

TOSCANINI PHILHARMONIC SYMPHONY SOCIETY OF NEW YORK: BRUCKNER SYMPHONY NO. 7 • Arturo Toscanini, cond; New York P • IP 1192-2 mono (2 CDs: 136:49) Live: Carnegie Hall, New York 1/27/1935¹; 3/29/1936²; 4/26/1936³

BRUCKNER ¹*Symphony No. 7*. **STRAUSS** ¹*Salome: Dance of the Seven Veils*.
SCHUBERT ³*Symphony No. 9*. **SIBELIUS** ²*En Saga*

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Over the years, Immortal Performances (IP) has done an extraordinary service by restoring many of the 1930s broadcasts by the New York Philharmonic (NY Phil) and its music director, Arturo Toscanini. As I've written many times, the Toscanini/NY Phil broadcasts and studio recordings are a unique and indispensable treasure. Toscanini was in his 60s, at the height of his powers, and leading one of the world's great orchestras. These recordings also find Toscanini willing to adopt broader tempos and a more liberal application of rubato than may generally be found in his more well-known recordings with the NBC SO (I acknowledge this is a generalization, and many performances that can serve as counter-examples). The radio broadcasts (preserved by various enterprising private recordists) suffer from inferior sound. And on occasion, when the recordist wasn't quick enough in swapping discs, there are performance gaps. IP has endeavored to restore the performances to a state that approximates what listeners heard when the broadcasts first aired. This involves painstaking work by IP's Richard Caniell to ameliorate the sonic defects inherent in the source discs. Caniell also fills in recording gaps with independent source material, sometimes by the same artists, and sometimes not. A new two-disc set from IP includes performances from Carnegie Hall broadcasts on January 27, 1935 (Bruckner 7, *Dance of the Seven Veils* from Strauss's *Salome*), March 29, 1936 (Sibelius *En Saga*), and April 26, 1936 (Schubert 9). The source material for the Bruckner 7 lacks the final seven bars of the opening movement, seven bars in the second movement, and 13 bars in the finale (the third movement is complete). The Schubert 9 is missing 1:15 of music in the finale. As usual, Caniell has done a remarkable job both of synthesizing the various materials, and in restoring the overall sonic quality to a degree that allows enjoyment and appreciation by all who are experienced in listening to historic broadcasts.

Toscanini conducted the music of Bruckner on five separate occasions. In December of 1896 in Turin, Toscanini led the *Adagio* of the Seventh Symphony in commemoration of Bruckner's passing. In March of 1931, Toscanini conducted the NY Phil in a series of concerts featuring the complete Bruckner 7. Toscanini and the NY Phil performed the Bruckner 4 in November, 1932, and February, 1934 (in a 1932 response to a questionnaire from the *Berliner Börsen Zeitung*, Toscanini revealed: "In recent years I have thoroughly studied Bruckner's monumental symphonies"). January 1935 concerts included the Bruckner 7. The January 27, 1935 NY Phil performance of the Bruckner 7 is the only recording of Toscanini conducting music by the great Austrian composer. Pristine Audio (PA) previously issued a fine restoration of this performance (PASC082), favorably reviewed in *Fanfare* by Lynn René Bayley (31:5, May/June 2008) and Marc Mandel (31:6, July/Aug 2008). Unlike IP, PA does not fill in the source recording's missing gaps. And as I've mentioned, IP release also includes three other Toscanini/NY Phil broadcast performances. As such, the IP and PA issues of the Bruckner 7 are two

distinct entities. Readers may purchase either with confidence, depending upon their specific desires. There is much to admire in Toscanini's Bruckner 7. The first two movements exude the appropriate solemnity and expansiveness. Toscanini's keen ear for a blended ensemble yields great rewards, especially when executed by the NY Phil, at the top of its form. The contrast in the third movement between the churning principal scherzo and the calming trio is well judged. The finale is the one disappointment for me. Toscanini cuts a portion of the recapitulation, and adopts a fleet tempo that he maintains right to the closing bars, denying the final measures their role as the work's apotheosis, a majestic summation of the entire symphonic journey. Overall, I'm gratified that this recording is available, and in two fine restorations.

The January 27, 1935 concert, in addition to the Bruckner 7, included Respighi's orchestration of the Bach Prelude and Fugue in D, BWV 532, not included here. Also on the program was the erotic *Dance of the Seven Veils* from *Salome*. Now, that's quite the contrast to the Bruckner 7! And in this performance, Toscanini and the NY Phil mine the work's seductive, insinuating qualities to the fullest. BMG's *Arturo Toscanini: The Complete RCA Collection* includes a 1939 NBC Studio 8-H broadcast of the same work. The NY Phil Carnegie Hall performance is 30 seconds longer (10:15/9:44). Toscanini uses that additional time to apply a breadth and flexibility of pacing that make the earlier broadcast a clear favorite. Perhaps the sound on the 1939 8-H broadcast is finer overall, but the 1935 Carnegie Hall version is good enough, and the NY Phil emerges as the far richer, more colorful ensemble. The contrast between the March 29, 1936 Toscanini NY Phil performance of Sibelius's *En Saga*, and the March 15, 1952 televised broadcast with the NBC SO (Testament SBDVD 1007) is even more dramatic. The 1936 rendition is a full two minutes slower than the 1952 (19:34/17:33). The NBC SO telecast performance is certainly played with commitment, precision, and arresting momentum. But the far broader (and again, more flexible) approach in the earlier rendition yields considerable dividends. Toscanini and the NY Phil are able to achieve a much greater sense of mystery, investing the contrasting martial episodes with far more impact. And again, the NY Phil emerges as the superior ensemble.

The April 26, 1936 Schubert 9 offers no such grand departures from the three versions available in *The Complete RCA Collection* (Philadelphia O November 16, 1941; NBC SO: February 25, 1947; February 9, 1953). A TT of 1:41 separates the fleetest (1936 NY Phil: 44:01) and slowest performance (1953 NBC SO: 45:42) (an example of Toscanini actually broadening his interpretation over time). The overall approach remains consistent. Toscanini adopts a broad tempo for the first movement's *Andante* introduction, allowing for a seamless transition to the ensuing *Allegro ma non troppo*. The movement's concluding bars remain essentially in tempo, rather than adopting the dramatic *allargando* most conductors employ. The second movement is taken at a comparatively brisk march tempo. The third movement scherzo is propulsive. As with the Bruckner 7, Toscanini noticeably relaxes the tension for the lyrical trio section. The finale is athletic, swift, and shorn of sentimentality. The Schubert 9 was a Toscanini favorite, and each performance is worth hearing. My preference is for the 1941 Philadelphia O account, in part for the orchestra's gorgeous sound, and for the moments of repose Toscanini injects on this occasion. The 1953 NBC SO sports the best sound, and is a performance of stature as well. The NY Phil version is the fastest of the quartet, particularly in the final two movements. The orchestra is up to the task, playing with precision, fire, and beauty. Given the other available commercial recordings, all in better sound, this one is more of a specialty item, but still a valuable one.

Dewey Faulkner's insightful comments on the repertoire and performances are always welcome, as are Richard Caniell's "Recording Notes." A brief amount of announcer commentary is included at the close of the Schubert 9 performance. The Bruckner 7 will make this a must for Toscanini aficionados, but I think the *Salome* and *En Saga* qualify as well. And the Schubert 9 is a fine performance in its own right. Recommended.

Five stars: Epic Bruckner and Schubert symphonies from Toscanini and the NY Phil, and more