



Toscanini

conducts Contemporary Russian Music



It is easy to forget, since Toscanini lived so long and the bulk of his recordings came towards the end of his career, that he knew or corresponded with a vast number of composers, and that he went out of his way to program their compositions in his concerts. In his youth the music of Tchaikovsky, Brahms, and even Wagner was relatively new. He knew Verdi, Puccini and Mascagni personally and was happy to perform numerous works by both well-known and more obscure American composers [see PASC495 and PASC497]. His relationship with contemporary Russian composers was complicated. He was in personal touch with all three composers represented here, and they joined together in wishing Toscanini a happy 80th birthday in 1947. All of them would have been glad to receive the musical blessing, bestowed by his conducting their works, of the man widely considered to be the greatest living conductor. But while he was clearly willing to perform modern Russian works, he did not embrace them wholeheartedly.

Prokofiev composed his 'Classical Symphony' in 1916. Perhaps the more traditional form and tonality appealed to Toscanini, compared to Prokofiev's later works, as it was the only composition of his that Toscanini ever conducted – three performances with the New York Philharmonic in 1929, and five with the NBCSO in 1939, 1944, 1946, 1947 and 1951. He also recorded the work commercially for RCA in 1951.

Toscanini conducted just two of Shostakovich's symphonies, the 1st and the 7th. Of those the 7th was performed only four times (the world premiere with the NBCSO followed by three further performances with the New York Philharmonic, all in 1942). Toscanini conducted the 1st symphony at least ten times with four different orchestras - the NY Philharmonic (1931), the Vienna Symphony Orchestra (1939), the BBC Symphony Orchestra (1937), the La Scala Orchestra (1946) and the NBCSO (1939 and 1944). Toscanini's biographer, Harvey Sachs, describes him as 'curious' about Shostakovich's music. However Toscanini also described Shostakovich as 'all dissonances' and that perhaps explains his unwillingness to conduct more popular works such as the 5th symphony.

Kabalevsky's 2nd symphony was programmed twice by Toscanini, in 1942 and 1945, both with the NBCSO. This 1942 American premiere 'made an excellent impression' according to the New York Times, as authentically fresh work by a 'sincere and accomplished Russian composer'. Kabalevsky's Colas Breugnon Overture, composed in 1936, was performed on numerous occasions by Toscanini and the NBCSO, and a commercial recording was made for RCA in 1946. The 1943 broadcast presented here was the piece's American premiere.



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TOSCANINI, NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Toscanini

PROKOFIEV Symphony No. 1 in D major, 'Classical', Op. 25

- 1 Introduction (0:13)
- 2 1st mvt. - Allegro (3:37)
- 3 2nd mvt. - Larghetto (3:31)
- 4 3rd mvt. - Gavotte. Non troppo allegro (1:27)
- 5 4th mvt. - Fonale. Molto vivace (4:47)

SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No. 1 in F minor, Op. 10

- 6 Introduction (0:28)
- 7 1st mvt. - Allegretto - Allegro non troppo (7:52)
- 8 2nd mvt. - Allegro (4:54)
- 9 3rd mvt. - Lento (8:46)
- 10 4th mvt. - Allegro molto - Lento - Allegro molto (10:02)

KABALEVSKY Symphony No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18

- 11 Introduction (0:51)
- 12 1st mvt. - Allegro quasi presto (7:05)
- 13 2nd mvt. - Andante non troppo (9:28)
- 14 3rd mvt. - Prestissimo scherzando (6:48)

- 15 KABALEVSKY Overture to Colas Breugnot (5:07)

NBC Symphony Orchestra

conducted by Arturo Toscanini

Prokofiev Symphony 1
Broadcast 15 November 1947

Shostakovich Symphony 1
Broadcast 14 January 1939

Kabalevsky Symphony 2
Broadcast 8 November 1942

Kabalevsky Overture
Broadcast 11 April 1943

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