

Eugene Ormandy

Born: November 18, 1899 – Budapest, Hungary

Died: March 12, 1985 – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

The musical career of the outstanding Hungarian-born American conductor, Eugene Ormandy (real name, Jenő Blau), began at a surprisingly young age. He could identify symphonies at the age of 3 and could play the violin at the age of 4. When he was 5, he became the youngest pupil in the history of the Royal Academy of Music in Budapest. By the time he was 10, he was performing for the royal family of Austria-Hungary. Ormandy's early musical experiences were made possible by his father, who wanted his son to become a world-renowned violinist.

In 1936, Eugene Ormandy was asked to conduct the Budapest Orchestra, much to his father's disappointment. Ormandy once said that his father did not realize how much more important it was to be a great conductor than a great violinist.

Eugene Ormandy was invited to undertake a concert tour of the USA, playing violin, but when he arrived he discovered he had been misled and the tour had fallen through. Down to his last nickel, Ormandy happened to run into an old friend, who was also a musician from Budapest, in a New York coffee shop near Broadway. The friend advised Ormandy to call Erno Rapee, who conducted the Capitol Theater Symphony.

Following his friend's advice Eugene Ormandy auditioned for Rapee, who responded, "You are much too good to play in a movie house. You should be playing in Carnegie Hall!" Ormandy played in the Capitol Theater Symphony orchestra, then made his conducting debut in 1924. During this time, Ormandy was greatly influenced by Arturo Toscanini at the New York Philharmonic. This influence would later show in Ormandy's precision and balance with the Philadelphia Orchestra, resulting in a totally unique sound.

Later, as a member of the CBS Radio conducting staff, Eugene Ormandy became one of radio's first important conductors. His work conducting symphonic music for commercial programs was hailed for its "finish, spirit, and accuracy."

The turning point in Eugene Ormandy's career came in 1931 when he was invited to replace Toscanini, who was slated for a guest performance with the Philadelphia Orchestra, but had suddenly become ill. Although his manager, Arthur Judson, advised him against it, Ormandy chose to do it and became an overnight sensation. He would later state, when asked what was his greatest single moment, "When I replaced Toscanini to conduct this orchestra."

In 1936, Eugene Ormandy became associate conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski, then in 1938, he was promoted to permanent conductor. It was during his time with the Philadelphia Orchestra that he became known as the "modest little maestro." He created an orchestra renowned for its warm romantic sound and developed an ensemble rapport that has been compared to a good varsity team. He personally hired every one of the 104 musicians who played under his baton.

In 1970, Eugene Ormandy cried as he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom "for bringing to each performance something more precious than his great gifts—himself and the rich experiences of his life." His sound was heard throughout the world for they toured extensively. In 1973, Ormandy's orchestra became the first American symphony to visit the People's Republic of China.

Eugene Ormandy conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra for an unprecedented 44 years. He retired from full-time music-making in 1980 and became conductor emeritus. Appropriately, his last concert was with the Philadelphia Orchestra at Carnegie Hall on January 10, 1984. He died in 1985, of pneumonia, at the age of 85.



# *Bela Bartók*

## *Concerto For Orchestra*

*The Philadelphia Orchestra*  
conducted by  
*Eugene Ormandy*



Mastered in DSD256

Until the '40s, Béla Bartók -- with his angular melodies, his brash colors, his harsh harmonies, and especially his aggressive rhythms -- was regarded as a modernist boogieman. But after his exile to America, Bartók's modernism mellowed, and his final works are among the most immediately attractive in twentieth century music. This is especially true of his 1944 Concerto for orchestra, with its appealing melodies, brilliant colors, vivid harmonies, and especially its irresistibly infectious rhythms. With the Concerto for orchestra, Bartók went from a modernist boogieman to a modernist master.

Until fairly recently, the best Bartók conductors were Hungarian. But while Szell, Solti, and especially Reiner are remembered as great Bartók

conductors, Eugene Ormandy is often forgotten. This is unfortunate, since, as this 1963 recording of the Concerto for orchestra with the Philadelphia Orchestra demonstrates, Ormandy was a superlative Bartók conductor with melodies that sing, colors that sparkle, harmonies that shine, and rhythms that jump and leap and dance. The Philadelphia was at its virtuosic peak under Ormandy in the early '60s, and its performance here is technically impeccable, but, more importantly, it is extremely energetic and deeply dedicated. This a reminder of Ormandy's excellence as a Bartók conductor.

# *Bela Bartók*

## *Concerto For Orchestra*

*The Philadelphia Orchestra*     *Eugene Ormandy*

- 1 Introduzione 9:52**
- 2 Giuoco Delle Coppie 6:55**
- 3 Elegia 6:53**
- 4 Intermezzo Interrotto 4:34**
- 5 Finale 9:06**
- Total Time: 37:20**

Recorded by Columbia Records at Philadelphia, PA, 1963



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Recorded by Columbia Records at Philadelphia, PA, 1963