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CANTELLI
conducts Tchaikovsky & Shulman

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Let us start at the beginning. Guido Cantelli graduated as a professional musician on 3 February 1943 and his first engagement was in his home town of Novara when he conducted *La Traviata* eighteen days later. His meteoric rise to fame came after an unseen Arturo Toscanini witnessed Cantelli's rehearsal during May 1948 with the Orchestra della Scala for a concert which was to be his first appearance in the Teatro alla Scala. The rest is well-known and it is an unequivocal fact that Cantelli's international career was launched from that informal encounter.

Up until the end of 1948 only one Tchaikovsky symphony (the *Pathétique*) had been performed (twice) by the young conductor and the only other performances of Tchaikovsky were the violin and the piano concerto which were conducted just once. Cantelli gave his first performance of the Tchaikovsky *Symphony No.5* when the Orchestra della Scala took part in the 1950 Edinburgh Festival: this was Cantelli's first visit to the UK. Such was the acclaim of his performances on the 5th and 9th of September that he was persuaded to record the work later that same month when the orchestra was appearing in London. There followed another seven performances in Italy with the same orchestra. In 1951 there were only five performances, all in the USA – two with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and three with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra.

Thus, by the time that Guido Cantelli mounted the podium on 1 March 1952 in Carnegie Hall, the late Harris Goldsmith made the very valid comment that the conductor had already given a dozen performances of this symphony since he made the commercial recording and that experience can be heard for three reasons: first, as Harris Goldsmith pointed out, Cantelli had considered his interpretation further in the light of these performances; second, he had a fabulous orchestra at his disposal; and third, this was his 22nd appearance with the NBC Symphony Orchestra and the musicians were well aware of the young conductor's way with Tchaikovsky since they had played the Fantasy Overture *Romeo and Juliet* twice and the *Symphony No.4* once. This was to be his only performance of *Symphony No.5* with this orchestra and, understandably, Cantelli had already honed his vision of the work to a remarkable degree. That is not to say that he followed every instruction contained in Tchaikovsky's score, but there is never the impression of manipulation or sentimentality and there are plenty of instances where Cantelli was meticulous in observing Tchaikovsky's wishes. Maybe there a wind of change in the air during the 1950s and - for this listener - it was like a breath of fresh air.

The performance of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* from a few weeks earlier (2 February) has all the ardour, passion and drama contained in the score and while Cantelli's commercial recording with the Philharmonia Orchestra (recorded 13 October 1951) is more subtle there is considerable disappointment that James Bradshaw's tympany is recorded at too low a level, which is very obvious when one hears the NBCSO's Karl Glassman ferocious attacks. Those who eyes are glued to the score will note that that Karl Glassman continues his drum roll through the very last note (apparently, Toscanini did this in a performance with the NBC Symphony Orchestra in 1938, but never repeated it again).

The concert on 1 March had opened with Alan Shulman's *A Laurentian Overture*. He was a cellist in the NBC Symphony Orchestra from 1937 until its disbandment in 1954 although he enlisted for military service during 1942-1945. He was also a composer (1915-2002). He had sent the score, which is dedicated to Tallulah Bankhead, to Cantelli on 6 June 1951 and Cantelli indicated in his reply dated 10 August that he had already decided to include the work in his concerts with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra (as it is known today) and possibly the NBC Symphony Orchestra as well: this he did. It may not be a great work, but it is one of those compositions which can delight audiences (even some critics as well) although, sadly, it did not find its way into the accepted repertoire. The outer sections are rumbustious and the central part has a meditative atmosphere. It has that sense of wide open spaces and a feeling that life, although quirky, is very much worth living. Anyway, Cantelli obviously liked it and the performances with both orchestras were brilliant.

These note © 2015 Keith Bennett, author of "*Guido Cantelli - Just Eight Years of Fame*" (GC Publishers, 2009)
A producer's note for this release can be found online



Cantelli

conducts

TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 5

Romeo & Juliet

plus

Shulman A Laurentian Overture

NBC Symphony Orchestra

Live recordings, 1952

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Guido Cantelli

Tchaikovsky 5, Shulman Overture
Live broadcast
Carnegie Hall, 1st March, 1952

Tchaikovsky Romeo & Juliet
Live broadcast
Carnegie Hall, 2 February, 1952

Total duration: 72:08

CANTELLI *conducts* Tchaikovsky

TCHAIKOVSKY *Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64*

- 1 1st mvt. - Andante - Allegro con anima (14:01)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Andante cantabile con alcuna licenza (11:53)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Valse - Allegro moderato (5:48)
- 4 4th mvt. - Finale - Andante maestoso - Allegro vivace (12:40)

TCHAIKOVSKY *Romeo and Juliet (overture-fantasia)* (18:44)

SHULMAN A *Laurentian Overture* (9:02)

NBC Symphony Orchestra

Guido Cantelli, conductor

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