

In April and May of 1950 Arturo Toscanini took the NBC Symphony Orchestra on what would be their only US tour together. Over the course of twenty-two concerts they travelled the length and breadth of the country, from New York to Los Angeles, north to Seattle, and back east again. Only in Pasadena, California, did they pause long enough to give two concerts in the same venue on consecutive evenings, on Wednesday 3rd and Friday 5th May, before heading north to San Francisco.

The NBC's specially chartered 15-carriage train carried the bulk of the players and their instruments across the miles, serving both as accommodation and a social hub. As on their 1940 South American tour, there were also players – and Toscanini himself – who travelled more comfortably by air, occasionally providing the local press with opportunities to record small airport dramas as the NBC party arrived. It was, by all accounts, a gruelling schedule, with concert after concert following long journeys, yet the level of performance never appeared to falter.

Our first Pasadena concert, issued as *PASC740*, revealed just how well these performances were captured, despite there being no evidence of any broadcast and no apparent intention to preserve them for posterity. Both concerts survive on acetate discs – fragile, short-lived by nature, and prone to deterioration – which have somehow made it through three-quarters of a century in remarkably decent condition. Even so, careful restoration was needed, particularly for the first Pasadena programme, to bring them back to life.

The second concert's programme shared no repertoire with the first. Toscanini opened with Rossini's overture to *La Cenerentola*, a work he had championed since his earliest days on the podium, taken here with his customary rhythmic precision and sparkle. This was followed by Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony, given in a taut, forward-driving account that omitted the exposition repeat, propelling the music towards its destination with characteristic urgency. The *Eroica* was a work central to Toscanini's repertoire, and his Pasadena reading combines architectural clarity with an almost combustible energy, making for a performance that still bristles with life today.

After the interval the mood shifted to Smetana's *The Moldau* (*Vltava*), the best-known of his *Má vlast* tone poems, which Toscanini shapes without excess sentimentality, allowing the colours of the river's journey to speak for themselves. The Good Friday Spell from Wagner's *Parsifal* follows, glowing with warmth and serenity, the NBC's strings and woodwinds playing with luminous delicacy. The programme concludes with Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* Overture, its lyricism tenderly phrased and its climaxes delivered with thrilling precision.

The Pasadena Civic Auditorium's acoustics add an extra dimension to these performances, allowing the NBC Symphony's sonority greater breadth than was possible in the more confined Studio 8H. This additional resonance lends warmth to the strings, richness to the brass, and a greater sense of space to climactic moments – an aural reminder of how different Toscanini and his orchestra could sound outside their regular New York home.

As a bonus, we have managed to secure a recording of the encore *Dixie*, by Daniel Decatur Emmett, which Toscanini performed in Atlanta, Philadelphia and, as heard here to an astonished and rapturous reception, in Richmond, Virginia, earlier in the tour. The music librarian to the NBC orchestra at the time, James Dolan, introduces the piece with a fascinating account of how it came to be included in the Maestro's programme.

Once again, the restoration process has been kind to these vintage discs. While the occasional faint trace of surface wear is inevitable, the overall sound quality for a live, non-broadcast performance of this vintage is exceptional. These two Pasadena concerts, preserved against the odds, capture Toscanini and his orchestra away from the confines of Studio 8H, in front of a live audience, still playing with an intensity and discipline that left no doubt as to why they were the envy of orchestras across America.

Andrew Rose



PASC 750

toscanini

in pasadena, volume two

rossini
la cenerentola overture

beethoven
symphony no. 3 'eroica'

smetana
the moldau

wagner
good friday spell

tchaikovsky
romeo & juliet overture

emmett
dixie (bonus track)

nbc symphony orchestra

Pristine
XR

live spring tour recording, 5 may, 1950

PRISTINE
AUDIO

PASC 750

TOSCANINI IN PASADENA, VOLUME 2: BEETHOVEN, ROSSINI, SMETANA, TCHAIKOVSKY, WAGNER
TOSCANINI, NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

toscanini

in pasadena, volume two

PRISTINE
AUDIO

PASC 750

TOSCANINI IN PASADENA, VOLUME 2: BEETHOVEN, ROSSINI, SMETANA, TCHAIKOVSKY, WAGNER
TOSCANINI, NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PASC 750

PRISTINE
AUDIO

disc one
(57:24)

1. **ROSSINI** La Cenerentola - Overture (8:45)

BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 3 in E flat major, Op. 55, 'Eroica'

2. 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio (14:24)

3. 2nd mvt. - Marcia funebre. Adagio assai (16:23)

4. 3rd mvt. - Scherzo. Allegro vivace - Trio (5:36)

5. 4th mvt. - Finale. Allegro molto (12:16)

disc two
(47:58)

1. **SMETANA** Má Vlast - 2. Vltava (*The Moldau*) (12:45)

2. **WAGNER** Parsifal - Good Friday Spell (12:02)

3. **TCHAIKOVSKY** Romeo and Juliet (overture-fantasia) (20:21)

Bonus Tracks

4. **James Dolan** (NBC SO Librarian): Introduction to *Dixie* (1:43)

5. **EMMETT** Dixie (1:07)

Recorded in Richmond, Virginia, 17 April 1950

NBC Symphony Orchestra
conducted by **Arturo Toscanini**

XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Toscanini

Live concert recording,
5 May 1950,
Pasadena Civic Auditorium

Total duration: 1hr 45:23

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