

Stokowski

conducts Wagner



Born in 1882, Stokowski's first musical experiences began when he sang in the choir of St. Marylebone's Parish Church in London. His evident precocity led him aged 13 to become the youngest student at that time to enter the Royal College of Music. His subsequent youthful choirmaster posts in London resulted in a similar position at St. Bartholomew's, New York, in 1905. Here his brilliant organ recitals drew fashionable crowds, entranced by the playing of his own arrangements of orchestral music, including many works by Wagner.

With his Cincinnati Orchestra appointment in 1909, he fulfilled his ambition to be an orchestral conductor. His first concert there ended with the *Siegfried Idyll* and the *Ride of the Valkyries*. With these two works, Stokowski conducted Wagner's orchestral music for the first time. The *Siegfried Idyll*, an eloquent birthday present from Wagner to his wife Cosima, never featured in Stokowski's commercial recording schedules, so this NBC broadcast is something of a rarity.

In 1912, Stokowski became the Philadelphia Orchestra's new chief conductor and the *Tannhäuser* Overture concluded his debut programme with them. In 1917, when he and his Philadelphians began making 78s, Wagner was naturally included. (All the Stokowski / Wagner acoustics have been issued on Pristine Audio: PASC 192, PASC 441 and PASC 471). However, the only complete Wagner music-drama he ever conducted was a concert performance of *Parsifal* during Easter Week in 1933. By now he'd begun creating 'Symphonic Syntheses' of Wagner's operas and his own arrangement of music from Act 3 of *Parsifal* was duly recorded by his Philadelphians in 1934 and repeated for his NBC audience in 1942 (PASC 591).

Tristan and Isolde was also given the 'Symphonic Synthesis' treatment, though it exists in more than one edition. A "long" version, first recorded in 1932, was repeated for a 1950 LP with his ad hoc 'Symphony Orchestra' (PASC 167). Later, he utilised music from Acts 2 and 3 and this became the "Love Music" from *Tristan and Isolde*. Stokowski wrote: "All through the three acts of *Tristan* is sounding the despair and ecstasy of love ... It is the supreme and ultimate of the poetry of love."

The Prelude to *Lohengrin*, one of the orchestral works that Stokowski had transcribed for organ, was later recorded with the Philadelphia Orchestra both acoustically and on an early electric 78. His own arrangement of *Wotan's Farewell and Magic Fire Music* - a musical evocation of Wotan putting Brünnhilde to sleep on a rock surrounded by flickering flames - is well realised in the stirring transcription heard here and it duly provided a full-blooded addition to that evening's NBC Symphony concert.

Edward Johnson



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WAGNER SIEGFRIED IDYLL - MUSIC FROM TRISTAN UND ISOLDE, LOHENGRIN, DIE WALKÜRE
STOKOWSKI, NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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1. WAGNER Siegfried Idyll (18:43)

Concert of 6 December 1942

WAGNER (arr. Stokowski) Tristan und Isolde

2. Love Music (22:19)

Concert of 28 February 1943

WAGNER Lohengrin

3. Prelude (10:00)

Concert of 23 January 1944

WAGNER (arr. Stokowski) Die Walküre

4. Wotan's Farewell (13:17)

5. Magic Fire Music (4:48)

Concert of 23 January 1944

NBC Symphony Orchestra

conducted by Leopold Stokowski

XR Remastered by **Andrew Rose**

Live broadcast recordings from NBC Studio 8H, Radio City, New York
Cover artwork based on a photograph of Leopold Stokowski

Total duration: 69:07

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