



Stokowski

conducts Beethoven's 'Choral' Symphony



Leopold Stokowski's recording career spanned an astonishing sixty years, from 1917 to 1977. Yet in all that time he recorded Beethoven's Ninth Symphony only twice: in 1934 with the Philadelphia Orchestra, and in 1967 (in stereo) with the London Symphony Orchestra. It was a piece he programmed comparatively rarely in concerts, particularly when compared to Beethoven's Fifth or Seventh Symphonies. Stokowski had been appointed as principal conductor of the NBCSO for the 1941-2 season and this broadcast was only his second appearance as conductor. In order to allow for acoustical changes to be made, at Stokowski's instigation, to the usual broadcast studio (8H) the orchestra had decamped to the Cosmopolitan Opera House in New York City. For this new season the broadcasts were moved from Saturdays to Tuesdays, and the length of the broadcast was shortened to just an hour. To complicate matters further, this particular broadcast was only allotted thirty minutes, from 9.30 to 10pm, as from 10pm several networks joined up to broadcast the 'Red Cross Roll Call'. Beethoven's Ninth would not have fit into the broadcast hour anyway, so the network decided to broadcast just the last movement, with the first three movements being heard only in the house by the (paying) audience. Fortunately for us, the NBC engineers recorded the non-broadcast movements (most likely for later relay to Latin America).

The New York Times was impressed by a 'dramatic performance that had special drive and crispness'. Stokowski decided to perform the choral section in English and gathered four young American soloists, all under the age of 30. In an acknowledgement of Beethoven's theme of universal brotherhood, two of the soloists were African American. Despite Marion Anderson and Paul Robeson becoming very well known, opportunities for black singers remained very limited in the USA and the racial segregation of schools, housing, and public transport was commonplace.

Anne Wiggins Brown was recognised as a prodigiously talented soprano from an early age. She studied at the Julliard School in New York, and while still a student she heard that George Gershwin was writing an opera about black life in the South and she requested an audition. Gershwin was so impressed that he immediately cast her as Bess in *Porgy and Bess*. She sang in the world premiere and the subsequent US tour. Despite her talent, and relative fame, Brown remained disappointed at the continued racism of US society, at one point refusing to sing Bess in Washington DC until the theatre was desegregated. She eventually left the US to live in Norway.

Contralto Winifred Heidt was at the start of her fairly short career at the time of this broadcast. Although she had been a runner-up at the Met auditions in 1939 her stage appearances with the company were limited to just two *Walküres* in 1940. After the war she appeared as Carmen with New York City Opera and was a regular concert performer with husband Eugene Conley. In 1954 she appeared on Broadway in *Carousel*.

Tenor William Horne was only 28 at the time of this broadcast, and (due to a short stint in the army during the war) would not make his stage debut until 1944 with the New York City Opera. In 1946 he sang the title role in the US premiere of *Peter Grimes* conducted by Leonard Bernstein.

Lawrence Whisonant (also later known as Lawrence Winters) was a still a college student at the time of this broadcast. Like Horne he served in the US army in the war, and he joined both Horne and Heidt at the New York City Opera in 1946 where he sang a number of leading baritone roles. He became the most prominent African American baritone of his generation, performing at the Royal Opera Stockholm, Deutsche Opera Berlin, Hamburg State Opera, and the Vienna State Opera. His US career was certainly curtailed by his race he never appeared at the Met for instance, though he did sing with the San Francisco Opera, and in concerts with the New York Philharmonic.

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symphony no. 9 'choral'

anne brown soprano
winifred heidt contralto
william horne tenor
lawrence whisonant bass

westminster choir
nbc symphony orchestra



live broadcast recording, 1941

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BEETHOVEN SYMPHONY No. 9, 'CHORAL'
STOKOWSKI, THE WESTMINSTER CHOIR, NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

stokowski

conducts beethoven

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XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Stokowski

Total duration: 66:04

BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125 'Choral'

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso (13:51)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Scherzo. Molto vivace - Presto (10:09)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Adagio molto e cantabile (15:08)
- 4 4th mvt. - Presto - Allegro assai (24:37)
- 5 RADIO Closing announcements (2:19)

Live broadcast recording, 11 November 1941
Movements 1-3 not broadcast
Cosmopolitan Opera House, New York City

Anne Brown *soprano*
Winifred Heidt *contralto*
William Horne *tenor*
Lawrence Whisonant *bass*

The Westminster Choir
NBC Symphony Orchestra

conducted by Leopold Stokowski

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