



Nikolai Sokoloff

Complete Cleveland Recordings



Producer's Note

This release celebrates the centenary of the Cleveland Orchestra by presenting all of the early recordings made under its founding conductor, Nikolai Sokoloff. While a few of them were reissued by the orchestra itself a quarter century or more ago on limited edition LPs or CDs, the majority are being made available here for the first time in over eighty years.

Nikolai Sokoloff was born in Kiev in 1886, and moved to New Haven, Connecticut with his parents when he was 13 years old. Four years later, he became a violinist with the Boston Symphony. He studied music at Yale, and also privately with Charles Martin Loeffler. Following this, he went to Paris to continue his studies with D'Indy, and conducted in Manchester.

Returning to America, he directed the San Francisco People's Philharmonic Orchestra (1916 - 1917), where he insisted on the then-unheard of practice of hiring women players and paying them the same as men. He was approached by Cleveland impresario Adella Prentiss Hughes with an offer to organize musical education there. Sokoloff accepted with one condition: an orchestra would need to be created that he would lead. On December 11th, 1918, the Cleveland Orchestra gave its first performance. By 1922, Sokoloff felt the ensemble was ready for its first Carnegie Hall appearance.

Two years later, Sokoloff and the orchestra began a series of recordings for the Brunswick label, then a major player in the American market alongside Victor and Columbia. Their recordings fall neatly into three periods: acoustic discs, which, after a single New York session in January, 1924 that produced the *1812 Overture*, were made in Cleveland in October of the same year; early electric "Light-Ray" recordings, also made in Cleveland in May of 1926 in a warmly reverberant venue which was probably the Masonic Auditorium, used by the orchestra before Severance Hall was built in 1931; and a final group of electrics made back in New York two years later, most likely in the Chapter Room of Carnegie Hall, where Brunswick had previously recorded the New York Philharmonic under Mengelberg and Toscanini.

While the sound of the acoustic recordings compares well with their counterparts on Victor and Columbia, the early electrics were more problematic. The "Light-Ray" method was developed by General Electric as an offshoot of an early sound-on-film recording process, using photoelectric cells to transmit sound optically to a disc cutting head, rather than the electrical impulses used by the rival Western Electric system. At lower volume levels, the results could be acceptable; however, anything *forte* and above came out congested and harshly distorted. By the time of the orchestra's final sessions in 1928, Brunswick had abandoned this system for Western Electric's.

The repertoire chosen for the most part reflected the same kind of light Classics that had been best sellers for other orchestras during the acoustic and early electric eras, usually heavily abridged in order to fit onto a single side or disc. Only with the final sessions in 1928 do we see entire, uncut works being attempted. (The Schubert *Unfinished* even features the first movement repeat, a rarity in those days.)

[continues in next disc insert...]



CD One **The Acoustic Recordings (1924)**

- 1 TCHAIKOVSKY 1812 Overture, Op. 44 (8:49)
- 2 J. STRAUSS II On the Beautiful Blue Danube – Waltz, Op. 314 (4:09)
- 3 J. STRAUSS II Tales from the Vienna Woods – Waltz, Op. 325 (4:25)
- 4 SIBELIUS Valse Triste (from Kuolema, Op. 44) (2:45)
- 5 SIBELIUS Finlandia – Symphonic Poem, Op 26 (4:20)
- 6 SCHUMANN Träumerei (Kinderszenen, Op. 15, No. 7) (3:33)
- 7 DVOŘÁK Slavonic Dance in D major, Op. 46, No. 3 (3:15)
- 8 BRAHMS Hungarian Dance No. 5 in G minor (2:35)
- 9 BRAHMS Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op 73 - 3rd Mvt. - Allegretto (4:19)
- 10 WAGNER Lohengrin - Prelude to Act 3 (3:07)
- 11 WAGNER Lohengrin - Bridal Chorus (Act 3) (3:15)

The "Light-Ray " Electrics (1926)

- 12 WAGNER Lohengrin - Prelude to Act 3 (3:11)
- 13 WAGNER Lohengrin - Bridal Chorus (Act 3) (3:18)
- 14 TCHAIKOVSKY 1812 Overture, Op. 44 (9:58)

CD Two

- 1 TCHAIKOVSKY The Sleeping Beauty, Op. 20, No. 6 - Waltz (4:09)
- 2 RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (arr. Victor Herbert) Sadko - Song of India (3:13)
- 3 RACHMANINOV Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2 (3:54)
- 4 NICOLAI The Merry Wives of Windsor - Overture (4:25)
- 5 SAINT-SAËNS Danse Macabre, Op. 40 (4:44)
- 6 HALVORSEN Entry March of the Boyars (5:31)

The Final Electrics (1928)

SCHUBERT Symphony No. 8 in B minor, D.759, 'Unfinished'

- 7 1st mvt. - Allegro moderato (12:29)
- 8 2nd mvt. - Andante con moto (12:05)

- 9 DELIBES Coppelïa - Entr'acte and Valse (3:14)
- 10 PIERNÉ Cydalise et le Chèvre-Pied - Entrance of the Little Fauns (2:08)
- 11 GRAINGER Shepherd's Hey (A Morris Dance) (2:15)

The Cleveland Orchestra *Nikolai Sokoloff*



Producer and Audio Restoration
Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Nikolai Sokoloff

Total duration: 3hr 0:20

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Nikolai Sokoloff

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Producer's Note

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What we hear on these recordings is an ensemble that already sounds superior to most of its European counterparts at the time, save perhaps for Mengelberg's Concertgebouw Orchestra. String portamento is used surprisingly sparingly for the period, and reserved mainly for the Russian Romantic repertoire. Ensemble playing is generally good, as are the instrumental soloists, particularly Joseph Fuchs, the concertmaster heard in the 1928 recordings. And Sokoloff is revealed as an energetic, often imaginative interpreter (although some of the swift tempi - like the mad dash through the "Presto ma non assai" section of the Brahms Second Allegretto - seem more dictated by recording timing constraints than interpretive choice).

Far and away the most ambitious recording Sokoloff made with the orchestra was the gramophonic première of the Rachmaninov Second Symphony. The conductor had first approached Rachmaninov in 1919 about making cuts to the nearly hour-long work in order to make it more palatable to audiences. Rachmaninov agreed that he had been "more voluble" in his younger days, and proceeded to craft what was intended to be a new performing edition.

Not only did the composer cut music he considered redundant, but he also changed some harmonies and assigned a new tempo marking for the second movement. The 1928 set presented here is the only recording of this version. The next recording, made by Eugene Ormandy in Minneapolis in 1934, cut even more out of the score, and became the *de facto* performing version in the US and elsewhere until the 1960s.

After leaving Cleveland in 1932, Sokoloff was appointed director of the Federal Music Project (1935 - 1939), a New Deal program created to employ musicians and encourage music appreciation during the Depression. From 1938 through 1941, he was music director of the Seattle Symphony. In 1941, he settled in La Jolla, California, where he organized the La Jolla Musical Arts Festival Orchestra. With them, he made several LP recordings in the early 1950s, featuring works by Rozsa and Lopatnikoff for the Concert Hall label and by Dello Joio, Martinů and Britten for Alco Records. He died in La Jolla in 1965.

Following the 1928 sessions, the Cleveland Orchestra would not stand before the recording microphones for another eleven years, when it began a long association with Columbia Records - first under Artur Rodzinski, who had been its music director since 1933, and then, briefly, with Erich Leinsdorf before George Szell arrived for his long tenure (1946 - 1970). But the seeds of the Cleveland Orchestra's later international success were already present in these recordings made within the first decade of its existence.

Mark Obert-Thorn



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PASC 524

NIKOLAI SOKOLOFF and the CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA
Complete Recordings - CD3

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Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Nikolai Sokoloff

Full discographic notes can be
found online at the Pristine
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Total duration: 3hr 0:20

CD Three **The Final Electrics (1928)**

- 1 SIBELIUS Valse Triste (from Kuolema, Op. 44) (3:42)
- 2 BORODIN Polovtsian Dances (from Prince Igor, Act 2) (11:19)

RACHMANINOV Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27

- 3 1st mvt. - Largo (15:33)
- 4 2nd mvt. - Allegro molto (8:11)
- 5 3rd mvt. - Adagio (12:27)
- 6 4th mvt. - Allegro vivace (10:05)

The Cleveland Orchestra *Nikolai Sokoloff*

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