

# TOSCANINI AT NBC



"...The Double Concerto provides a different situation, with the two NBC performances, both featuring the same first-desk soloists, contrasting markedly. As issued by RCA on LP, the second of the two broadcasts was almost unlistenable: shrill, thin, and painfully cramped. Transferred onto compact disc (and videocassette), the performance sounds far more musical: the shrillness has been eliminated, the orchestra has been given more weight, and the overall ambience seems less cramped. As a result, the musical virtues—veiled in the original LP—have become more apparent, notably the way in which tightly knit organization and a steady pulse underscore the work's suggestion, with opposition of paired soloists against larger tutti forces, of the concerto grosso style. Brahms, it should not be forgotten, was a first-class musicologist who had edited Handel (among others) and was thoroughly familiar with the baroque concerto idiom, as Toscanini's 1948 performance reminds us.

The 1939 broadcast comprises a considerably more improvisational reading, rhythms being less rigid and melodic lines lingered over more caressingly. None of this, however, violates good taste or the music's integrity. Indeed, it is a prime example of Toscanini's (and the soloists') command of rubato. In short, this is a performance that adds considerable dimension to Toscanini's Brahms."

"Of all the Brahms symphonies, the Second may pose the fewest interpretive problems. Not surprisingly, then, it is the Brahms symphony in which one encounters the fewest changes in approach from one Toscanini reading to another. The main differences among them center on the pacing for the finale: sometimes relatively expansive, as in the magnificent 1952 studio recording, other times swift. The 1938 broadcast features a blend of both approaches. And common to all of Toscanini's surviving accounts is his refusal to accelerate in the movement's coda, where the lullabylike second subject is transformed into a festive peroration for full orchestra.

As in the Brahms First, Toscanini's way with the Second Symphony is distinguished by a prevailing freedom from sentimentality. Neither of the first two movements is unduly protracted, and both benefit from an exceptional clarity of texture and firmness of pulse, with rubato, if often evident, subtly applied. In both movements surging dynamics and arching phrases suggest the ebb and flow of the sea that Brahms knew so well and that clearly influenced his music. And in all of Toscanini's performances the third movement is a model of unaffected, straightforward simplicity."

*From "Arturo Toscanini - the NBC Years" by Mortimer H. Frank (Amadeus Press, 2002)*

## Restoration notes

The two recordings presented here were transferred from tapes donated to the Pristine Audio collection which, although they may be a generation or three away from the original disc recordings (I honestly don't know), have done a remarkably good job of preserving the fine detail captured by NBC's microphones in the late 1930s. If anything the later, 1939 recording is slightly sharper - it certainly presented fewer restoration problems, though hopefully no major differences will be heard in this release between the two.

In both recordings I have managed to find considerable clarity and range extension, and though the top end is occasionally marred by hiss and mild peak distortion, both the Concerto and Symphony sound remarkably fresh and alive in these transfers. **AR**

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT [WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM](http://WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM)

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## Toscanini at NBC: The Early Years

# BRAHMS

## DOUBLE CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN & CELLO

MISCHA MISCHAKOFF  
FRANK MILLER

## SYMPHONY No. 2 IN D, Op. 73

NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
CONDUCTED BY  
ARTURO TOSCANINI

RECORDED IN 1938 AND 1939



## Toscanini at NBC: Brahms (1938-39)

### BRAHMS Double Concerto in A minor OP. 102

- 1 1st mvt. - *Allegro* (15:10)
- 2 2nd mvt. - *Andante* (8:07)
- 3 3rd mvt. - *Vivace non troppo* (8:11)

Mischa Mischakoff, violin

Frank Miller, cello

### BRAHMS Symphony No. 2 in D major OP. 73

- 4 1st mvt. - *Allegro non troppo* (14:28)
- 5 2nd mvt. - *Adagio non troppo* (8:45)
- 6 3rd mvt. - *Allegretto grazioso (quasi andantino)* (5:38)
- 7 4th mvt. - *Allegro con spirito* (8:35)

NBC Symphony Orchestra  
conducted by Arturo Toscanini



PASC 283

XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Transfers from tapes in the  
Pristine Audio collection

Cover artwork based on a  
photograph of **Toscanini**,  
coupled with a 1930s-era NBC  
radio logo

#### Double Concerto

Broadcast of 21 October 1939

#### Symphony No. 2

Broadcast of 12 February 1938

Total duration: **68:54**

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