

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 SYMPHONY OF THE AIR

SHOSTAKOVICH SYMPHONY NO. 1

GLIERE SYMPHONY NO. 3 Ilya Murometz



Shostakovich was 19 when he completed the piece, which he used as his graduation exercise for the Leningrad Conservatory. While he was working on it, he considered calling it "Symphony -- Grotesque." It was premiered on May 12, 1926, to an overwhelmingly enthusiastic reception. The symphony quickly caught on throughout the world, as Bruno Walter, Leopold Stokowski, and other noted conductors championed it. By the age of 21 Shostakovich was something of a celebrity, even mentioned in the company of the two Russian giants living abroad, Prokofiev and Stravinsky.

The symphony already shows characteristics of Shostakovich's mature style, especially in its sense -- burgeoning though it was -- of irony and satire, as evidenced in the mischievous second movement. Both the first and second subjects of the first movement are rather typical of the mature composer as well; their character would be out of place in the later symphonies, though not in the ballets and film scores to come.

The work is cast in four movements, with the second lasting about five minutes and the other three having a duration of around eight to ten minutes each. The first movement begins with an introductory theme played by muted trumpet and answered by the bassoon. The main theme is march-like and serious, while the second subject is lyrical and has an air of nonchalance and grace. There is much color in the orchestration when the themes are developed. Overall the melodies in this movement, light though they are, are as memorable as any Shostakovich would write.

As mentioned above, the second movement is satirical and a fine example of the composer's precocity. While it is colorful and imaginative, again featuring brilliant orchestration, it also divulges the influence of Prokofiev. It is no mere

imitation, though. The third movement (*Lento*) begins with an oboe solo and leads to a threatening theme from the brass, after which a *Largo* brings calm but at the price of gloom. This movement also brings hints of the composer's later tragic style.

The finale is connected to the third movement by a drum roll. The finale (*Allegro molto*) clearly comes across as episodic, switching from fast to slow and from triple forte to triple piano, and moving from melancholy moods to irony and even playfulness. The music also has a tendency to stop and start in places. Overall, though the work is not one of Shostakovich's greatest, it is one of the finest first symphonies ever written and has remained in the standard repertory.

Glière, a Russian composer of French ancestry, was one of the more conservative figures of the twentieth century. His most famous large-scale work is this program symphony telling the tale of the legendary twelfth century figure Il'ya Murometz. He is selected by a mighty "bogatyr," a Russian type of knight, to be his successor. Il'ya captures an outlaw named Solovei (which ironically means "nightingale"), and takes him to the castle of Vladimir, the Sun. Using Solovei's mighty voice as a weapon (before decapitating him) Murometz overcomes the defenses of the castle, and is welcomed inside by Vladimir. Finally, he is conquered when he and his forces are turned to stone. The idiom of the symphony is the rich romanticism of Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky, with richer, more Wagnerian harmonies.

Shostakovich Symphony No. 1

Glière Symphony No. 3 arr. by Stokowski

Leopold Stokowski conducting The Symphony of the Air
and The Houston Symphony Orchestra

Symphony No 1 (33:33)

1 Allegretto 9:18

2 Allegro 4:00

3 Lento 8:42

4 Allegro Molto 10:54

Symphony No 3 (37:38)

5 I. Ilya Murometz And Svyatogor (Andante Sostenuto) 11:16

6 II. Ilya Murometz And Solovei The Brigand (Andante) 9:33

7 III. Ilya Murometz And Prince Vladimir (Allegro) 4:10

8 IV. The Heroic Deeds And Petrification Of Ilya Murometz (Allegro Tumultuoso) 12:39

Shostakovich recorded 1959 by United Artists Records

Glière recorded by Capitol Records 1957



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