

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.



Tchaikovsky

Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3

Gary Graffman, piano

Eugene Ormandy Philadelphia Orchestra

Tchaikovsky conceived his Second Concerto between 1879-1880, meant as a virtuoso piece for Nicholas Rubinstein; but Rubinstein died before he could give the premiere. Sergei Taneyev gave the Russian debut with Anton Rubinstein's leading the Moscow orchestra. The writing is generally more bombastic and percussive than for the First Concerto. A degree of intimacy occurs, however, in the second movement *Andante non troppo* in D Major, which features extended passagework for violin and cello, creating a virtual "triple concerto." This movement has often been performed in a cut edition by Alexandre Siloti. The last movement comes as a Slavic powerhouse, rife with blazing runs and octaves, a wild Russian dance.

The Second Piano Concerto simply is insuperable. I do not know about another performance that can steal its primacy. It possesses Oriental Fantasy, Caucasian passion, and febrile Balkan intensity. Graffman was truly enraptured and inspired as was Ormandy. This team made the most incandescent and imperial performances of these two Piano Concertos Two and Three. Prior to this 1965 recording of the Second Piano Concerto with Gary Graffman, every pianist played the corrupt edition by Alexander Siloti. Graffman

used Tchaikovsky's original score for movements 1 and 3; Siloti for movement 2. Every subsequent recording has used Tchaikovsky's original for all three movements (except Emil Gilels, who remained loyal to Siloti until the end). Despite the abridged second movement, the Graffman/Ormandy has always been my favorite. The Philadelphia Orchestra makes a glorious noise. In 1893, Tchaikovsky returned to his sketches for an intended Seventh Symphony's first movement, and transformed them into the single-movement in E-flat Major, Third Piano Concerto, *Allegro Brillante*, Op.75. Tchaikovsky recast his sketches for the slow movement and finale of the symphony as a work for piano and orchestra (completed by Sergei Taneyev and published posthumously as "Andante and Finale" Op.79). As to the interpretations of Tchaikovsky's 2nd and 3rd concerti with Ormandy, I must admit I only know a handful of alternatives, but I promise if you own these recordings, you will not need any. Most inspired collaborations of soloist and orchestra that will make you listen to these lesser-known concerti much more often than you might think.

Tchaikovsky

Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3

Gary Graffman, piano

Eugene Ormandy Philadelphia Orchestra

Concerto No. 2 In G Major For Piano And Orchestra

1st movement

2nd movement

3rd movement

Concerto No. 3 In E-Flat Major For Piano And Orchestra

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