

By the late 1930s the National Broadcasting Company had created something unprecedented in American musical life: a full-time symphony orchestra assembled specifically for radio. The NBC Symphony Orchestra was formed in 1937 primarily for the broadcasts of Arturo Toscanini, but before Toscanini's first appearance on Christmas Day of that year the orchestra needed to be tested, disciplined and moulded into a working ensemble. That crucial preparatory work fell largely to the Polish conductor Artur Rodziński.

Rodziński had already established a formidable reputation in the United States through his transformative leadership of the Cleveland Orchestra. NBC engaged him first for a trial broadcast in November 1937, followed by three concerts in December that effectively served as the orchestra's public dress rehearsal before Toscanini assumed the podium. Rodziński returned to conduct further NBC Symphony broadcasts in April 1938 and again in December of the same year. The present recordings preserve the last two of four concerts he conducted on consecutive weekends that December.

These broadcasts therefore represent the closing chapter of Rodziński's brief but significant association with the NBC Symphony Orchestra. The New Year's Eve programme heard here would prove to be the final concert he conducted with the ensemble.

The Christmas Eve broadcast opens atmospherically with the Prelude to Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*, music whose luminous orchestral writing made it a favourite seasonal curtain-raiser. From there Rodziński turns to Johann Sebastian Bach as orchestrated by Ottorino Respighi. Respighi's Bach transcriptions were widely admired in the early twentieth century for their rich orchestral palette, and here two chorales from the set of *Three Chorales* were performed: *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* and *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*.

The central work of the programme is Beethoven's First Symphony, music that bridges the Classical world of Haydn and Mozart with the emerging individuality that would soon transform the symphonic form. Rodziński follows it with one of the most striking orchestral transformations of the twentieth century: Arnold Schoenberg's orchestration of Brahms's Piano Quartet in G minor. Schoenberg explained that one reason for making the arrangement was that he wanted to hear everything in Brahms's densely written score more clearly than was possible in the original chamber version. The result is a dazzling re-imagining of the work in which Brahmsian architecture is expanded into a vibrant orchestral showpiece.

The New Year's Eve broadcast presents an equally colourful programme. It begins with Alexander Siloti's orchestral arrangement of a concerto from Antonio Vivaldi's *L'estro armonico*. Siloti's late-Romantic treatment of the Baroque original reflects the era's fascination with adapting earlier music to the modern symphony orchestra.

From there Rodziński launches into Alexander Scriabin's Third Symphony, *Le Divin Poème*, a vast mystical canvas whose ecstatic climaxes and shimmering orchestration stand at the threshold of musical modernism. Scriabin's ecstatic vision is followed by a sequence of orchestral miniatures: Ravel's nostalgic *Pavane pour une infante défunte* and two movements from Debussy's *Nocturnes*, *Nuages* and the exuberant *Fêtes*.

The concert concludes in celebratory fashion with the first waltz sequence from Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, music whose swirling Viennese rhythms provided a fitting close to a New Year's Eve broadcast.

The original transmissions were introduced by NBC announcer Gene Hamilton. His commentary survives in full on the source recordings, but because the complete broadcasts run slightly longer than a standard compact disc allows, much of this material has been edited here in order to accommodate the music within a single CD. Short excerpts of Hamilton's introductions to the Christmas Eve concert and his closing remarks at the end of the New Year's Eve broadcast have been retained.

Despite their broadcast origins the surviving recordings are remarkable for their warmth, dynamic range and clarity. In these new XR remasterings the sound reveals impressive orchestral colour, with quiet surfaces and extended frequency range that allow Rodziński's incisive conducting and the NBC Symphony Orchestra's brilliance to emerge with striking immediacy.

These final NBC broadcasts not only complete Rodziński's recorded association with the orchestra but also offer a vivid glimpse of American orchestral broadcasting at the end of the 1930s.

# rodziński

nbc 1938, volume 4

Pristine  
XR  
PASC 767

humperdinck hänsel und gretel prelude  
bach two chorales  
beethoven symphony no. 1  
brahms piano quartet no. 1  
vivaldi concerto in d minor  
scriabin symphony no. 3  
ravel pavane pour une infante défunte  
debussy nuages & fêtes  
r. strauss rosenkavalier waltzes

nbc symphony orchestra  
conducted by artur rodziński

live broadcast recordings, 1938



# rodziński

## nbc 1938 vol. 4

## disc one (79:45)

1. RADIO Introduction to Christmas Eve Program (0:28)
2. HUMPERDINCK Hänsel und Gretel - *Prelude* (8:00)

**BACH** (arr. Respighi) Chorales from the *Orgelbüchlein*

3. Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, BWV 659 (5:38)
4. Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme, BWV 645 (4:10)

**BEETHOVEN** Symphony No. 1 in C major, Op. 21

5. 1st mvt. - Adagio molto - Allegro con brio (6:46)
6. 2nd mvt. - Andante cantabile con moto (6:56)
7. 3rd mvt. - Menuetto: Allegro molto e vivace (3:27)
8. 4th mvt. - Finale: Adagio - Allegro molto e vivace (5:43)

**BRAHMS** (arr. Schoenberg) Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor, Op. 25

9. 1st mvt. - Allegro (13:44)
10. 2nd mvt. - Intermezzo: Allegro ma non troppo - Trio: Animato (8:51)
11. 3rd mvt. - Andante con moto (8:35)
12. 4th mvt. - Rondo alla zingarese: Presto (7:26)

XR remastering by: Andrew Rose

Live broadcast recordings, 24 &amp; 31 December 1938

Studio 8H, NBC Radio City, New York

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Artur Rodziński

Total duration: 2hr 37:46

## disc two (78:01)

**VIVALDI** (arr. Siloti) Concerto in D minor  
from *L'estro armonico*, Op. 3 No. 11, RV 565

1. 1st mvt. - Allegro (5:33)
2. 2nd mvt. - Adagio e spiccato (4:37)
3. 3rd mvt. - Allegro (3:22)

**SCRIBIN** Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 43 - *Le Divin Poème*

4. 1st mvt. - Lutte (17:05)
5. 2nd mvt. - Voluptés (8:11)
6. 3rd mvt. - Jeu divin (9:47)

7. **RAVEL** Pavane pour une infante défunte (6:17)**DEBUSSY** Nocturnes

8. Nuages (8:35)
9. Fêtes (6:01)

10. **R. STRAUSS** *Der Rosenkavalier* Waltzes - First  
sequence (7:55)

## 11. RADIO Conclusion to New Year's Eve Program (0:38)

**NBC Symphony Orchestra**  
conducted by Artur Rodziński