

TOSCANINI 150TH ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE CD

STEVEN RICHMAN, CONDUCTOR

HARMONIE ENSEMBLE/NEW YORK

BRIDGE RECORDS 9493

Verdi: Aida Overture; Bizet/Toscanini: Carmen Suite; Tchaikovsky: Nutcracker Suite

Waldteufel/Toscanini: Skaters Waltz; Rossini: William Tell Overture

It's difficult for me to express, verbally, my feelings about music and musicians; after all, music begins where words end. Before addressing the Toscanini Tribute recording, I think it's necessary to give some background information on my musical life and development.

My fascination and fixation with Arturo Toscanini began very early on. In fact, on my 11th birthday, my parents bought me an LP of Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony in Waldteufel's Skaters Waltz, the Tchaikovsky Nutcracker Suite, and the William Tell Overture, my very first classical record. By an odd and strange coincidence, the birthday purchase turned out to be 2 days after Toscanini's death, which I only realized many years later. We even lived not that far from Toscanini's Riverdale home, Villa Pauline. (Was the torch passed?) If memory serves, I also received an Elvis Presley LP as well (my musical tastes have remained catholic).

My father listened to "classical" music on the weekends, but mostly Overtures and Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. (Many years later, he informed me that a teacher in Junior High School had

required the students to memorize patter songs.) Interesting how a teacher could have a major influence on a future generation, though somewhat delayed. Though I was heavily into early rock n' roll (when it was great and raw), I enjoyed and appreciated the records my father played. It was never, for me, "oh please, turn off that classical stuff!" I simply liked both. I still adhere to the words of Duke Ellington, "There's two kinds of music, good music, and the other kind." No categories...

Several years later I began studying French horn, since my parents wanted me to play an "unusual" instrument. They had two musician friends, one a bassoonist in the Metropolitan Opera, and the other a horn player, but the latter instrument appealed to me more, being both heroic and expressively melodic. Around the same time, I spontaneously began buying classical records: Reiner and the Chicago Symphony 1812 Overture, Dvořák Carnival Overture, Weinberger: Polka and Fugue from Schwanda; Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto and Rachmaninoff Concerto No. 3 with Cliburn; Grofé Grand Canyon Suite (Morton Gould); Copland Rodeo and Billy the Kid (Bernstein), and Bartók Concerto for Orchestra, likewise Reiner. Bernstein's New York Philharmonic Young People's Concerts on television and the fact that Tchaikovsky Competition-winning pianist Van Cliburn had gained world renown also had a big effect on me. Bernstein was my idol; he was brilliant, articulate, and engaging, and was into all kinds of music—including Broadway, jazz, and Pop. Even professional musicians could learn from him, I later realized. (At age 15 at a summer music camp I actually imitated the broadcasts by playing records and giving background information on the pieces to some of the young music students.) I eagerly read the record jacket notes and also noted the pictures of other LP covers for future reference and purchase. Each week I took my entire ten dollar allowance and bought 4 monaural LPs at Sam Goody's record store on West 49th Street in Manhattan.

I am often asked where my love for classical music came from. Since I don't believe there were any musicians in my family (although I think there was an uncle who was a music publisher), the best I can come up with is that I researched my parents' family origins, which were from Budapest, Vienna, and Warsaw. Collective memory? Looking back, my remembrance is that it was "already there" inside me.

Eventually, I studied with the principal horn of the NBC Symphony, Arthur Berv. I chose him specifically since I admired the remarkable classic beauty, discipline, and style of his playing, and also for the obvious association with The Maestro. He had also played principal in the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski. By 1970 I had become assistant principal horn of the American Symphony Orchestra under Stokowski in Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, assisting my teacher's assistant in the NBC Symphony, so things had come full circle, in a sense. I only wish I could have played assistant in NBC, a musical dream come true. Oh well, born too late! I remained 20 years in ASO, but my conducting career overlapped my playing, beginning in earnest around 1979.

In that year, I founded and conducted the first concert of Harmonie Ensemble/New York, so named because our initial performances were of classical wind ensemble repertoire. The Netherlands Wind Ensemble was our model. They had, besides performing wind music by Mozart, Beethoven, *at al*, unearthed, in manuscript, many rare arrangements dating from the late 18th to early 19th centuries, of opera, symphony, and even piano repertoire. There were literally thousands of such versions, having been devised by wind players/music directors of royal resident ensembles. I actually obtained a number of arrangements from the Dutchmen, including one of Rossini's Semiramide Overture, a *tour de force* if there ever was one. Also on the first program was Stravinsky's Octet for Wind Instruments, a Mozart Divertimento, and the Dvořák

Serenade for winds, cello, and bass. Much of this repertoire we later recorded. But I did not limit myself to such works; almost immediately I expanded the ensemble to orchestral size, performing some music that Toscanini himself arranged, that of the Cherubini Symphony in D (1815). The Maestro had actually referenced the Cherubini String Quartet No. 2, dating from 1829, which has a great deal of similar material, though expanded and with a new slow movement. Toscanini incorporated material from the quartet, which added considerably to the symphony's beauty and effectiveness. Also on the program were the Wagner Siegfried Idyll and the Beethoven Symphony No. 5. I myself contacted the New York Times and was surprised to receive a request for a phone interview, which resulted in an extensive article previous to the performance.

These concerts took place at New York's Symphony Space, on the Upper West Side, which also presented and still presents the Wall-to-Wall Concerts, day-long marathon events devoted to composers, the first of which was in 1978, devoted to Bach. On November 22, 1980, the concert honored the Dean of American Composers, Aaron Copland, whose 80th Birthday was being celebrated; other American composers' works were heard as well. I was honored to conduct Copland's *Music for the Theatre*, (a work which I had first heard in a Bernstein Young People's Concert, *Humor in Music*) and the composer himself led Harmonie Ensemble/New York in the original 13 instrument version of his ballet *Appalachian Spring*. Bernstein attended the concert, which was broadcast live throughout the United States on National Public Radio, and gave a brief though infamous speech just prior to my conducting. I was privileged to collaborate with Mr. Copland, who attended my rehearsals, as I did his. I carefully wrote down everything he said in the rehearsals (most memorably, "No Tchaikovsky!"), which came in handy when I eventually recorded both these works in 2002. Excerpts from the Copland Wall-to-Wall concert

were featured in a PBS-TV broadcast entitled Aaron Copland at 80, a Self Portrait, later released on video worldwide.

Following the Copland, I dipped into a Stravinsky project likewise long-brewing. I led a Stravinsky 100th Birthday Concert at the 92nd Street “Y”, including a staged version of Histoire du Soldat. Later on, we recorded the suite, as well as several small works, and four unpublished pieces I had uncovered. The rarities included 2 violin works and 2 songs.

Quite a few times we presented serendipitous anniversary tributes which were not planned years in advance, as most other organizations do. Orchestral celebrations devoted to Gershwin (50th Anniversary of his last New York concert), Handel (300th Birthday), Bernstein (70th Birthday), Morton Gould (75th Birthday), etc. were presented at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall, and the Out-of-Doors Festival at Damrosch Park. Other events included Martinů, Mancini, and even a Toscanini celebration at his Wave Hill Home in Riverdale, New York, on the 20th anniversary of his final NBC concert.

Further excursions into the symphonic repertoire resulted from my involvement in efforts to save the Manhattan row-house at 327 East 17th Street where the great Bohemian composer Antonín Dvořák lived and wrote, from 1892-95 while director of the National Conservatory of Music. Sadly, the house was demolished in 1991, but my energies changed to organizing and conducting several benefit concerts to place a statue of Dvořák in Stuyvesant Square Park, at Second Avenue and 17th Street, diagonally across the street from where the Dvořák House once stood. The statue was eventually dedicated on September 13, 1997, in conjunction with a gala Dvořák Day Concert in which I led Harmonie Ensemble/New York (aka in this case, Dvořák Festival Orchestra of New York) in the *Symphony No. 9*, “From the new world”, in St. George’s Church,

across the park from where it was composed. Violinist Josef Suk, Dvořák's great-grandson, performed the Sonatina for Violin and Piano, op. 100, also written in the house. Members of the Dvořák Family, film director Milos Forman, the Czech Ambassador, and many other prominent guests attended the historic event. The Dvořák Day Concerts continued on for several years, featuring both Czech and American artists in works by Dvořák and other Czech composers. The 1997 Dvořák Day Concert was released on cd as well.

My interests continued and blossomed into the music of George Gershwin, Aaron Copland, and Duke Ellington, who had been trained, coincidentally, by Dvořák's students Rubin Goldmark, Edwin Franko Goldman, and Will Marion Cook. Five of my cds, of the three composers, have been a result. Gershwin I have devoted more than three decades to researching, performing and recording his original orchestrations, which had been meddled with by various editors and publishers over the decades.

Further more recent excursions have been in a jazzier direction, including the Miles Davis/Gil Evans Sketches of Spain, Henry Mancini's Music For Peter Gunn (a Number One Best-Seller on Amazon and iTunes), and tributes to Big Band arrangements of the Classics from the Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, and Claude Thornhill Bands; and perhaps most prominently, the Duke Ellington/Billy Strayhorn Nutcracker Suite (paired with Tchaikovsky's original).

Now, after the explanatory introduction, to the subject at hand. To a certain extent, my entire (musical) life can be seen as a prelude to the present recording project.

My original concept of the Toscanini 150th Anniversary Tribute was not specifically to present it as such. As my fourteenth cd of widely varied music, it was simply, I thought, an interesting combination of repertoire, a project that had been on the back burner for years. (And in looking back at several of my recent recordings, it too seemed to be an unconscious musical reliving of my childhood.) But it included two rare Toscanini arrangements as well as three others with unique associations with the great Italian maestro. It would not necessarily be considered from his core repertoire, but rather some unusual works he had programmed from time to time, particularly in his later career at NBC.

And Toscanini's approach to all music was essentially the same. Complete and total devotion to realizing the composer's intentions without show, artifice, or sham. In particular, for instance, Waldteufel's Skaters Waltz, in a sense, to me sounds as great as Beethoven's Ninth in his performance, such is its attention to line, balance, proportion, honesty and purity of musicianship. I own several recordings of the Waltz, but none even approaches the level of dedication, artistry, and musicality that Toscanini achieves. Perhaps at age 11 I did not perceive precisely why it struck me so strongly, but instinctively felt it.

If I had initially planned a tribute ahead of time, I certainly would never have come up with some obvious repertoire such as Beethoven or Brahms Symphonies, Rossini Overtures, Aïda or La Bohème, this making no sense. So the project evolved naturally, over time. As it dawned upon me that the Toscanini Sesquicentennial was approaching, it became gradually apparent it was the only way to go. Though I knew in a sense I was setting myself up for direct and instant comparison, I felt I had no choice but to go ahead with the idea with the usual enthusiasm, energy, and attention to detail with which I approach everything, be it Gershwin, Handel, Dvořák, Gil Evans, Miles Davis, Stravinsky, or Benny Goodman.

My goal, as always with recordings, was to make it sound as natural, realistic, spontaneous, and live as possible, not at all like a recording, particularly in this case, like an NBC broadcast. I acted as co-producer and co-editor, supervising all details, and worked hard with the engineer to achieve this result.

Coincidentally, three of the works from my first classical LP figure on the present recording, the Waldteufel, Tchaikovsky, and Rossini. The first work on the tribute cd is one that Toscanini performed only once, in 1940, Verdi's rare, unpublished Aïda Overture, composed in 1872, subsequent to the opera's premiere. But Verdi decided to use the original, shorter Prelude which he had composed. In 1926, the Verdi family loaned Toscanini the original manuscript, asking his opinion as to whether or not it should be published. In fact it was not, and Toscanini's opinion, if he actually had one, is not known. But 13 years later he wrote the score out from memory (!), performing it with the NBC Symphony in 1940, a world premiere, without the heirs' permission. The work is rarely heard, though it is an exciting and well crafted amalgam of the principal melodies from the opera, a real barn-burner (if done in an Italianate style and tempo), and a real challenge to the conductor, as were all the works on the cd; the Italian Verdi and Rossini, the French Carmen, the Waldteufel, and the Russian Tchaikovsky.

Toscanini was only 8 years old when Bizet composed Carmen in 1875, the year previous to the young cellist's entering the Parma Conservatory. The Maestro actually later conducted the first Don José, Paul Lhérie, and led the opera on numerous occasions between his 20s and 40s. (What I would give to have heard Toscanini conduct Carmen!). In his 70s he put together an orchestral suite somewhat different from that done by Ernest Guiraud, a friend of Bizet's who, after the composer's untimely death, compiled the two suites usually heard today. Toscanini's version utilizes much of Guiraud's Suite No. 1, eliminating the Seguedille, and, instead of Les

Toréadors, Introduction to Act I, includes the March and Chorus from Act IV, with the children's chorus at bar 7 being substituted by muted trumpets, by the horns after rehearsal no. 20, and the addition of winds to cover the chorus at bar 150, among other details. I found the Maestro's version to be refreshingly different in sequence and approach, and his recording bracingly vibrant and unique. It was also issued on reel-to-reel tape in the 1950s, in wonderful sound.

The suite from Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker ballet (1892) first appeared on a Toscanini program only four years after its premiere, on the Maestro's first complete symphony concert, in Turin, in 1896. Some review made mention of my tempi in the recording, but I found recently that they matched exactly the very first recording of the Suite (1909, The Royal Palace Orchestra conducted by Herman Finck). Toscanini's Tchaikovsky performances were highly expressive, direct, unsentimentalized, and dramatic, and praised by no less than Sergei Rachmaninoff. The Maestro's Waltz of the Flowers particularly is a masterpiece unto itself, with subtle variations in tempi and a natural growth and accelerando unparalleled in any other recording I have heard.

The charming Skaters Waltz, as it is known in English (originally Les Patineurs, 1882) was written by the prolific Alsatian waltz composer Emile Waldteufel (né Levy). Originally written for a salon ensemble/orchestra of a few single winds, brass, timpani, and strings, it was robustly orchestrated by Toscanini in the 1940s for the full forces of the entire NBC Symphony. The Maestro also added some repeats from the original piano score from which I also worked. Our recording of the arrangement is the only one other than the Maestro's from 1945. Actually an introduction, 4 waltzes, and a coda, in Toscanini's hands it is supremely musical, with flexibility of tempi and phrasing, making it into much more than a mere trifle, as most other recordings do, in this case a gemlike mini-masterwork. I aspired to maintain this approach. An added plus: my

teacher, principal horn Arthur Berv, begins the work with a brief, lovely solo E major pastoral horn call.

Toscanini conducted Rossini's Overture to William Tell at the tender age of 19, in August, 1886 during his debut season in Rio de Janeiro; so bookends to an extraordinary life and career, since his final recording of the work was with the NBC Symphony in 1953. One runs into difficulty in approaching a work as ubiquitous as Rossini's 1829 overture. How to approach it in an unhackneyed way, and take it freshly and seriously, with all its myriad associations with so many films, cartoons, TV shows, pop songs, commercials, etc. How many of us first heard it via Warner Brothers, on television, or radio? Unique in the repertoire, to me it's a mini-symphony with four distinct sections. I first, as I always do, went back to the earliest possible sources, in this case, the original manuscript and earliest editions. Numerous editorial and publishing changes including dynamics, phrasing (especially in the opening celli section), tempo markings and other details popped out. For instance, *sotto voce* in Rossini's hand had been changed to *pp*. The composer certainly spoke Italian, and chose the wording carefully. I strove to achieve this special atmospheric (literally!) effect. *Andantino* in the famous English horn/flute duet had been altered to *Andante*, and original articulations in a number of cases had gone by the wayside. I've found this sort of liberty-taking in publications of composers as diverse as Dvořák, Gershwin, and Mozart, to name but a few. It irks me no end that editors and publishers feel it is their right to make these sorts of alterations, in effect changing the character and flavor of the work. But I did follow Toscanini's practice of doubling the five soli celli in the introduction, since to me it adds a texture that I think adds to the effect, and I believe the composer would have approved. (So much for Toscanini's supposed slavish adherence to the score!).

And in the ultimate showing of respect and admiration, for this recording, I actually used the Maestro's batons, purchased via auction by phone to London!

As a postlude, I would like to further briefly discuss the tempo issue regarding Toscanini, which has been much abused. If one takes note of tempi in classical music in old 1930s movies, and many historic recordings, often they are more swift and spirited than much of what we hear today. Also, for instance, in Toscanini's recordings such as the Elgar Enigma Variations, the Maestro's tempi (BBC 1935 and NBC Symphonies) are virtually exactly the same as the composer's recording with the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra (1926), the difference being although the composer knows precisely what he wants, Toscanini was a conductor of genius. And Siegfried Wagner, who would certainly know the tempo of his father's Siegfried Idyll, in his recording matches exactly the tempi of Toscanini's recording.

Some years ago the New York Philharmonic finally released from its vast archive, on the Immortal Performances label, live performances of Toscanini from a Brahms cycle, including on Feb. 24, 1935 featuring a breathtakingly beautiful Violin Concerto with Jascha Heifetz and an equally gorgeous and elegant Mozart Piano Concerto No. 27 in B-flat with Rudolf Serkin in his American debut on Feb. 23, 1936. Toscanini, by the way, was working from a copy of Mozart's original manuscript provided to him by Serkin, which confirmed the Maestro's instinct about Mozart's original tempo marking of the first movement (*alla breve*, rather than 4/4), and other details such as 7 missing orchestral tutti bars in early publications.

To me, Toscanini was the most interesting, musical, and dynamic conductor I have ever heard, by far. I hope my tribute will be taken in the spirit in which it was produced; as a humble musician pursuing an honest musical goal.

STEVEN RICHMAN is the Grammy Award-nominated conductor of Harmonie Ensemble/New York. He has conducted birthday/anniversary tributes to Handel, Stravinsky, Dvořák, Copland, Toscanini, Gershwin, Bernstein, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, *et al*, and written articles on Dvořák, Copland, Toscanini, and Gershwin, among others. Mr. Richman served as Music Associate for international TV broadcasts of the United Nations Day Concerts, collaborating with conductors including Zubin Mehta, Lorin Maazel, Rafael Fruhbeck de Burgos, and Yehudi Menuhin. He has also given talks on Toscanini and Gershwin at Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts. His 14 internationally acclaimed cds have been issued on the Harmonia Mundi [PIAS], Koch International Classics, Bridge, Music & Arts, and Sheffield Lab labels, available on amazon.com and other international sources. For further information see harmonieensembleny.com or write: info@harmonieensembleny.com