

Leopold Stokowski was one of the greatest conductors of all time. Born in London on April 18, 1882, he started his musical career as an organist. In 1903, he took the post of principal organist at St. James' Church in London, situated in a small side off the famous Piccadilly. Although only 21 years old, he became soon well-known and after two years received an offer from St. Bartholomew's Church in New York, which he accepted enthusiastically. The congregation loved him, particularly for his uncommon musical repertoire.

In 1909, the famous pianist Olga Samaroff made it possible for him to conduct a concert with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra on May 12, in which she was the soloist. The concert was a great success and Stokowski was instantly engaged for the next season. Despite triumphal successes, however, he left Cincinnati in 1911, due to internal quarrels. Back in Europe, he married Olga. In 1912, he returned to the United States, this time to the Philadelphia Orchestra, where he conducted his first concert on October 11. The Philadelphia Orchestra was then rather a middle-class orchestra but Stokowski improved its sound within short time. The result became later known as the Philadelphia Sound and was achieved with some unusual innovations. First, he allowed the strings free bowing, which means the string players were free to move their bows up and down as they pleased, rather than in unison. This produces a very warm, silky and vivid sound, as it had never been heard before. Stokowski also made several changes to the orchestra's seating arrangement to improve the transparency and clarity of the sound. But it was not only this what made him popular. He sometimes produced his concerts like a stage-play by placing light spots on him or his always baton-less conducting hands, by speeches to the audience and even once by hiding the orchestra behind a curtain. Stokowski always made a mystery of himself. Asked about his age, he would give 1887 as his year of birth instead of 1882. Throughout his whole life he spoke with a strange pseudo-east-European accent of which nobody ever had an idea where he, as a born Lodoner, could have it from.

In 1940, Stokowski made the famous film *Fantasia* together with Walt Disney, in which cartoon figures move in ballet-like sequences to classical music. The music for the film was recorded in eight-channel stereophony and surprised its spectators for both its visual and acoustical achievements. Stokowski also appeared in some other, rather slushy films, which are listed here.

His private life also brought him into the newspapers. He was married several times - once to the million heiress Gloria Vanderbilt - and had a well-publicized affair with Greta Garbo.

Musically, he provoked a still-lasting controversy over his bombastic symphonic transcriptions of Bach works, which are considered sacrilege by baroque purists. He also had no inhibitions about making changes to the scores of other great masters, such as Beethoven or Tchaikovsky, if this served the work in any way. He also made his own orchestral arrangements of other works, such as Mussorgski's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and *A Night on the Bare Mountain* or Debussy's *La cathédrale engloutie*. Stokowski left Philadelphia in 1941, turning to various musical projects. He had many engagements as guest conductor all over the world and founded several orchestras, such as The All-American Youth Orchestra, The American Symphony Orchestra, The Symphony of the Air and "His" Symphony Orchestra (for recording sessions with Capitol Records).

With a legendary concert on June 14, 1972, Stokowski celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of his first appearance with the London Symphony Orchestra. Stokowski was always very interested in improving the sound quality of recording media. Therefore, it is a great luck for the record lover that he became so old. He made still excellent (perhaps even his best) stereo recordings in his higher age. The difference between his recordings and those of other conductors is simply that he is a magician. When you hear Stokowski, suddenly the music begins to develop its own life. The sound is usually richer than everywhere else and so intense that you can't believe it is produced by a hundred people and not by only one. It is said that Stokowski kept on playing the organ his whole life: through the orchestra.

At 94, he was optimistic enough to sign a five years contract with Columbia Records. Unfortunately, this could not avert his destiny. He died on September 13, 1977, at the age of 95 in his house in Nether Wallop, Hampshire, England. It was the day on which he was to record Rachmaninov's Second Symphony, a wonderful work he never recorded commercially. Stokowski was buried at Marylebone Cemetery, East Finchley, in north London. Should you wish to visit his grave, you will find it at position D 10 147.



STOKOWSKI CONDUCTS HANDEL

WATER MUSICK

AND

ROYAL FIREWORKS MUSICK

Summer evokes outdoor concerts, treble clef design but the music often gets trumped by the occasion – we recall the atmosphere, logistics and companions more than the actual entertainment. Classical Classics Two of the most renowned were presented in London a dozen generations ago by George Frideric Handel, whose music has survived to delight modern audiences.

The first took place on April 17, 1717. The Daily Courant reported:

At about 8, the King took Water at Whitehall in an open Barge ... and went up the [Thames] River towards Chelsea. Many other Barges with Persons of Quality attended, and so great a Number of Boats, that the whole River in a manner was cover'd; a City Company's Barge was employ'd for the Musick, wherein were 50 instruments of all sorts, who play'd all the Way from Lambeth the finest Symphonies, compos'd express for this Occasion, by Mr. Handel; which his Majesty liked so well, that he caus'd it to be plaid over three times in going and returning. At Eleven his Majesty went a-shore at Chelsea where a Supper was prepar'd, and then there was another very fine Consort of Musick, which lasted till 2; after which, his Majesty came again into his Barge, and return'd the same Way, the Musick continuing to play till he landed.

The Prussian ambassador, His Majesty afloat Friedrich Bonet, corroborated the newspaper account and provided further details of the "Musick" – it was sponsored by a Baron Kilmanseck, the instruments consisted of trumpets, horns, oboes, bassoons, flutes, violins and basses, and each of the three performances lasted an hour – twice going and again returning.

Unfortunately, though, we have no reliable documentation of just what was played. Although many of the pieces became instant hits throughout London, none was published at the time. The chronology has been traced by Roger Fiske in his preface to the Eulenburg score. Two of the minuets appeared in 1720, followed by the overture in 1725. John Walsh published The Celebrated Water Musick in 1733, but with only eleven of the nineteen movements that he included in a 1743 harpsichord arrangement as Handel's Celebrated Water Musick Compleat. Up to a dozen other selections, including an entire five-movement 1733 Famous Water Peice, once were claimed to be part of the work but later rejected as spurious. George Frideric Handel Extensive research by Samuel Arnold led to a 1788 edition of nineteen pieces that is generally accepted as the authoritative Water Music. Yet, questions of structure remain.

While some arrangers try to separate the dances with more reflective interludes, most nowadays tend to group the pieces into three suites of distinctive character. The first, in F major/d minor, features French horns (possibly their first use in England); the second, in D, adds trumpets; and the third, in G, is more lightly scored with flutes. Scholars now tend to speculate that the suite in F, the longest and widest-ranging, was played on the outbound trip (and may have been written for a similar excursion two years earlier); the third, too delicate for outdoors, during the banquet; and the noble second during the concluding downstream trip back home. (But this conflicts with Bonet's claims that the entire set was played each time and that each performance took an hour - even with pauses for the musicians to catch their breath, the first suite is barely half that long; yet the movements may have been repeated or perhaps Handel, a notorious recycler, may have enlarged the work with other pieces.)

Then as now, a success demands a sequel. That occasion was the mammoth festivities planned for April 27, 1749 to celebrate the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle that ended the War of Austrian Succession. Fireworks were to erupt from a massive "machine," an elaborately decorated wooden Dorian temple, 410 feet long and 114 feet high, constructed in Green Park. According to an observer, Horace Walpole: For a week before, the town was like a country fair, the streets filled from morning to night, scaffolds building wherever you could or

could not see, and coaches arriving from every corner of the kingdom. To defuse the tension, 12,000 tickets were sold for a rehearsal of Handel's music, which ended with a 101 cannon salute and caused a massive traffic jam that blocked London Bridge for three hours. Reportedly, the night was rainy, many fireworks fizzled and ground displays failed to ignite. One Horace Walpole observed: "The wheels and all that was to compose the principal part were pitiful and ill-conducted, with no change of colored fire and shapes; the illumination was mean, and lighted so slowly that scarce anybody had patience to wait the finishing." However, there was a grand finale – the "machine" itself caught fire and burned to the ground! (A contemporary illustration [at right] was captioned: "The GRAND WHIM for Posterity to Laugh At ... with the Right Wing on Fire and the cutting away the two Middle Arches to prevent the whole Fabrick from being Defroy'd.") A stampede ensued but, according to Walpole: "Very little mischief was done, and but two persons killed."

None of the surviving reports made any mention at all of Handel's music, and so the extent to which it meshed with the fireworks is not known. Fortunately, though, we do have his autograph score. The King at first wanted no music but compromised by decreeing only "martial instruments." Handel, too, bargained – for sufficient volume to be heard over the din he had wanted a hundred players, but settled for the then-colossal ensemble of 24 oboes, 12 bassoons, 9 horns, 9 trumpets and 3 kettledrums. Trevor Pinnock conducts the English Concert in Handel's Water Music (Archiv CD cover) Yet, he did have the final say - despite the royal aversion, Handel added strings to his score for a repeat performance the next month to benefit his favorite charity, the Foundling Hospital.

The huge crowds for both the Water Music and Fireworks performances are significant. Public concerts would arise only in the late 18th century. Before then, performances of opera, concerti and all the other secular Baroque works we now revere were strictly for royalty and their entourages. The general public had no access aside from trickle-down versions by itinerant musicians, and Edward Van Beinum and the Concergebouw Orchestra play Handel's Water Music - Epic LP cover indeed, many would pass their entire lives without ever hearing a skilled artist perform great music. An opportunity to witness a brand new work by England's most famous composer was unique and not to be missed.

Perhaps well aware of this, Handel seized the occasions not only to delight his unaccustomed fans, but, more important, to educate them. Both the Water Music and Royal Fireworks brought his audience a crash course in the art they had missed. Thus, Bernard Jacobson hails the Water Music as a glorious amalgam of styles, combining the Italian taste for contrast between solo and ensemble, English bass-writing and alluring French dance rhythms. H. C. Robbins Landon viewed the result as one of diplomacy, essentially appealing to the English audience while incorporating a cosmopolitan range of influences from a formal overture, minuets and pastoral airs, to a sailors' hornpipe and a rollicking country dance.

Handel was ideally situated to this role. Although he settled in England (and became a British citizen in 1724), Eugene Ormandy conducts the Philadelphia Orchestra in his suite of Handel's Water Music (Columbia LP cover) he was raised in Germany and trained in Italy, and so combined all but one of the European powerhouses of culture. While his gift for alluring melody and colorful orchestration gave his instrumental music wide appeal, it was used primarily as interludes in the theatre, for which he had a particular affinity. At first, the power and emotion of his Italianate operas created a sensation, and then, after taste had shifted, he launched an even greater career with Biblical oratorios; the tradition of annual performances of his most famous, the Messiah, persists to this day.

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