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# Cantelli Cherubini - R. Strauss - Busoni

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The works for this programme is interesting. As far as the Cherubini symphony is concerned a more comprehensive account is to be found on Pristine Audio PASC 319, a CD which also includes Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung* both being part of Cantelli's 29th appearance with the NBC Symphony Orchestra on 27 December 1952. On this present CD the performance of the Cherubini is only fractionally quicker than the rendition given by the NBC Symphony Orchestra but there is a more substantial difference for the Strauss - 22:21 here as opposed to 23:28 in the earlier performance. Incidentally, that 1952 performance is closer both to Strauss's and Toscanini's interpretations.

However, collectors will be more interested in having the two pieces by Busoni. The composer was profoundly affected by the death of his mother on 3 October 1909 and he returned to a little piece for piano entitled *Berceuse élégiaque* which he had composed earlier in the year. He conceived the extended orchestral version which we know as *Berceuse élégiaque* and this was completed on 27 October 1909. For once in his life Busoni carried out the mental task of writing out the orchestral parts no doubt because he was very much aware that the work contained a number of singular harmonies and instrumental harmonies which have not yet been approved and it took a half-hour rehearsal with the Queen's Hall Orchestra (granted by Henry Wood) on 1 November 1909 for Busoni to be satisfied that what he had written and now had the opportunity of hearing was what he intended. The score is specific regarding the number of musicians required and rarely departs from *Andantino molto* only rising to *fz* briefly in its 118 bars. Even if some commentators feel that the work is not significant in Busoni's oeuvre, that is not what the composer himself felt about it explaining 'I have succeeded for the first time in creating an individual sound and dissolving the form into feeling'; from the listeners standpoint the near static tempo, *Andantino molto*, creates the numbness of grief.

Although Oskar Fried ran through the work in 1910 with the Berliner Philharmoniker, it had to wait until 21 February 1911 for its first performance when Gustav Mahler included the work in 1911 for its first performance in a concert consisting of mainly of Italian music at his final concert in New York. The composer acknowledged the applause from a box: in that box was Arturo Toscanini and when Busoni wrote to his wife he mentioned that the Italian conductor had expressed great admiration for the piece. Toscanini gave six performances with the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York between 1929 and 1932, but then there was a considerable gap until he gave a performance with the NBC Symphony Orchestra on 13 March 1948.

Cantelli recorded the work with the Orchestra Stabile dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia on 10 May 1949 and initially approved the recording for issue on 21 September. However, after he had taken the test pressings for Toscanini to hear he adamantly refused to countenance the release. Was it just a coincidence that Toscanini conducted the piece again on 10 December 1949? Cantelli was due to begin his second stint with the NBC Symphony Orchestra on 24 December and he could already have been in New York at the time of what was to be Maestro's final performance of the *Berceuse élégiaque* perhaps Toscanini was showing his younger colleague just how it should be played. Interestingly, although the *Berceuse élégiaque* can be numbered as among Cantelli's core repertoire (he gave 28 performances with twelve orchestras) it was not until 1951 that he programmed the work in the USA and never once did he include the work during his stints with the NBC Symphony Orchestra. The composer's suggestion for a performance was approximately 10:00 of the two Toscanini performances (which were made available to the author by John Canell) his slower was the 1949 rendition (8:15). On this CD Cantelli gives his quickest performance (7:54), but all the performances by Cantelli and Toscanini are respectful of the composer's wishes in terms of dynamics.

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# Cantelli

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**Cherubini**  
Symphony in D  
**R. Strauss**  
*Tod und Verklärung*  
**Busoni**  
*Berceuse élégiaque*  
*Tanzwalzer*

**Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York**  
Live concert recording, 21 March 1954, Carnegie Hall, New York



