



Bernstein

conducts Blitzstein, Gillis & Ravel



2018 marks the centenary of the birth of Leonard Bernstein, who remains well known as both a conductor and a composer. Some famous conductors composed a little (Furtwängler or Walter for example) but their works are rarely performed. Some prolific composers had glittering conducting careers (Mahler and Richard Strauss spring to mind) but were not well served by recordings. Bernstein made a large number of commercial recordings, preserving his legacy as a conductor, and his most popular works such as *West Side Story* and *Candide* continue to be regularly performed.

Bernstein was one of the most influential American musicians of the twentieth century. He had a long association with the New York Philharmonic, including a spell as musical director in the 1960s, making his conducting debut as a last minute replacement for Bruno Walter in 1943. Throughout his conducting career, and perhaps because he himself was a composer, Bernstein programmed a large amount of contemporary American music. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that this release includes two such pieces, followed by a third showcasing Bernstein as performer.

Marc Blitzstein wrote much of his *Airborne Symphony* while on active service in London during World War II. This largely choral work charts the history of human flight, and was closely associated with Bernstein from the beginning. Much of the original score was lost when Blitzstein returned to the USA after the war and it was Bernstein who persuaded the young composer to write it out again. Bernstein premièred the work with the New York City Symphony on 1 April 1946, broadcast on the local WNYC station. These forces would record the symphony commercially later the same year, but before doing so Bernstein conducted it with the NBC Symphony Orchestra.

The work is in three movements. The first movement contains a brief history of flight, the second explores the impact of German air power during WWII, and the third depicts the Allied Air Force as ultimately triumphant. While obviously a product of its times, and reflecting its composer's personal experiences, the work is actually not that jingoistic. The terrible destructiveness of airpower is not something to be used lightly, Blitzstein warns, but only in the most severe times.

Don Gillis is perhaps best known as the producer of the NBC symphony broadcasts between 1944 and 1954, but he was also a prolific composer. His best known, and most often performed work, is the unusually titled *Symphony No 5½* but several of his other compositions were performed by the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony and the NBC Symphony during the 1940s and 50s. *'Motor Perpetuo'* was based on a popular tune *'In my merry Oldsmobile'* written by Gus Edwards in 1905. It is a tribute to America's love affair with the automobile, something that has not changed in the seventy years since it was written. This broadcast with the NBC Symphony is the single known performance of this short work, and there is some slight confusion over the title. Mortimer Frank's book on the NBC Symphony lists the title as *'Moto Perpetuo'* or perpetual motion, but the original manuscript copy, in the library of the University of North Texas, confirms that the actual title is the more amusing *'Motor Perpetuo'*.

Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G*, although by a French composer, should perhaps be considered as an American work. Written between 1929 and 1931 following Ravel's visit to the United States, it is clearly influenced by the contemporary American music he heard (most obviously Gershwin), but also by jazz. Bernstein plays the piano as well as leading the orchestra, at the time a relatively unusual thing for a conductor to do. Bernstein recorded the work several times during his career, the first of which would be just a few weeks after this live broadcast but with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London.

bernstein

in the 1940s, volume 1



PASC 526

blitzstein

airborne symphony

charles holland **tenor**

walter scheff **baritone**

marc blitzstein **narrator**

gillis

motor perpetuo

world première

ravel

piano concerto

leonard bernstein **piano**

nbc symphony orchestra & chorus

leonard bernstein **conductor**



bernstein

in the 1940s Volume 1

BLITZSTEIN Airborne Symphony

- 1 Part One - The Theory of Flight (4:36)
- 2 Ballad of History and Mythology (4:24)
- 3 Kittyhawk (2:44)
- 4 The Airborne (1:40)
- 5 Part Two - The Enemy (4:17)
- 6 Threat and Approach (2:20)
- 7 Ballad of the Cities (7:10)
- 8 Morning Poem (1:17)
- 9 Part Three - Air Force: Ballad of Hurry-Up (6:44)
- 10 Night Music: Ballad of the Bombardier (4:53)
- 11 Recitative: Chorus of the Rendezvous (2:08)
- 12 The Open Sky (Finale) (7:14)

Charles Holland *tenor*

Walter Scheff *baritone*

Marc Blitzstein *The Monitor (narrator)*

- 13 GILLIS Motor Perpetuo (4:42)

RAVEL Piano Concerto in G major

- 14 1st mvt. - Allegramente (7:32)
- 15 2nd mvt. - Adagio assai (9:01)
- 16 3rd mvt. - Presto (3:38)

Leonard Bernstein *piano*

NBC Symphony Orchestra & Chorus

Leonard Bernstein *conductor*



XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Leonard Bernstein

Blitzstein Airborne Symphony
Broadcast of 27 May, 1946

Gillis Motor Perpetuo
Ravel Piano Concerto
Broadcast of 2 June, 1946

Total duration: 74:20

For a full catalogue visit
www.pristineclassical.com
or call : (00) 33 967 391 857

© 2018 Pristine Audio

