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De Sabata: Complete Berlin Recordings

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What an astonishing conductor Victor de Sabata was. The Carlos Kleiber of his day: the parallel is not entirely inexact.

At about the time these Berlin recordings were made, other parallels were being proposed. One of the city's most respected critics, Heinrich Strobel, wrote a review of the 30-year-old Herbert von Karajan's debut with the Berlin Philharmonic in which he compared him to de Sabata: 'the rhythmic inexorability, the incredible musical energy, and the intensity of the melodic shaping'. That de Sabata had these qualities in special measure is burningly clear from these recordings.

De Sabata's account of the Kodaly is thrilling, superior to the fine immediate post-war LPO version under the young Georg Solti. And the Respighi is, quite simply, sensational: definitive. I once saw *Feste romane* (1928) described as 'an entirely indefensible piece': a somewhat puritanical judgement, I would suggest. The piece blazes with colour and the third movement, 'October', has in it a delightful hunting sequence, superbly realized here by the Berlin horns.

In all these performances, the string playing is phenomenal, as is de Sabata's way of etching phrasing and dynamics into the mind and imagination. The first 18 bars of the *Tristan und Isolde* Prelude are a *locus classicus* of this, the climax of the *Liebestod* overwhelming in its intensity...

RO, Gramophone, October 1999 (*excerpts from review of Pearl CD reissue*)

Producer's Note

At the time Victor de Sabata made these recordings, his discography was limited to eight sides of mainly short works recorded with an Italian radio orchestra in 1933. This was disproportionate to his rising international reputation as a conductor, both in the opera house (as director of La Scala since 1930 and a frequent guest at the theatres of Vienna and Berlin) and as an interpreter of the symphonic repertoire.

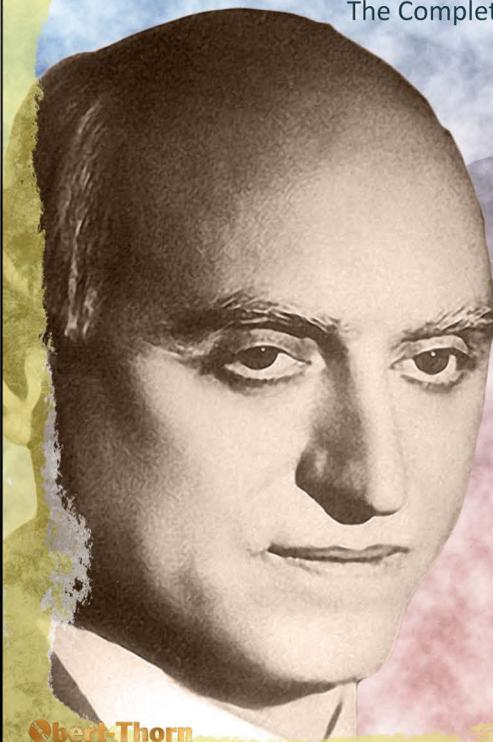
Although he would go on to record two more series of orchestral works (with the London Philharmonic in 1946 and the Santa Cecilia Orchestra in 1947-48) as well as the Requiems of Mozart and Verdi and an unsurpassed version of Puccini's *Tosca* with Maria Callas, the Berlin recordings occupy a special place in his slim commercial discography. They feature uniformly superb performances – boldly conceived, rhythmically flexible and executed with tremendous verve and a minute attention to detail. Never again would de Sabata work with an ensemble of this calibre for a symphonic commercial recording session. While all of the works have appeared before on compact disc, this is the first time they have been assembled in one place (an earlier Pearl set having omitted the rare *Aida* Prelude).

The sources for the transfers were yellow-label postwar DGG pressings for the Strauss, Verdi, Kodaly and Respighi items; picture-label Grammophon "Meisterklasse" pressings for the Brahms set and black-label Grammophon discs for the Wagner. **Mark Obert-Thorn**

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
SARL Pristine Audio, 144 Rue de l'Eglise, 24610 St. Méard de Gurçon, France

Victor de Sabata

The Complete Berlin Philharmonic Recordings



BRAHMS Symphony No. 4
STRAUSS Death & Transfiguration
WAGNER Tristan und Isolde:
Prelude & Liebestod
VERDI Aïda - Prelude
KODALY Dances of Galánta
RESPIGHI Feste Romane

Obert-Thorn

Studio Recordings · 1939

Victor de Sabata Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra**BRAHMS** *Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98*

- 1 1st Mvt. - Allegro non troppo (12:30)
- 2 2nd Mvt. - Andante moderato (12:55)
- 3 3rd Mvt. - Allegro giocoso (5:41)
- 4 4th Mvt. - Allegro energico e passionato (9:27)

R. STRAUSS *Death and Transfiguration, Op. 24*

- 5 I. Largo (Happy memories of childhood) (5:39)
- 6 II. Allegro molto agitato (Life and death battle) (3:23)
- 7 III. Meno mosso, ma sempre alla breve (Dreams of the dying – Death) (7:13)
- 8 IV. Moderato (Transfiguration) (7:35)

WAGNER *Tristan und Isolde*

- 1 Prelude to Act 1 (10:32)
- 2 Liebestod (Act 3) (7:32)
- 3 **VERDI** *Aïda* - Prelude (4:40)

KODALY *Dances of Galánta*

- 4 I. Lento (4:31)
- 5 II. Lento – Allegretto moderato (2:47)
- 6 III. Allegro con moto – Grazioso (1:26)
- 7 IV. Allegro (6:04)

RESPIGHI *Feste Romane*

- 8 1. Circenses (Circuses) (4:26)
- 9 2. Giubileo (Jubilee) (7:11)
- 10 3. L'Ottobrata (October Festival) (7:13)
- 11 4. La Befana (The Epiphany) (5:37)

Producer & Audio Restoration Engineer:
Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover artwork based on a photograph
of Victor de Sabata

All recordings made in the Alte Jacobstrasse Studio,
Berlin, March & April 1939 by Gramophone

Full details of source recording catalogue and
matrix numbers are available at
www.pristineclassical.com/pasc404.html

Special thanks to Nathan Brown and
Charles Niss for providing source material.

Total duration: 2 hr 06:21

For a full catalogue visit
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