

Serge Koussevitzky Beethoven Symphony No. 9

Serge Koussevitzky (July 26, 1874 – June 4, 1951) was born into a poor Jewish family in Vshny Volodchok, Tver Oblast, about 250 km northwest of Moscow, Russia. His parents were professional musicians who taught him violin, cello, and piano. He also learned trumpet. He excelled at the bass, joining the Bolshoi Theatre orchestra at the age of twenty, in 1894, and succeeded his teacher, Rimsky-Korsakov, as the principal bassist in 1914. That same year he made his debut (25 March) as a soloist in Moscow, and later won critical acclaim with his first recital in Berlin in 1903. In 1902, with Reinhold Glier's help, he wrote a popular concerto for the double bass, which he premiered in Moscow in 1906. He soon resigned from the Bolshoi, after having married Natalie Uslikova, daughter of an extremely wealthy tea merchant, and the couple moved to Berlin, where Serge studied conducting under Arthur Nikisch, using his new-found wealth to pay off his teacher's gambling debts.

In Berlin he continued to give double bass recitals and, after two years practicing conducting in his own home with a student orchestra, he hired the Berlin Philharmonic and made his professional debut as a conductor in 1908. The concert included Sergei Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2, with the composer at the piano. The next year he and his wife returned to Russia, where he founded his own orchestra in Moscow and branched out into the publishing business, forming his own firm, Editions Russes de Musique, and buying the catalogues of many of the greatest composers of the age. Among the composers published by Koussevitzky were Rachmaninoff, Alexander Scriabin, Sergei Prokofiev, Igor Stravinsky, and Nikolai Medtner. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, he accepted a position as conductor of the newly named State Philharmonic Orchestra of Petrograd (1917–1920). In 1920, he left the Soviet Union for Berlin and Paris, presenting new works by Prokofiev, Stravinsky, and Maurice Ravel. In 1924 he took a post in the United States, replacing Pierre Monteux as conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He took full US citizenship in 1941.

Koussevitzky's appointment as conductor of the Boston Symphony was the beginning of a golden era for the ensemble that would continue until 1949. Over that 25-year period, he built the ensemble's reputation into that of a leading American orchestra, and developed its summer concert and educational programs at Tanglewood. His students and protégés included Leonard Bernstein, Samuel Adler, and Sarah Caldwell. Bernstein once received a pair of cufflinks from Koussevitzky as a gift, and thereafter wore them at every concert he conducted.

Edited from online biography of Serge Koussevitzky at Wikipedia.com

Restoration and recording notes

This transfer is unusual in that it came from a largely unplayed set of clear red vinyl-like 78s issued by RCA Victor under the "Red Seal De Luxe" label in the second half of the 1940s. Although pressed from the same masters as their shellac equivalents, they cost twice as much and were advertised as much for their unrepeatability as their much quieter and cleaner surfaces. It was a format which was soon superseded by microgroove LPs and 45s, pressed onto very similar plastic.

In transfer the discs suffered similar shortcomings to both early LPs and many 78s. There was a noticeable treble drop-off towards the end of each side, and many sides suffered from the swish which plagued many discs at all speeds until well into the 1950s. They also presented a considerably noisier degree of rumble over other formats. That said, overall two sides excepted - see online notes) the fidelity and clarity of these discs was indeed excellent for their day, and for the overall impression is excellent. It has been suggested to me that these discs could produce the finest transfers possible of this recording - to the extent that a reassessment of Koussevitzky's performance here might be long overdue. I certainly believe this XR remastering has addressed many of the technical criticisms previously levelled against it, and this allows the recording to be heard in a completely new light. **AR**

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
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Serge KOUSSEVITZKY Boston Symphony Orchestra

Beethoven Symphony No. 9 'Choral'

Frances Yeend soprano
Eunice Alberts contralto
David Lloyd tenor
James Pease bass

Berkshire Music Festival Chorus Robert Shaw

Studio recording, 1947



PRISTINE AUDIO
PASC 300
BEETHOVEN SYMPHONY No. 9 'CHORAL' IN D MINOR, Op. 125
KOUSSEVITZKY, BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Beethoven Choral Symphony

BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125
"Choral"

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso (16:23)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Molto vivace (11:47)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Adagio e cantabile - Andante moderato (14:21)
- 4 4th mvt. - Presto - Allegro assai (26:09)

Frances Yeend soprano
Eunice Alberts contralto
David Lloyd tenor
James Pease bass

Berkshire Music Festival Chorus Robert Shaw
Boston Symphony Orchestra Serge Koussevitzky

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
PASC 300

XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Transfers from RCA Victor Red Seal
De Luxe DV12 (18-0098/108)

Cover artwork based on photographs
of **Serge Koussevitzky**

Recorded 6, 12 & 13 August, 1947
The Music Shed, Tanglewood,
Lenox, Massachusetts, USA

Matrix Nos. D7-RC-7719 - 7734
Takes 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1,
2, 2, 2, 3, 2, 1, 2, 2, 3

Total duration: 68:40

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