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Mengelberg conducts Tchaikovsky

In its way this is about the most wilful performance of Tchaikovsky's *Fifth* I have ever heard. The beginning of the *Allegro* starts the wilfulness off. The strings set a sensible enough tempo, but the clarinet and bassoon drag everything back with a markedly slower speed. If it was one instrumentalist playing the melody, one would say the conductor had been deliberately defied. But not Mengelberg. I imagine. The next few minutes treat us to some really astonishing pulling-about, and I only marvel at the way the Berlin players manage to keep together. There is the most extraordinary effect at the ends of phrases in the first subject on the dropping octave figure, a reduction to about half-time. The rule of loud meaning fast, and soft meaning slow, can rarely have been observed more exaggeratedly either in this movement or later. Nowadays such an approach seems very old-fashioned indeed, quaint even. But some, I imagine, will enjoy this nonetheless, for as in the Mengelberg *Pathétique* dubbing issued by Telefunken last year, there is the urgency and excitement of a live performance...

E.G., The Gramophone April 1963 (*excerpt from review of Fifth Symphony*)

Producer's Note

The two works on this release – Mengelberg's only recordings with the Berlin Philharmonic – came about as a result of a pair of concerts celebrating the centenary of Tchaikovsky's birth, which were held in the Philharmonie on Friday and Saturday, July 5th and 6th, 1940. (The concerts began with the composer's *Roméo and Juliet* Overture, which was not subsequently recorded.) The following Monday, Telefunken engineers took down the symphony and, the next day, the concerto.

While the latter, played with Edwin Fischer pupil Conrad Hansen, was new to Mengelberg's discography, he had previously recorded the symphony with his own Concertgebouw Orchestra (the two middle movements alone in 1927, followed by a complete recording the next year). Carried over from the earlier recording are the cuts in the last movement of the symphony, both in the development section and in the lead-up to the final peroration. Mengelberg cited the claim of Modest Tchaikovsky, the composer's brother, that in his final performances of the work, the composer had made these cuts, wanting to tighten the structure of the movement.

The present performance differs from the earlier recording, however, in the BPO's reticence with regard to applying string portamenti, which only really surface during the second movement of the symphony (and there, only sparingly). In addition, although the timings of the first, third and fourth movements are slightly longer in the BPO version, the second movement is over a minute longer in the 1928 Concertgebouw recording. This was probably a function of Telefunken's desire to fit the symphony on 12 sides rather than the 13 Columbia allotted to the earlier version, which featured the second movement on four sides rather than the three given here. (Timing considerations probably also account for the elimination of most of the first movement cadenza in the concerto.)

The sources used for the transfers were German Telefunken 78s except for Side 7 of the concerto, which came from a Czech Ultraphon set. **Mark Obert-Thorn**

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Mengelberg

conducts
Tchaikovsky
Piano Concerto No. 1
Symphony No. 5

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra
Conrad Hansen, piano
Studio recordings, 1940

Obert-Thorn

COMPACT
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MENGELBERG CONDUCTS TCHAIKOVSKY
MENGELBERG, HANSEN, BERLIN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

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Mengelberg Tchaikovsky

Piano Concerto No. 1 in B flat minor, Op. 23

- 1st Mvt. - Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso (17:49)
- 2nd Mvt. - Andantino semplice - Prestissimo (6:41)
- 3rd Mvt. - Allegro con fuoco (6:52)

Conrad Hansen piano

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64

- 1st Mvt. - Andante - Allegro con anima (13:42)
- 2nd Mvt. - Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza (13:07)
- 3rd Mvt. - Valse: Allegro moderato (6:10)
- 4th Mvt. - Finale: Andante maestoso - Allegro vivace (10:08)

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Willem Mengelberg

Producer & Audio Restoration Engineer
Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover artwork based on a
photographs of **Willem Mengelberg**
(front) and **Conrad Hansen** (back)

Piano Concerto No. 1
Recorded 9 July 1940 in the Philharmonie, Berlin
Matrix nos.: 025083-1, 025084-1, 025085-1, 25086-
1, 025087-1, 025088-1, 025089 and 025090-1
First issued on Telefunken SK-3092 through 3095

Symphony No. 5
Recorded 8 July 1940 in the Philharmonie, Berlin
Matrix nos.: 025071-1, 025072-5, 025073-1,
025074-1, 025075-1, 025076-1, 025077-1, 025078-1,
025079-2, 025080-1, 025081-1 and 025082-1
First issued on Telefunken SK-3086 through 3091

Total duration: **74:29**

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