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WILLEM VAN OTTERLOO

Beethoven Symphony No. 9

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HISTORIC REVIEW

The first two movements of the 9th Symphony are very well played and give this performance a start that, with fine recorded orchestral sound and, for once, plenty of bass, makes it right away a record to be seriously considered. The Scherzo, incidentally, is played without the repeat of its second half, first time through. After this, things go rather less to my own liking. But is any performance of this vast work likely to be exactly what any one listener wants from the first note to the last? So if I found the opening of the Adagio molto just too slow for the melody to have movement and shape, that must be taken as my view: you may like it as slow as this, I think the speed of the great tune in the Finale, when it begins softly, too slow to convey happiness (as Toscanini's does). But if you want to disagree with Toscanini (apart from me!), you will be in good company, for Kleiber is among the many great conductors who begin slowly and thoughtfully.

More factual matters upon which to comment are that in the second tune of the slow movement, the slightly faster one in D major, the orchestra does not take enough care over the note values: that later on I suspect the technical people of letting us down, for there is a bad gap before the return to the tempo primo, a gap that is not judged as any conductor would naturally feel it, and with the violins' grace-note missing.

As to the soloists, we have still to hear on a record a quartet of equally good voices, consistently well recorded. Hermann Schey starts off with an arresting sound, but his higher notes do not sound too happy and there is sometimes a slight sense of sharpness. The tenor, an adequate singer, detaches every note in the 6/8 march, regardless of its written length: the others cope reasonably well with their difficulties. If this does not sound very enthusiastic, yet who can wholly approve the soloists in any of the current recordings? Certainly not Toscanini's quartet, for whatever their merits, he drives them mercilessly and they are for the most part so distantly recorded. The best quartet still seems to me to be found in the Abendroth performance (and much else of it is very fine) but the discs have a very inferior surface, or had when they first appeared, and their 10-inch size makes this version expensive.

This new Dutch set, well recorded, is certainly one to hear.

T. H., *The Gramophone*, April 1955

Producer's Note

This 1952 Amsterdam recording was suggested to me in an e-mail I received a month or so ago: "I'm sure you get lots of folks saying to you why don't you get hold of such and such a record and work your magic on it. Here's my suggestion: A Philips LP of Beethoven 9 with The Hague Philharmonic under Van Otterloo ... I don't think it was that great a recording technically in the first place, but at the time I had the choice between it and the Vox Horenstein...I heard both before buying...and found it even more satisfying..." Well the good news is that, underneath some very average pressings and somewhat constricted sound lurks a real gem, sonically- and musically-speaking. It really was very well captured indeed, and despite being let down at the time by technical inadequacies in the microphone department, XR remastering has delivered a sound that's vital, full, clear, immediate and, where it matters, entirely thrilling!

Andrew Rose

Otterloo

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

ERNA SPOORENBERG, SOPRANO
MARIA VON ILOSVAY, ALTO
FRANS VROONS, TENOR
HERMAN SCHEY, BASS

TOONKUNSTKOOR AMSTERDAM
RESIDENTIE ORKEST DEN HAAG

Philips studio recording, Amsterdam, 1952

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BEETHOVEN SYMPHONY NO. 9 "CHORAL" IN D MINOR, OP. 125
OTTERLOO, SPOORENBERG, ILOSVAY, VROONS, SCHEY, RESIDENTIE ORKEST

WILLEM VAN OTTERLOO *conducts* Beethoven

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XR remastering by Andrew Rose

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

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso (15:30)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Molto vivace (11:06)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Adagio molto e cantabile – Andante moderato (15:38)
- 4 4th mvt. - Presto – Allegro assai (24:16)

Erna Spoorenberg *soprano*
Maria von Ilosvay *contralto*
Frans Kroons *tenor*
Hermann Schey *bass*

Toonkunstkoor Amsterdam
(Chorus Master *Hans Cleaver*)

Residentie Orkest den Haag *Willem van Otterloo*

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of
Willem van Otterloo

Beethoven Symphony No. 9
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Concertgebouw, Amsterdam,

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