



Mitropoulos

In Philadelphia



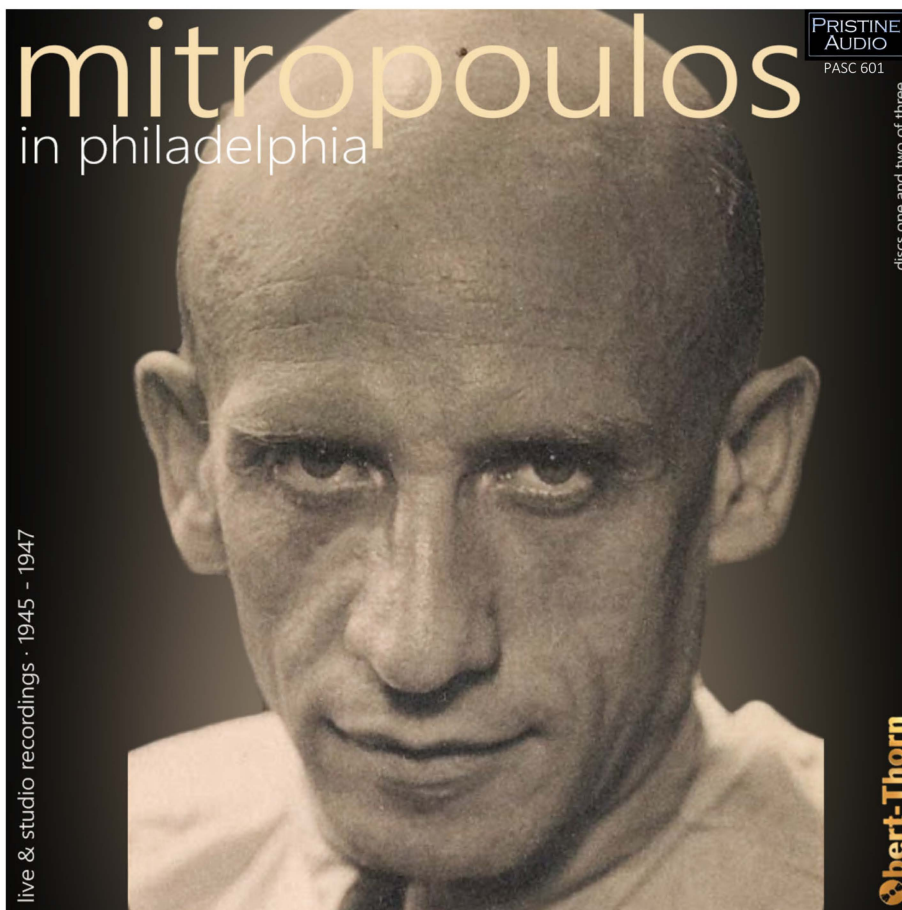
Dimitri Mitropoulos – A Greek's Passion
by Gary Lemco

When we consider the artistry and career of Greek conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos (1896-1960), we confront the very tensions that defined his era: art and politics, identity and self-expression, tradition and innovation. In my conversations with Leonard Bernstein and composers David Diamond and Morton Gould on the subject of Mitropoulos, each of them used the word “tragic,” not so much to lament the man’s fate or personality, but to characterize his inward vision, his singularly messianic dedication to his art, even at the cost of social acceptance and success – and more, his palpable sound in the music of such luminaries as Brahms, Scriabin, Mahler, Schoenberg, Vaughan Williams, Krenek, Prokofiev and Shostakovich, that reveals the anguish of their respective worlds.

Born in Athens of a highly religious family, the young Dimitri Mitropoulos might have entered the monastery on Mount Athos and remained there, literally a priest rather than a “priest of art.” But the authorities forbade him even a harmonium in his cell, and he rebelled, entering the Athens Conservatory and mastering the keyboard and musical composition. In 1919, Mitropoulos’ opera *Soeur Beatrice* (after Maurice Maeterlick) was performed, and on the basis of that success, he sojourned first to Paris for consultation with Camille Saint-Saens, and upon his recommendation on to Berlin (1920) for studies with Ferruccio Busoni and Paul Gilson. The Busoni circle included the gifted pianist Egon Petri (1881-1962) with whom he performed often in Berlin. In 1941 New York City they organized, with Joseph Szigeti, a major tribute to Busoni that included such works as the *Violin Concerto* and *Indian Fantasy*. It was a sudden illness that had befallen Petri that required Mitropoulos first to conduct in Berlin the Prokofiev *C Major Concerto* from the keyboard, a feat he repeated both in later concerts and on record with the Robin Hood Dell Orchestra of Philadelphia.

In Berlin, between 1921 and 1925, Mitropoulos served with the Berlin State Opera, working with Erich Kleiber. After Kleiber left Nazi Germany, Mitropoulos, working with Stokowski at the NBC Symphony Orchestra, influenced authorities that Kleiber should be welcome to lead the NBC in a series of concerts. But it was Boston and Koussevitzky who invited Mitropoulos to debut in the United States. Bernstein, a young, aspiring pianist, composer and conductor, was in attendance. “Mitropoulos led a performance of Ravel’s *Rapsodie espagnole* that hit me like a revelation. And the sensuality – I tell you, there wasn’t a dry seat in the house!” Mitropoulos, having made an immediate sensation, accepted the duties of leading the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, replacing Eugene Ormandy, who had assumed the post at the Philadelphia Orchestra. C. Ryan Hill, reviewing Mitropoulos in Minneapolis, praised the “French” sound Dimitri elicited from the brass, “gushing” crescendos, the genuineness and compelling quality of the Mitropoulos sonic image, the rapport between conductor and his loyal ensemble. There were, however, those complaints about Mitropoulos’ selected repertoire, which would challenge traditionalists with strong doses from the Second Viennese School as well as contemporary American composition, some of which Mitropoulos himself commissioned. “What bothered many about Dimitri in Minneapolis and New York City,” proffered David Diamond in my interview with him at Juilliard, “was his odd juxtaposition of musical styles. He’d schedule quite imposing works – a *Prometheus* of Scriabin, the Chausson *B-flat Symphony*, a Mahler Sixth; and then, virtually out of nowhere except his facile imagination, you’d get *Three Dances* from Falla or *Marche Joyeuse*!” A case in point is the somewhat jarring presence of the Ibert *Escales* directly following on the heels of the moody *Boecklin Poems* by Reger on the 20 December 1947 concert by the Philadelphia Orchestra presented here.

[continues in next insert]



mitropoulos

in philadelphia

disc one

1. RADIO Introduction (0:37)
2. MOZART The Magic Flute - *Overture* (6:40)

BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 4 in B flat, Op. 60

3. 1st mvt. - Adagio - Allegro vivace (11:01)
4. 2nd mvt. - Adagio (10:21)
5. 3rd mvt. - Allegro vivace (6:00)
6. 4rd mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo (5:38)

REGER Four Tone poems after Böcklin, Op. 128

7. 1. The Hermit Playing Violin (10:47)
8. 2. In the Play of the Waves (3:49)
9. 3. The Isle of the Dead (9:21)
10. 4. Bacchanal (4:38)

Alexander Hilsberg, solo violin

conducted by Dimitri Mitropoulos

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Additional noise reduction for Ibert, additional pitch stabilisation: Andrew Rose

Full discographic information available online

All recordings made in the Academy of Music, Philadelphia

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Dimitri Mitropoulos

Total duration: 3hr 32:16

CD1: 68:51

CD2: 77:53

disc two

IBERT Escales (Ports of Call)

1. 1. Rome - Palermo (6:34)
2. 2. Tunis - Nefta (2:31)
3. 3. Valencia (6:25)

4. R. STRAUSS Der Rosenkavalier - *Suite* (23:24)

The Philadelphia Orchestra

MOZART Concerto for 2 Pianos and Orchestra in E flat, K365

5. 1st mvt. - Allegro (9:32)
6. 2nd mvt. - Andante (7:29)
7. 3rd mvt. - Rondo (Allegro) (6:55)

Vitya Vronsky & Victor Babin, pianists

8. PUCCINI Manon Lescaut - *Intermezzo* (3:47)

9. MASCAGNI Cavalleria Rusticana - *Intermezzo* (3:59)

WOLF-FERRARI The Jewels of the Madonna

10. Intermezzo No. 1 (3:50)
11. Intermezzo No. 2 (3:28)

Robin Hood Dell Orchestra of Philadelphia

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Mitropoulos

In Philadelphia

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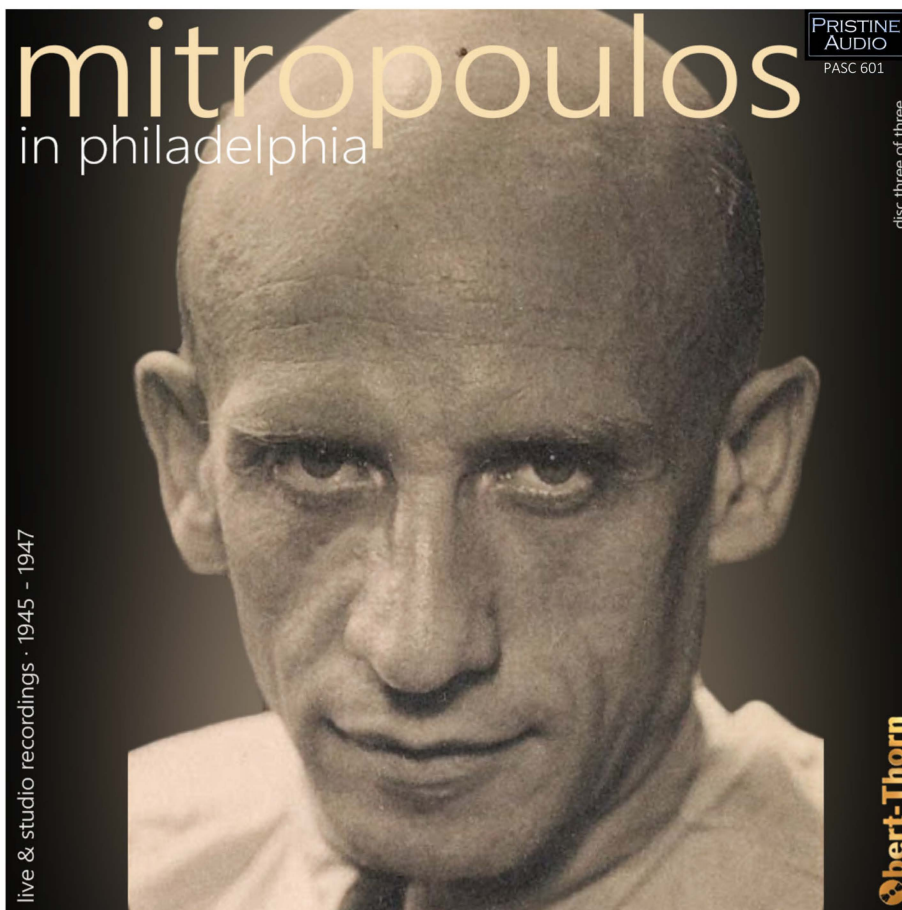
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The cry of conservatism found its most rabid spokesperson in Howard Taubman of *The New York Times* in August 1956, who excoriated Mitropoulos for what Taubman construed as a lack of orchestral discipline and a failure to maintain the prestige of the Philharmonic. Taubman deplored Mitropoulos' seeming lack of sympathy for the standard Classical repertory and early Romantic music: the "feverish intensity" Mitropoulos brings to "areas of twentieth century music . . . Richard Strauss, Mahler, Schoenberg, or Berg . . . to a Puccini opera . . . become failings, for [Classical] works need proportion and delicacy." "It is true," observed Stefan Bauer-Mengelberg (1927-1996), assistant conductor at the Philharmonic, "that Dimitri seemed to court complexity. His eidetic memory would seize the entire score of *Wozzeck*; and, in the midst of what to others might be cacophony and pure dissonance, he would announce, 'F-sharp, clarinet, F-sharp,' and suddenly bring out a Viennese waltz, the 'human' element in the most severe aural environment. And when I recall his Mahler *Ninth* with the Philharmonic, I envision a man's leading not so much music as an Idea."

Mitropoulos abdicated his post with the New York Philharmonic, at once mentioning "a stab in the back" and the opportunity to court "that very tempting mistress, the MET." In 1957, Mitropoulos shared a South American tour with his successor, Leonard Bernstein, and conducted his final New York Philharmonic concerts as music director, subsequently serving at the MET from 1957 onward. Mitropoulos' Philharmonic concerts in January 1960 included a Mahler festival. Mitropoulos remained highly welcome in Europe, having led the Vienna Philharmonic, most notably, the Berlioz Requiem in memory of Wilhelm Furtwaengler. Invitations came not only from Salzburg but from Cologne, Germany; but by 1960 his physical health had been compromised. An avid mountaineer, Mitropoulos no less suffered an addiction to Galoises cigarettes, with frightful damage to his heart. Refusing to cancel his work in Cologne – on the Mahler *D Minor Symphony* – he sped immediately to Milan to begin rehearsals of that same Mahler *Third* on November 1. A massive heart attack took him, and he was already dead when he struck the floor.

What is past is prologue. Assessments of Dimitri Mitropoulos maintain his personal lifestyle – as an unapologetic homosexual who eschewed Leonard Bernstein's option for a "cosmetic marriage" – may have played a role in the decision to remove him from the New York Philharmonic. His personal generosity, however, goes unblemished, from those who consistently mention his donating his own money to purchase musicians' instruments. Leonard Pennario recalled having suffered a chastisement from Dimitri: "After we performed the Rachmaninoff *Second Concerto*, Dimitri insisted I take up the *G Minor* Saint-Saens. My personal 'snobbery' at the time balked, and I rather laughed at Dimitri's suggestion. Well, boy, did he ever lace it into me, reminding me that Saint-Saens had been an early support for his career! I never contradicted him again." Opera singer Licia Albanese remembered having been nervous about an upcoming opera, not knowing who was to lead the cast and ensemble: "When I saw Mitropoulos stride out from the wings – 'Maestro Excitement' we called him – I thought Thank God!"

Of the various performances from Philadelphia presented here, perhaps the most striking and important lies in the live Beethoven Symphony No. 4, especially since his only commercial recording of a Beethoven symphony, the *Pastoral* from Minneapolis, testifies to Dimitri's innate ingenuousness in the face of music devoid of crisis. Though Beethoven limits the strongest tension to the opening – thirty- eight harmonically ambiguous measures of jabbing dissonances that might adumbrate some cosmic tragedy – Mitropoulos manages a nervously bizarre atmosphere in B-flat Minor, only alleviated at the repetition of the F chords that signal true jubilation, *Allegro vivace*.



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MITROPOULOS in PHILADELPHIA (CD3)
CHOPIN/ROGAL-LEVITZKY, MENOTTI, PROKOFIEV

mitropoulos

in philadelphia

disc three

CHOPIN/ROGAL-LEVITZKY Chopiniana

1. Etude No. 12 in C minor, Op. 10, No. 12 ('Revolutionary') (2:41)
2. Nocturne No. 13 in C minor, Op. 48, No. 1 (5:51)
3. Mazurka No. 25 in B minor, Op. 33, No. 4 (5:40)
4. Valse brillante No. 14 in E minor, Op. Posth. (2:58)
5. Polonaise No. 6 in A flat, Op. 53 ('Heroic') (5:49)

MENOTTI Sebastian - Ballet Suite

6. 1. Introduction (2:02)
7. 2. Barcarolle (3:31)
8. 3. Street Fight (1:18)
9. 4. Cortège (3:55)
10. 5. Sebastian's Dance (2:06)
11. 6. Pavane (3:53)

PROKOFIEV Piano Concerto No. 3 in C, Op. 26

12. 1st mvt. - Andante - Allegro (8:48)
13. 2nd mvt. - Theme and Variations (8:18)
14. 3rd mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo (8:41)

Dimitri Mitropoulos, piano

Robin Hood Dell Orchestra of Philadelphia
conducted by Dimitri Mitropoulos

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: **Mark Obert-Thorn**

Additional noise reduction for lbert, additional pitch stabilisation: Andrew Rose
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RECORDING DATES

CD 1
20 Dec 1947 (1-2, 7-10)
21 Dec 1946 (3-6)

CD 2
20 Dec 1947 (1-3)
21 Dec 1946 (4)
21 Sep 1945 (5-7)
26 July 1946 (8-11)

CD 3
21 Sep 1945 (1-5)
26 July 1946 (6-14)

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MITROPOULOS in PHILADELPHIA (CD3)
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