

T O S C A N I N I
NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
WAR BOND BENEFIT

25 April 1943
ALL-TCHAIKOVSKY
Symphony No. 6 in B Flat Minor
Nutcracker Suite
Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Major
Vladimir Horowitz
US National Anthem
Carnegie Hall, New York
FIRST RELEASE OF THE ENTIRE CONCERT
IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE TOSCANINI ESTATE



BONUS: V-J Day 1945 - Beethoven Symphony No. 3 in E Flat, Op.
IP 1216-2 mono (2CDs: 140:54)

Review by Ken Meltzer
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On April 25, 1943 at Carnegie Hall, the NBC Symphony Orchestra and Arturo Toscanini performed a war bond benefit concert, an all-Tchaikovsky program. The concert raised \$10,190,045.00, the equivalent of almost \$200 million in today's currency. The concert opened with the "Pathétique" Symphony. After the *Nutcracker* Suite, Vladimir Horowitz joined Toscanini and the NBC SO for the Piano Concerto No. 1. The concert concluded with Toscanini's orchestration of *The Star-Spangled Banner*. The "Pathétique" was not included in the broadcast program. But Toscanini's son Walter arranged for the entire concert to be recorded by the Carnegie Hall Recording Services. Now, in association with the Toscanini Estate, Immortal Performances (IP) offers the first release of the entire April 25, 1943 concert.

When Tchaikovsky conducted the world premiere of his "Pathétique" Symphony on October 28, 1893, Arturo Toscanini was 26 years old. Toscanini first conducted the "Pathétique" in 1898, but not again until an NBC SO broadcast of October 29, 1938. During his tenure with the NBC SO, Toscanini returned to Tchaikovsky's final symphony on several occasions, both for broadcast concerts and a November 24, 1947 studio recording. Toscanini also recorded the "Pathétique" with the Philadelphia Orchestra on February 8, 1942 (Immortal Performances IP 1125-2). The various Toscanini broadcast and commercial "Pathétique" recordings document an overall consistency of approach. Some view Toscanini's interpretation of this intensely confessional work as too objective, lacking sentimentality. From my perspective, Toscanini manages both to convey the revolutionary genius of Tchaikovsky's

inspiration, and the symphony's raw emotional power. Crisp orchestral execution, a marvelous blending of orchestral sonorities, with a beautiful singing tone in the strings (with more portamento than one might expect), serve this Romantic masterpiece in sterling fashion. The quick-tempo portions, arrestingly swift, are juxtaposed with ample repose in the broader episodes. There is a welcome (indeed, necessary) flexibility of phrasing that never becomes indulgent or disruptive of the music's flow. Of utmost importance is Toscanini's mastery of how each episode in the "Pathétique" relates to its predecessor and successor. Toscanini brilliantly charts the sweeping architecture of Tchaikovsky's symphonic narrative. And Toscanini, a masterful opera conductor, embraces the theatrical, emotional qualities of the score. The apocalyptic development section of the opening movement is hair-raising in its intensity. The headlong momentum of the third-movement march sets the stage for an outpouring of grief and resignation in the concluding *Adagio lamentoso*. The "Pathétique" lends itself to a wide range of interpretations. I enjoy many of them, with Toscanini's approach occupying a favored status.

With regard to the recording of the April 25, 1943 "Pathétique," IP's Richard Caniell explains in his "Recording Notes": a lacquer of (the concert recording) was lost or damaged. This left a gap of 13:30 minutes, losing the final three minutes of the first movement and the entire second movement." For this IP set, Caniell completes the opening movement of the "Pathétique" with a portion of an April 19, 1941 all-Tchaikovsky program. The second movement is taken from the November 15, 1947 broadcast. While there are unifying qualities in Toscanini's approach to the "Pathétique," his interpretations are hardly duplicates of each other. The following is as a comparison of the TT for the Philadelphia and NBCSO commercial recordings with the April 25, 1943 Carnegie Hall performance reveal: Philadelphia O, 1942 I. 16:41 II. 8:02 III. 8:30 IV. 9:09; NBC SO 1943 (supplemented by excerpts from other performances) I. 16:41 II. 6:37 III. 9:05 IV. 8:47; NBC SO 1947 I. 16:15 II. 7:23 III. 8:46 IV. 9:04. The Philadelphia recording is the most flexibly phrased and sonically opulent of the three versions. The 1943 and 1947 NBC recordings are more propulsive and intensely focused. While the Philadelphia version is my favorite among these three, both the NBC SO performances are impressive, powerful accounts. Thanks to the Toscanini Estate and IP for adding the 1943 war bonds concert performance of the "Pathétique" to the discography.

The 1943 performance of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* Suite compares favorably with the November 19, 1951 RCA studio recording. There is the appropriate lightness of touch, the dance rhythms are enticingly sprung, and the orchestral timbre, enhanced by lovely woodwind playing, brings considerable pleasure. The legendary, electrifying April 23, 1945 performance of the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1 by Horowitz, Toscanini, and the NBC SO has previously been issued by RCA. Caniell observes: "This 1943 concerto was published on LP and CD (volume 44 of the complete edition) in a good transfer in which I could make only the slightest improvement in the strings and only in the tuttis plus a touch of improvement in the piano tone, drawing from the sonics a touch more liveliness." While the difference between the official RCA release and IP's version is not dramatic, the greater warmth and focus in the latter, especially in the reproduction of Horowitz's contribution, is a welcome improvement to an irreplaceable treasure. The recorded sound of the "Pathétique" and *Nutcracker* Suite, while not the equal of the First Piano Concerto, allows full appreciation of the performances.

The IP release concludes with a September 1, 1945 broadcast with Toscanini and the NBC SO performing Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony. The concert, recorded without an audience in NBC's Studio 8-H, was hastily organized to commemorate V-J Day. The NBC SO and Toscanini rise to the occasion, with an intense and propulsive account of Beethoven's revolutionary masterpiece. Toscanini balances the overall sense of athletic momentum with subtle but effective plasticity of phrasing, as well as lovely string portamenti. This stirring "Eroica" is similar in character and impact to the April 20, 1949 benefit concert performance I review in this issue (IP 1217-2). The broadcast sound for the September 1, 1945 performances is quite good.

Former *Fanfare* contributor James Camner is the author of the lively and enthusiastic liner notes that stand alongside Richard Caniell's commentary. All told, this is a document of considerable musical and historical importance. Recommended.

Five stars: The first release of the complete April 25, 1943 Toscanini/NBC SO War Bonds Concert, along with the 1945 V-J Day "Eroica"