies ranging from Beethoven's *Eroica* and *Pastoral*, Brahms's *Symphony No.1*, Mozart's *Symphony No.40*, a Cherubini rarity, familiar excerpts from Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* and rather more enterprisingly, Shostakovich's *First Symphony*. London had never heard anything quite like it and Toscanini himself praised the orchestra for playing even better than in 1935.

The *Pastoral* shared the programme with a Rossini overture, the Brahms *Haydn Variations* and Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung*. Apparently, Toscanini laid great emphasis on wanting the symphony to sound smooth and 'pastoral'. Listening to the results, surprisingly coherent given the sessions were spread over the time at the festival and the return visit to London for two concerts at the start of the same year's autumn season, there is a wonderful fluidity and spontaneous ease of expression, even relaxation that is not found in many of his other recorded performances of the work. Although the storm is duly threatening and tempestuous, the overriding impression remains one of wonder and enchantment, much enhanced by the conductor's own vocal encouragement to nail the climax of the final

thanksgiving with maximum lyrical outpouring.

Toscanini's vocal muse can be heard to even more audible effect in the recapitulation of the soaring second subject in Brahms's *Tragic Overture*. With such palpable tension in the air throughout this gritty and incisive performance, it is tempting to wonder whether there may have been something of a premonition of the famed outburst that occurred a few days later during the rehearsal for Beethoven's *Ninth*, when Toscanini walked out, feeling that the orchestra was not giving of its best. Basically trivial, the incident was blown up out of all proportion by the press, who then had a field day when the Maestro subsequently lashed out at a photographer on leaving his hotel only to hit his wife instead. The reception for Toscanini's 1937 autumn concerts, however, was as rapturous as ever. As water off a duck's back and no doubt deliberately to confound the press and ingratiate himself with the BBC, he declared the orchestra easy to rehearse and magnificently disciplined.

An invitation to return to London the following May for the 1938 festival duly materialised, this time for a total of six concerts. By this time, however, the international situation was tense and fast deteriorating. Nor were matters at the BBC as harmonious as in previous years. The founding Director General, Sir John Reith, had announced his intention to leave at the end of June after eleven years in post and Owen Mase, the prime mover in the music department who had secured Toscanini's continuing engagement with the orchestra, had left to pursue a career as concert agent and promoter. Fortunately the BBC was shrewd enough to keep his services on hand to look after the conductor for the duration of his stay. Capitalising on approval of the BBC Choral Society for the previous autumn's Beethoven *Ninth*, the highlights of 1938 were two

performances of the Verdi *Requiem* with soloists Zinka Milanov, Kerstin Thorborg, Helge Roswänge and Nicola Moscona. By this stage the relationship between conductor and orchestra was restored to full love affair status. 'It is impossible to go on praising Toscanini; yet there is little else to do', wrote Neville Cardus.

The opportunity was quickly taken to set down the Mozart, Rossini and Weber items that complete this disc. Thereafter Toscanini was persuaded to return in May 1939 to conduct a complete cycle of Beethoven symphonies and two performances of the *Missa Solemnis* for the last London Music Festival. War was in the air and it was not until after the cessation of hostilities that serious efforts were made to woo the Maestro back to London to conduct a British orchestra. The BBC very nearly succeeded for the opening series of the Royal Festival Hall in 1950, when contracts were signed with Owen Mase in his capacity as Concerts Adviser to the new hall, but Toscanini had to withdraw at the last minute owing to an accident. It was not until 1952, this time with Walter Legge's rapidly ascendant Philharmonia Orchestra, that Toscanini finally returned for the famous Brahms concerts in the same hall.

Although perhaps more renowned for the wealth of recordings with the NBC Symphony Orchestra, both live and more particularly in the studio, there is no question that the BBC caught Toscanini in full maturity and at the peak of his powers. It must have been a relief for him to find an oasis from the political machinations of concert life in the United States and elsewhere. This, together with his relationship with Ada Mainardi at the time, prompted inspiration and achievement to run especially high.

Ian Julier

GREAT CONDUCTORS · TOSCANINI

- BEETHOVEN: Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68 ('Pastoral')** **38:14**
- ① Allegro ma non troppo (Cheerful impressions awakened by arriving in the country) 8:58
- ② Andante molto moto (Scene by the brook) 11:49
- ③ Allegro (Peasants' merrymaking) 5:06
- ④ Allegro (Thunderstorm) 3:27
- ⑤ Allegretto (Shepherds' Song: Joyous thanksgiving after the storm) 8:56
- Recorded 22nd June, 16th July and 21st-22nd October, 1937 in Queen's Hall, London
Matrices: 2ER 231-1, 232-1, 233-1; 2EA 3585-2, 3586-2, 3587-2; 2ER 237-2A, 238-2A, 239-2A and 240-1A
First issued as HMV DB 3333 through 3337
- ⑥ **MOZART: Die Zauberflöte - Overture** **6:44**
- Recorded 2nd June, 1938 in Queen's Hall, London
Matrices: 2EA 6654-1 and 6655-1
First issued as HMV DB 3850
- ⑦ **ROSSINI: La Scala di Seta - Overture** **6:09**
- Recorded 13th June, 1938 in Queen's Hall, London
Matrices: 2EA 5754-1 and 5755-1
First issued as HMV DB 3541
- ⑧ **WEBER (orch. BERLIOZ): Invitation to the Dance** **9:26**
- Recorded 14th June, 1938 in Queen's Hall, London
Matrices: 2EA 5756-1 and 5757-1
First issued as HMV DB 3542
- ⑨ **BRAHMS: Tragic Overture** **12:46**
- Recorded 25th October, 1937 in Queen's Hall, London
Matrices: 2ER 248-2A, 249-2A and 250-2A
First issued as HMV DB 3349 and 3350

BBC Symphony Orchestra • Arturo Toscanini

Producer's Note

The second movement of the Beethoven *Pastoral* Symphony, the Rossini overture and the Weber-Berlioz *Invitation* were only ever issued as dubbings, electronic re-recordings from the original disc masters. Some of these sides were not perfectly centered when originally dubbed, leading to some unavoidable pitch wobble during playback (e.g., at the end of the *Pastoral* movement). In addition, some music was missing during the changeover from the second to the third side of the Beethoven, as well as during the side breaks for the other two recordings, which I have attempted to fill in for the current transfers.

The sources for the restorations were pre-war U.S. Victor "Gold" pressings, the most quiet form of issue for these recordings.

Mark Obert-Thorn

ADD

 Playing
 Time
 73:19

BEETHOVEN • BRAHMS

MOZART • ROSSINI • WEBER

BBC Symphony Orchestra
 Arturo Toscanini

8.110877



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Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn
 Special thanks to Richard Kaplan and Don Tait

www.naxos.com

A complete track list can be found in the booklet
 Cover Image: Toscanini in 1898
 (Lebrecht Collection)

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