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Toscanini

The 1939 Beethoven Cycle, Volume 5

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Toscanini, in Fifth Concert of Beethoven Cycle,
With NBC Orchestra, Gives Two 'Leonore' Overtures

The fifth broadcast concert of Toscanini's Beethoven cycle with the NBC Symphony Orchestra took place last night at Radio City. Of the master's physical life, the program traversed the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Of his creative life, it spanned a distance that is unequaled in the realm of music. There were the "Leonore" Overtures Nos. 1 and 2; the Eighth symphony, and excerpts from the ballet "Prometheus"—products of the earlier years. And there were the middle two movements of the F major quartet, Op. 135, which came the year before the master's last. Toscanini has simply transferred the original quartet parts for full orchestral strings and fortified the 'cellos in certain measures with a few stands of double-basses.

In default of a string quartet with endless bows, the arrangement for string orchestra is definitely an improvement in the communication of Beethoven's exalted thought. The slightest rasp in the change of a single bow, a momentary unevenness of the individual vibrato, or a wrongly stressed accent may dispel the mood so magnificently established and maintained in the score.

These risks are partly nullified in the larger arrangement. In the hands of a Toscanini, whose sense of classic line is exquisite, whose shaping of delicate nuance is a unique feat, these excerpts—particularly the slow movement—are almost reborn to our ears, assuming a pristine beauty. To the unpredictable drive of the scherzo, the basses give a touch of the diabolic that no amount of good 'cello playing from two hands can possibly achieve. But even granting the splendid playing of last night's violins, massed strings take some of the glint and sparkle from the original scoring.

Those who are fond of esthetic speculation could dwell again on the mystery of the "Leonore" Overtures. Were they written in the order of the compositions known as Nos. 2, 3 and 1? Or are we to reject the teachings so arduously imbibed at the price of our conservatory diploma, and take the side of Ernest Newman and his disciples, who say that evidence both external and internal points to the astonishing fact that the "Leonores" were written in exactly the order in which they are numbered? Last night's performance presented a strong case for the iconoclast. Is it possible that this lightly scored, almost hesitantly constructed overture could have been written after the gigantic Nos. 2 and 3? Florestan's aria, so meagerly developed, seems to be proof that the answer is no.

But these, at any rate, are doubts that did not afflict last night's audience, which was as well pleased with No. 1 as with No. 2, and with both as with the whole program.

G. G., The New York Times, 26 November 1939

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volume five

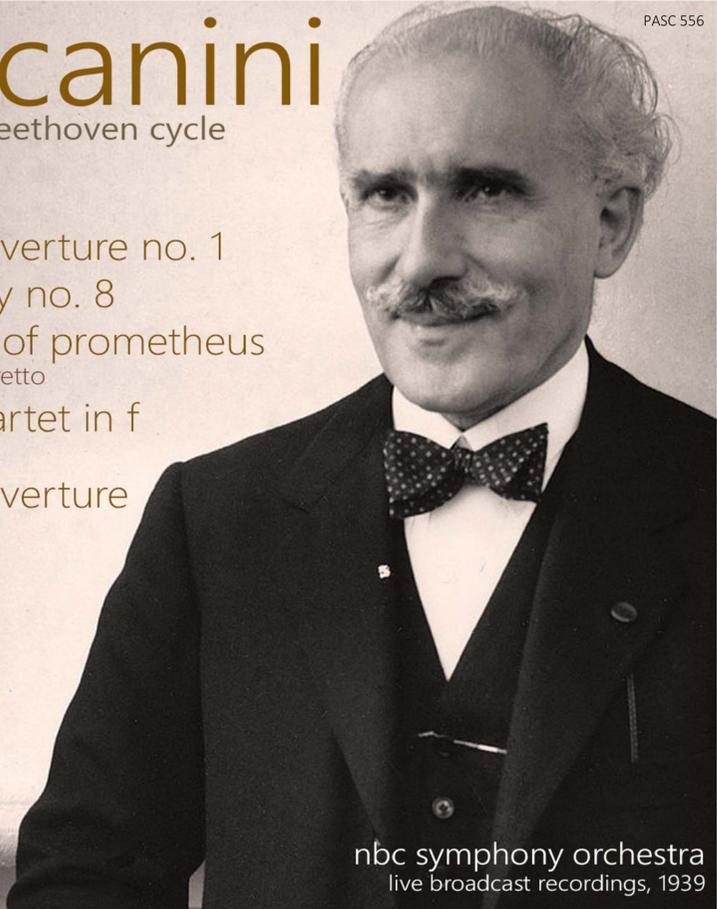
leonore overture no. 1
symphony no. 8
creatures of prometheus
adagio & allegretto

string quartet in f
lento & vivace

leonore overture
no. 2

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nbc symphony orchestra
live broadcast recordings, 1939



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TOSCANINI, NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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1. RADIO Introduction (1:59)
 2. BEETHOVEN Leonore Overture No. 1, Op. 138 (8:48)
- BEETHOVEN** Symphony No. 8 in F, Op. 93
3. 1st mvt. - Allegro vivace e con brio (9:14)
 4. 2nd mvt. - Allegretto scherzando (3:43)
 5. 3rd mvt. - Tempo di Menuetto (4:48)
 6. 4th mvt. - Allegro vivace (7:14)
7. RADIO End of part 1 (1:33)
 8. RADIO Intermission talk - Samuel Chotzinoff (8:48)
 9. RADIO Start of part 2 (0:35)

BEETHOVEN String Quartet No. 16 in F Major, Op. 135

10. 3rd mvt. - Lento assai, cantate e tranquillo (7:36)
11. 2nd mvt. - Vivace (3:32)

12. **BEETHOVEN** The Creatures of Prometheus, Op. 43
No. 5: Adagio - Andante quasi Allegretto (7:22)

13. **BEETHOVEN** Leonore Overture No. 2, Op. 72a (13:12)
14. RADIO Ending (1:17)

NBC Symphony Orchestra
conducted by Arturo Toscanini

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Toscanini

Broadcast of 25 November, 1939
NBC Studio 8H, Radio City, New York

Total duration: 79:41

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