

Leopold Stokowski was one of the greatest conductors of all time. Born in London on April 18, 1862, 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 give 1887 as his year of birth instead of 1862. 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.



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PROKOFIEV Romeo and Juliet

Excerpts from Suites
Nos. 1, 2, and 3

MENOTTI
Sebastian

STOKOWSKI

Conducting Members Of
The NBC Symphony Orchestra

In the early- and mid-twentieth century, the three major Tchaikovsky ballets -- Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty, and The Nutcracker -- were viewed as the three greatest full-length ballets. Not surprisingly, they were also more popular by wide margins than all other works in the genre. By the latter quarter of the century, however, Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet had entered the trio's select company and remains exceedingly popular today. Some have even asserted it is the greatest of full-length ballets. Certainly, it is one of Prokofiev's supreme masterpieces and, via the three suites extracted from it, among his most often-played music.

His previous ballets had been shorter and more pungent, like Chout, Op. 21 (1915-1920), and Le Pas d'Acier, Op. 41 (1925), which created a bit of a stir in Paris when it premiered. Both, along with The Prodigal Son (1929), were composed for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Romeo and Juliet was thus his first attempt at writing a full-length ballet, and while he would have further successes in the genre, most notably with Cinderella, no other stage work of his would quite approach it in popularity.

Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet, based on Shakespeare's play, consists of four acts and ten scenes, within which are 52 separate dance numbers. The work opens with a six-note motif that appears throughout the ballet. This same theme, cut to four notes, opens the composer's Symphony-Concerto for Cello and Orchestra (1950-1952) and appears elsewhere in its first movement. There are many famous melodies in Romeo and Juliet, foremost among which is probably the march-like theme that appears in No. 13, "Dance of the Knights." This music symbolizes the strife between the opposing families. A variant of it is played in the next number, "Juliet's Variation," where its character changes from the austere malevolence in No. 13 to innocence and playfulness.

Another important and immensely popular melody is the love theme of Romeo and Juliet. It is a soaring melody in an arch-like pattern that exudes warmth and yearning, passion and grace. But there are many other

memorable themes, including the joyous, rhythmic one in No. 12, "Masks," as well as the two in No. 22, "Folk Dance." Perhaps the most profound creation in the ballet, however, is the dark and tragic theme appearing in No. 51, "Juliet's Funeral," whose arch-like pattern is similar to that of the love theme.

Prokofiev also quotes from his own Classical Symphony here (No. 18 "Gavotte"), using music from the third movement Gavotte. It is not for want of thematic material that he resorts to this reference, but to show irony: this post-Renaissance French dance is as much miscast here as the two teenage lovers who are caught up in an unforgiving adult world. Romeo and Juliet lasts about two-and-one half hours in a typical performance. It was premiered in Brno, Czechoslovakia, on December 30, 1938.

Menotti composed this ballet score to his own libretto in 1944. The choreography of the original production was considered unsuccessful, but with restagings later it became a success. Sebastian is a Moorish slave, secretly in love with a courtesan. She, in her turn, shares love with the Prince of their Italian kingdom. The prince's sisters, desiring to end the affair, steal the courtesan's veil, which allows them to work black magic on her, which they can do with a life-sized wax figure covered with the veil; firing arrows into it will kill her. Sebastian learns of the plot, substitutes himself for the wax figure, and is shot with the arrows. The sacrifice breaks their spell over the courtesan, and she is reunited with her beloved. Menotti's music is ardent and romantic, sort of an Italian Prokofiev in style and sound. It is very listenable, a fine score of its type. There is a suite in seven movements drawn from the score.



PROKOFIEV Romeo and Juliet

Excerpts from Suites Nos. 1,2,and 3

MENOTTI Sebastian

LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI

Conducting Members Of The NBC Symphony Orchestra

Romeo And Juliet

- 1 Romeo At The Fountain 2:25
- 2 Juliet 6:08
- 3 Romeo And Juliet 8:34
- 4 Romeo At The Tomb Of Juliet 6:40

Menotti: Sebastian

- 5 Adagio 2:09
- 6 Barcarolle 3:31
- 7 Street Fight 1:31
- 8 Cortege 4:37
- 9 Sebastian's Dance 3:11
- 10 The Courtesan's Dance 3:50
- 11 Pavane 4:32

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