



Stokowski

conducts British music at the NBC



Leopold Stokowski conducted Gustav Holst's *The Planets* for the first time in Philadelphia when, on learning of the composer's death in 1934, he programmed the work by way of a tribute. His next performance of the seven-movement suite came during his three-season appointment in 1941 as the NBC Symphony's chief conductor. The war had its own influence on Stokowski's programmes in that he often advocated music from Allied countries. England was duly represented on 14 February 1943 by what the *New York Times* described as "a remarkable performance of Holst's great mystical tone-poem." The critic from the daily *Brooklyn Eagle* added that "Stokowski knew, of course, how to show *The Planets* their orchestral brilliance most graphically, while the orchestra lent its virtuosity to a good cause."

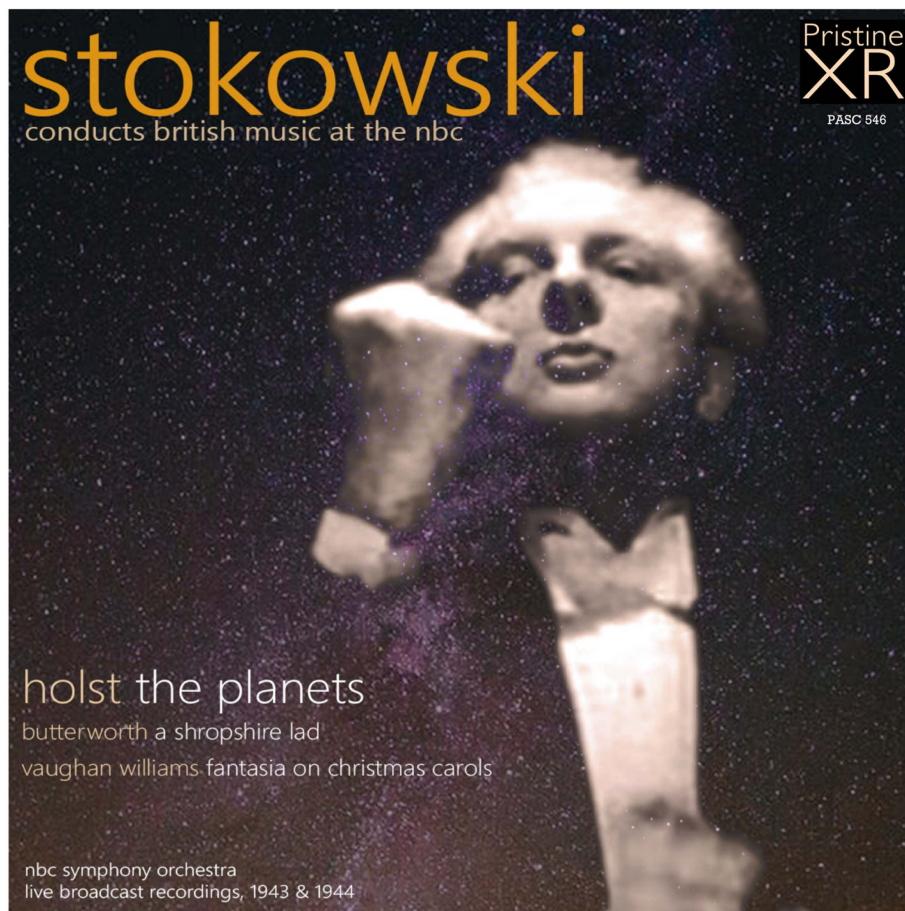
Stokowski returned to *The Planets* in 1956 when he made its first stereo recording for Capitol with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. His next traversal of the work took place in the Royal Albert Hall in 1963 with the London Symphony Orchestra. On this occasion, one commentator wrote that "Stokowski is marvellous conductor; individual certainly, eccentric even on occasion; but capable of achieving unique, exciting and vastly stimulating results."

In the case of his war-time performance of *A Shropshire Lad* by George Butterworth, Stokowski had doubtless heard Sir Adrian Boult conduct the work in an all-British NBC broadcast in 1938 and decided to revive it. Butterworth's idyllic rhapsody was to prove influential on several British composers but this was the only occasion on which Stokowski conducted the work himself.

As with so many living composers at the time, Stokowski was something of a Vaughan Williams champion in the USA. He performed several of the symphonies and other works, notably the Tallis Fantasia, making the first recording of the 6th Symphony with the New York Philharmonic in 1949 and conducting the US Premiere of the 9th in 1958 in tribute to the recently deceased composer.

However, the final work in this NBC selection is something of a rarity! The original score of the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* requires a baritone soloist, a choir and an accompanying orchestra. It also appeared in several other formats, as did Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music*, a work similarly scored for voices and orchestra. However, this was also published in purely orchestral form, so for his Christmas 1943 concert, Stokowski took his cue from the orchestral version of the *Serenade to Music* and adopted the same procedure with the *Carols Fantasia*. His instrumental arrangement proves an effective alternative, so it's rather a pity it wasn't adopted and published, so that other orchestras could play Stokowski's version in their own Christmas concerts!

Edward Johnson



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HOLST THE PLANETS
BUTTERWORTH A SHROPSHIRE LAD
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS CAROLS FANTASIA
STOKOWSKI, NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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photograph of Stokowski

HOLST The Planets
Broadcast 14 February 1943

BUTTERWORTH A Shropshire Lad
Broadcast 13 February 1944

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS Carols Fantasia
Broadcast 14 December 1943

Live performances broadcast from
Studio 8H, Radio City, New York

Total duration: 71:28

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1 RADIO Introduction (0:19)

HOLST The Planets Op. 32

2 1. Mars, the Bringer of War (6:54)

3 2. Venus, the Bringer of Peace (8:50)

4 3. Mercury, the Winged Messenger (3:40)

5 4. Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity (7:06)

6 5. Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age (9:05)

7 6. Uranus, the Magician (5:48)

8 7. Neptune, the Mystic (10:40)

9 BUTTERWORTH A Shropshire Lad (9:33)

10 VAUGHAN WILLIAMS Fantasia on Christmas Carols (orchestral version) (9:33)

NBC Symphony Orchestra

conducted by *Leopold Stokowski*

HOLST THE PLANETS
BUTTERWORTH A SHROPSHIRE LAD
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