

In December 1938 Artur Rodziński and the NBC Symphony Orchestra offered American radio audiences two exceptional programmes from Studio 8H in Radio City, separated by a single week but strikingly different in their musical terrain. Still early in the orchestra's life, these broadcasts reveal an ensemble of formidable discipline and tonal punch, and a conductor whose flair for programming was matched by his ability to coax high-voltage playing from musicians already performing at the top of their game.

The 10 December 1938 broadcast opened with Glinka's evergreen *Ruslan and Lyudmila* Overture. The New York Times critic Olin Downes singled out its "sparkling" character and the orchestra's brilliance, noting that despite the modest studio acoustics the execution was "satisfactory to brilliant" throughout the programme. Under Rodziński the overture becomes a showcase of tensile rhythmic drive and peerless ensemble precision. The NBC strings, already one of the most agile sections in the country, dispatch Glinka's perpetual-motion writing with an ease that belies the difficulty of the music.

The centrepiece of that first broadcast was Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5, a Rodziński speciality. Downes wrote admiringly of the conductor's command of Tchaikovsky's long spans and the orchestra's powerful response, observing that the sweeping finale stood out even in the modest confines of the studio acoustic. Rodziński shapes the symphony without indulgence: the opening motto is sombre yet flexible; the slow movement's horn solo emerges with poised lyricism; the waltz glides without heaviness; and the finale surges with tightly controlled energy. These players may have been assembled for Toscanini, but in Rodziński they found a conductor who drew from them a comparable mixture of discipline and white-hot emotional commitment.

That programme also included the American broadcast premiere of Mikhail Starokadomsky's Concerto for Orchestra, a 1933 work by a now little-known pupil of Myaskovsky. Although too long to fit our CD programme, it is included complete in the download edition.

The concert closed with Stravinsky's *Firebird* Suite, the critic noting it "livened things up" despite the dryness of the broadcast studio. Rodziński's performance is taut, colourful and intensely dramatic, the NBC brass and percussion delivering Stravinsky's climaxes with thrilling impact. Even in the early years of high-fidelity broadcasting, the sheer blaze of this performance must have made a vivid impression on listeners.

A week later, on 17 December 1938, Rodziński returned to Studio 8H with an entirely new programme, later reviewed in the New York Times' "Other Music" column. The broadcast opened with Dvořák's Symphony No. 4 — the work now recognised as his Eighth — already a favourite in the concert hall by that time. The critic praised the NBC Symphony's "strong, clear and brilliant" playing, noting especially the finely balanced winds and the orchestra's rhythmic vitality in a score whose pastoral lyricism can so easily turn heavy-handed. Rodziński gives the symphony a firm architectural profile, shaping its buoyant themes with affection but without sentimentality.

Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* Symphony followed, a bold choice in 1938 when the composer was at the centre of cultural controversy in Europe. The Times again highlighted the NBC Symphony's "splendid discipline" and the work's vivid colour and firm structure under Rodziński, whose affinity for Hindemith's muscular counterpoint is audible throughout. Far from the austerity sometimes associated with the composer, Rodziński finds warmth and expressive breadth in the score, especially in the luminous "Engelkonzert" movement.

The second broadcast concluded with Richard Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel*, played with élan, razor-sharp precision and a wicked sense of humour. The Times reviewer praised the performance's personality and momentum, noting the orchestra's quick responsiveness to Rodziński's characterisation of Strauss's mercurial antihero.

For these restorations Pristine has employed its XR remastering and Ambient Stereo techniques to address the inherent limitations of Studio 8H's bone-dry acoustics. Wow and flutter have been virtually eliminated, tonal edges softened, and a sympathetic convolution reverb drawn from one of the world's finest symphonic halls has been added to restore a sense of breadth and natural resonance. The result is a pair of broadcasts that emerge with new presence and musical richness, preserving the sound of a great orchestra under an electrifying conductor at a pivotal moment in American radio history.

# rodziński

nbc 1938, volume 3

Pristine  
XR  
PASC 760

dvořák symphony no. 8  
glinka ruslan and ludmila: overture  
hindemith mathis der maler  
r. strauss till eulenspiegels lustige streiche  
stravinsky firebird suite  
tchaikovsky symphony no. 5

nbc symphony orchestra  
conducted by artur rodziński

live broadcast recordings, 1938



rodziński  
nbc 1938 vol. 3PRISTINE  
AUDIO

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Rodziński NBC 1938, Vol. 3  
DVOŘÁK, GLINKA, HINDEMITH, R. STRAUSS, STRAVINSKY, TCHAIKOVSKY

PASC 760

PRISTINE  
AUDIO

## disc one (75:27)

1. RADIO Introduction (1:52)
2. GLINKA *Ruslan and Lyudmila* - Overture (5:44)
- TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64
3. 1st mvt. - Andante - Allegro con anima (14:10)
4. 2nd mvt. - Andante cantabile con alcuna licenza (13:05)
5. 3rd mvt. - Valse. Allegro moderato (5:48)
6. 4th mvt. - Finale. Andante maestoso - Allegro vivace (11:57)

## STRAVINSKY The Firebird (Suite)

7. Introduction (3:46)
8. Dance of the Firebird (1:15)
9. Dance of the Princesses (4:52)
10. The Infernal Dance of King Kashchei (3:51)
11. Berceuse (Lullaby of the Firebird) (3:25)
12. Finale (5:42)

XR remastering by: Andrew Rose  
Live broadcast recordings, 10 & 17 December 1938  
Studio 8H, NBC Radio City, New York  
Cover artwork based on a photograph of Artur Rodziński

Total duration: 2hr 35:07

## disc two (79:39)

1. RADIO Introduction (1:52)
- DVOŘÁK Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88
2. 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio (9:45)
3. 2nd mvt. - Adagio (10:01)
4. 3rd mvt. - Allegretto grazioso – Molto Vivace (5:48)
5. 4th mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo (11:23)
- HINDEMITH Mathis der Maler Symphony
6. 1st mvt. - Engelkonzert (9:07)
7. 2nd mvt. - Grablegung (4:31)
8. 3rd mvt. - Versuchung des heiligen Antonius (13:03)
9. R. STRAUSS Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche (14:09)

NBC Symphony Orchestra  
conducted by Artur Rodziński

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