

ARTURO TOSCANINI: NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA TRANSCONTINENTAL TOUR 3 May 1950 • Arturo Toscanini, cond; NBC SO • IMMORTAL PERFORMANCES 1210-2 mono (2 CDs: 156:20) Live: Pasadena Civic Auditorium, Pasadena 5-3-1950¹, Carnegie Hall, NY 11-15-1952²

BEETHOVEN ¹*Egmont* Overture. **BRAHMS** ¹Symphony No. 4. **DEBUSSY** ¹*Ibéria*. **GLINKA** ¹*Jota Aragonesa*. **WAGNER** ¹*Siegfried: Forest Murmurs*. ¹*Die Meistersinger: Prelude to Act I*. **SOUSA** ¹*The Stars and Stripes Forever*. **ROSSINI** ²Sonata for Strings No. 3 in C. **SAINT-SAËNS** ²Symphony No. 3

By
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Fanfare September/October 2025

In the previous issue of *Fanfare*, I reviewed an Immortal Performances (IP) release of a May 5, 1950 tour concert by Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra, performed at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium in Southern California. The in-house recording (not broadcast) was made available to IP by the Toscanini Estate. A new release from IP offers the Toscanini/NBC SO Pasadena concert that took place two days prior. As I wrote in my previous review, the 1950 spring concert tour—spanning six weeks, 8,600 miles, 20 cities, and 21 concerts—proved to be a particularly gratifying episode in Toscanini’s relationship with the NBC SO. Toscanini, 83 at the time of the tour, was in energetic, buoyant spirits, and the NBC SO responded in kind with sparkling performances. According to some, including NBC SO first violinist Samuel Antek, they were the finest of the Orchestra and Maestro’s two-decade association. The May 5, 1950 concert, comprising works by Rossini, Beethoven, Smetana, Wagner, and Tchaikovsky, is a treasure. The engineers who recorded the concert captured the NBC SO in sound that surpasses what RCA’s engineers typically achieved in Carnegie Hall and NBC’s Studio 8-H. The sonic profile is rich, transparent, and far more illustrative of Toscanini’s gifts as an orchestral colorist. The improved sound is coupled with performances that showcase Toscanini adopting a more expansive and flexible approach (with no loss of excitement and momentum) than documented in contemporaneous RCA recordings of the same repertoire. The IP release of the May 5, 1950 Pasadena concert is an absolute treasure, one that will be part of my 2025 Want List.

The May 3, 1950 concert recording provides similar joys. The NBC SO is once again presented in excellent sound. And with very few exceptions, Toscanini adopts slower tempos for this concert than in the parallel RCA recordings. Perhaps the contrasts between the Pasadena concert and the RCA releases are not quite so dramatic as in the May 5 program. But the divergence is nonetheless palpable, as is Toscanini’s willingness to caress phrases with greater flexibility and tenderness. The *Egmont* Overture, Brahms Fourth, and *Forest Murmurs* from Wagner’s *Siegfried* benefit most from this modification of approach. The Debussy, Glinka, and Prelude to Act I of Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger* are less distinguishable from the studio counterparts, but no less gratifying for that. The Pasadena audience is ecstatic in response to the concert, and the attendees are rewarded with an encore, a rip-roaring *Stars and Stripes Forever*. Perhaps the May 3, 1950 Pasadena concert is not quite as essential as the May 5 recording. But anyone interested in Toscanini and his legacy with the NBC SO will want to hear it. I enjoyed it immensely.

The IP release covers two discs, with the Pasadena concert extending over to the second. The remainder of Disc 2 is the November 15, 1952 Toscanini/NBC SO broadcast from Carnegie Hall. The program opens with Rossini's String Sonata No. 3 in C. Rossini composed the score when he was 12. Toscanini discovered the work's score in the Library of Congress, and conducted the Sonata's American premiere at the November 15 broadcast concert. Toscanini and the NBC SO did not record the work commercially. Their crisp, lyrical, and at times humorous rendition recommends itself to Toscanini admirers. The ensuing performance of the Saint-Saëns "Organ" Symphony is the same one released commercially by RCA (some portions of the November 14 rehearsal were incorporated into the finished product). But even if you own the RCA issue of this fine performance, IP's sonic restoration is worth hearing. IP's Richard Caniell has unveiled greater presence, color, definition, and impact. And for a work often viewed as a sonic spectacular, those gains are significant. Ben Grauer's broadcast commentary is included. The set's printed materials include commentary by Robert Matthew-Walker, Robert Carlson, and Richard Caniell. Recommended.

Five stars: Toscanini and the NBC SO in concert at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium, on May 3, 1950