



Stokowski

Bach: Symphonic Transcriptions



Leopold Stokowski was naturally familiar with Bach's keyboard works from his early days as a church organist. However, once he had moved to the conductor's podium, he began transcribing them for his new concert audiences and his arrangement of the *Toccata and Fugue in D minor* was to become the most popular orchestration of all Bach's organ works. Its first recording, made in 1927, was hailed in the *Gramophone* as "Magnificent!" and it later found world-wide fame in Walt Disney's *Fantasia*.

Stokowski's transcription of the *Prelude in Eb minor* from the Well-Tempered Clavier Book 1 was the opening item on his debut concert with the NBC Symphony in 1941 and is one of his most reflective arrangements. The *Arioso* from the Keyboard Concerto No. 5 in F minor was re-used by Bach as the "Sinfonia" in his Cantata No.156 where the solo oboe has the melody, though in Stokowski's version it is played by the strings.

Bach adapted the Lutheran chorale *Ein Feste Burg* several times and Stokowski made three arrangements himself. A short version marked his film debut in *The Big Broadcast of 1937* while a longer one was first recorded in 1939. He then made a third version in which the melody is curiously interspersed with woodwind cadenzas. The NBC performance presented here is its only extant recording.

Wir glauben all' an einen Gott was noted for the "giant-like strides of the pedal theme" that gave the piece its 'Giant Fugue' name. This performance began the NBC concert of 6 December 1942 and the next item - the slow movement from the *Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C major* - followed without a pause. It features what Stokowski described as "the improvisational freedom of so much of Bach's music."

Es is vollbracht, an alto aria in the St. John Passion, opens with the words: "It is accomplished; what comfort for suffering human souls." The music brightens up with "The hero from Judah ends his victorious fight!" and then reverts to the solemnity of the opening. *Christ lag in Todesbanden* is a Chorale Prelude based on an Easter Hymn by Luther, with Stokowski's scoring again being suitably sombre.

This selection of all the Bach transcriptions which Stokowski played during his three NBC seasons is completed by the *Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor*. As with the *Toccata and Fugue in D minor*, he recorded it several times and wrote that "it is in music what a great Gothic cathedral is in architecture."

The non-transcribed final item is the St. Matthew Passion's closing chorus: "Here yet awhile, Lord, Thou art sleeping, Hearts turn to Thee, O Saviour blest; rest Thou calmly, calmly rest." The NBC performance of this chorus is again a rarity, insofar as Stokowski's discography is concerned, but it makes an appropriate conclusion to a compendium of music by the maestro's declared favourite composer.

Edward Johnson



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BACH-STOKOWSKI SYMPHONIC TRANSCRIPTIONS
STOKOWSKI, NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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1. Toccata and Fugue in D minor (9:57)
Broadcast of 12 December 1943
2. Prelude in E flat minor (from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book 1) (7:02)
Broadcast of 4 November 1941
3. Arioso (Largo from *Harpichord Concerto No. 5* in F minor) (8:35)
Broadcast of 25 November 1941
4. Prelude on *Ein Feste Burg* (6:54)
Broadcast of 7 April 1942
5. Wir Glauben all' an Einen Gott (Chorale-Prelude '*Giant Fugue*') (3:09)
6. Adagio (from *Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C minor*) (5:32)
Broadcast of 6 December 1942
7. Es ist Vollbracht (from the *St. John Passion*) (9:23)
Broadcast of 28 March 1943
8. Christ lag in Todesbanden (Chorale-Prelude) (3:57)
Broadcast of 12 December 1943
9. Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor (13:50)
Broadcast of 27 February 1944

Bonus track:

10. St. Matthew Passion - Final Chorus (8:52)
"Here yet awhile, Lord, Thou art sleeping, Hearts turn to Thee, O Saviour blest!"
Collegiate Chorale
Broadcast of 31 March 1942

NBC Symphony Orchestra
conducted by Leopold Stokowski

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Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based
on a photograph of
Leopold Stokowski

Special thanks to
Edward Johnson

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