



Toscanini

The 1939 Beethoven Cycle, Volume 4



Perhaps those who listen to an instrumental concert by means of the radio get the greatest rewards from the scores which employ but a few instruments, as, for example, the Beethoven septet, which, with reinforced strings, was performed by the NBC Symphony Orchestra under Toscanini's direction last night in Studio H-8 in Radio City in the fourth concert in the Beethoven cycle. At least, this principle holds true if Toscanini directs the performance.

He is pre-eminent in music which requires the clarity, aristocratic grace and inherent power of the representative scores of the Haydn-Mozart and early Beethoven period. Much of the Septet might be Haydn, were it not for a new compression, energy and humor which entered music with Beethoven. It was a common mistake of even a quarter of a century ago to refer condescendingly to the early scores of the Bonn master, but Toscanini always knew better. He makes of each phrase a masterpiece.

Mr. Toscanini would probably agree with the Arabian philosopher who discovered in a small ring the reflection of the completeness of the universe. Here, in simple melodic lines and small dimensioned forms, are the profound formal ideas which underly the symphonies. The enchanting simplicity of the Septet, in a word, is matched by its consummate workmanship. To achieve a like simplicity and mastery in performance is an accomplishment of only secondary magnitude.

Mr. Toscanini accomplished this so felicitously that at times one wanted to laugh aloud in sheer exhilaration at his achievement. There were not only grace and wit, but also a pervasive beauty of song in the playing which provided the last essential of a great interpretation. Thirty strings replaced Beethoven's four. These thirty proved that they could play, not like four, but like one.

The utter absence of bombast or mere dramatic rhetoric, and the quintessence of drama and heroism in the "Egmont" score were precisely reflected in the performance. The Beethoven Seventh Symphony had the same unsurpassable sincerity and complete absence of effect for effect's sake, or for any reasons save those both implicit and explicit in the score.

It would be interesting, one of these days, if that rare being, the conductor who loves Beethoven but fears him as he does his God, should attempt a small editing to obtain somewhat better balances in the orchestration of the symphony's introduction, where the wind parts, with the noble swinging motive in half notes, are in certain measures not strong enough to balance properly the ascending sixteenths of the strings. That is Beethoven's short-coming.

Mr. Toscanini, as usual, takes the trio of the scherzo of the symphony faster than is customary. The more one hears this, the more it seems logical, and no injustice to the music. He made no attempt to read special things into the uproarious finale, built principally on the Nora McCruna song. He gave the music its head, and we were richly rewarded.

Olin Downes, The New York Times, 19 November 1939



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TOSCANINI THE 1939 BEETHOVEN CYCLE VOLUME 4 - SYMPHONY NO. 7, SEPTET, COROLIAN OVERTURE
TOSCANINI, NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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the 1939 beethoven cycle volume 4

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NBC Studio 8H, Radio City, New York

Total duration: 79:55

1. RADIO Opening Announcement (0:37)

2. BEETHOVEN Egmont, Op. 84 (8:21)

3. RADIO Midway Announcement 1 (1:02)

BEETHOVEN Septet in E flat for Woodwind, Horn & Strings, Op. 20

4. 1st mvt. - Adagio - Allegro con brio (8:00)

5. 2nd mvt. - Adagio cantabile (8:25)

6. 3rd mvt. - Tempo di menuetto - Trio (3:10)

7. 4th mvt. - Tema con variazioni. Andante (7:34)

8. 5th mvt. - Scherzo. Allegro molto e vivace - Trio (2:59)

9. 6th mvt. - Andante con molto alla marcia - Presto (5:27)

10. RADIO Midway Announcement 2 (0:38)

BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 7 in A, Op. 92

11. 1st mvt. - Poco sostenuto - Vivace (11:19)

12. 2nd mvt. - Allegretto (8:08)

13. 3rd mvt. - Presto (6:51)

14. 4th mvt. - Allegro con brio (6:40)

15. RADIO Closing Announcement (0:44)

NBC Symphony Orchestra
conducted by Arturo Toscanini

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