

in the waveform as well as audible, more so because there are some pitch discrepancies caused by RCA's early tape recorders. All such splices and pitch discrepancies have been repaired in HDTT's current releases, probably for the first time.

Toscanini's recordings have largely languished in the digital era for the reason that some number of his original master tapes are reportedly missing from RCA's (now Sony's) vaults. The story that has circulated about this situation is that a former employee checked them out of the RCA archives and simply never returned them. The veracity of this story has been supported by the unimpressive sound quality of the various efforts to reissue Toscanini's recordings in the digital era. Improvements have been made, to be sure, but not the kind of improvements that would spark any kind of reassessment of his recorded legacy. For the most part, at least up until now, the view that one must make allowances for the sound quality when listening to Toscanini's recordings has remained in force. A handful of Toscanini's early 1950's recordings made their way to release by RCA on reel-to-reel tape, and we have assumed that such reel-to-reel tapes were probably sourced from master tapes that are now apparently lost.

The instant Brahms First Symphony recording is considered to be one of Toscanini's very greatest, providing a superb dramatic presentation of this complex symphony, thoroughly idiomatic and played with both flexibility and radiant, well-balanced orchestral sound. We hope that the new HDTT releases open a new window onto the quality of Toscanini's recorded legacy in his final years.

**An extended version of these notes is available for free on the HDTT Webpage for this release, at the "Download Cover Art and Liner Notes" button**



# BRAHMS

# SYMPHONY No.1

# TOSCANINI

and the NBC Symphony Orchestra



## TOSCANINI IN HIGH-RESOLUTION?

By John H. Haley

Yep. The recordings from the last years of Toscanini's career, from which we best know his work as a conductor, have always been remarkable for their musical content, whether or not one agrees with the interpretations, but they have never scored high marks for their sonic quality. With this release of Toscanini's famous 1951 recording of Brahms Symphony No. 1 and another of his 1953 New World Symphony recording, HDTT has sought to do something about this situation.

Arturo Toscanini was born in Parma, Italy on March 25, 1867, well back into the 19th Century that gave rise to our "Romantic" masterpieces that still today form the core of the standard orchestral repertoire. As a point of reference, when Brahms's First Symphony had its premiere in 1876, Toscanini was 9 years old, and when Brahms died in 1897 at age 63, Toscanini was 30 and well on his way to becoming well-established as a major conductor.

Toscanini's conducting career ceased with his last concert in April, 1954, so unlike many of his contemporaries, who lived long enough to make brilliant sounding recordings in the stereo era, it did not extend significantly into that era. While all of these maestros left the definite imprint of their personalities on the music they recorded, as listeners we are obliged to study their recordings for what they tell us about their understanding of the style of the music written in the 19th and early 20th centuries--in a very real sense, they were performing and recording music of their own time or from not so long before. The music in which these maestros excelled does not need any kind of revolutionary reinvention for modern ears based on scholarly research or current trendiness--the musical style demonstrated by their recordings is

"authentic" by definition.

During his lifetime, Toscanini was lionized as the greatest of all maestros and acquired a mystique that became ironclad. As his legend grew during his lifetime, he even acquired the moniker "the Maestro," as if he were something other than one among many great 20th century maestros. While his huge reputation did not survive intact in the decades following his death in 1957 at age 89, today perhaps we might want to take a longer perspective, allowing for the possibility that there has been some overkill in the negative assessments of his work, brought about largely by the rather poor sonic quality of his recordings made in the late 1940's and early 1950's.

A number of factors contributed to the lackluster sonic quality of Toscanini's recordings. First is Toscanini's own well documented impatience with and even disdain for the process of making recordings. A second factor is the decision, however it was made, to release a number of his recordings deriving from the dry, airless acoustics of Studio 8H in NBC's New York studios, from which many NBC radio broadcasts originated. We are fortunate that both recordings being released by HDTT were made in the alternative recording space used for this orchestra, Carnegie Hall, renowned worldwide for its warm yet brilliant acoustics.

Another factor was RCA's own slowness to adopt more modern recording techniques in the early 1950's. Recording on tape only became the norm starting in 1950-1951, but even so, RCA's results were no match for what some of its competitors were achieving. Nor was the pressing quality of RCA's early 1950's mono records outstanding. RCA was still recording in fairly short segments that would fit on 45 RPM record sides, which were later spliced together for continuous play on LP. The side-join splices are sometimes visible

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**1 Un poco sostenuto; Allegro 11:56**

**2 Andante sostenuto 8:12**

**3 Un poco allegretto e grazioso 4:29**

**4 Adagio; Piu andante;**

**Allegro non troppo ma con brio 16:58**

Recorded by RCA at Carnegie Hall, November 6, 1951



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