TOSCANINI LIVE

BEETHOVEN: Missa Solemnis in D, Op. 123. Zinka Milanov, soprano; Bruna Castagna, mezzo-soprano; Jussi Bjoerling, tenor; Alexander Kipnis, bass; Westminster Choir; VERDI: Missa da Requiem. Zinka Milanov, soprano; Bruna Castagna, mezzo-soprano; Jussi Bjoerling, tenor; Nicola Moscona, bass; Westminster Choir, NBC Symphony Orchestra, Arturo Toscanini, cond. Melodram MEL 006 (3). (Three Discs). (Mono).

BEETHOVEN: Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Op. 125. Vina Bovy, soprano; Kerstin Thorborg, contralto; Jan Peerce, tenor; Ezio Pinza, bass; Schola Cantorum; Arturo Toscanini Recordings Association ATRA 3007. (Mono). (Distributed by Discocorp).

BRAHMS: Symphonies: No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 68; No. 2 in D, Op. 73; No. 3 in F, Op. 90; No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98; Tragic Overture, Op. 81; Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op. 56A. Philharmonia Orchestra. Cetra Documents. Documents DOC 52. (Four Discs). (Mono).

BRAHMS: Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 68; Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, No. 2 in B Flat, Op. 83. Serenade No. 1 in D, Op. 11: First movement only; Vladimir Horowitz, piano (in the Concerto); Melodram MEL 229 (Two Discs).

BRAHMS: Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 68. MOZART: Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, K. 550. TCHAIKOVSKY: Romeo and Juliet (Overture-Fantasy). WAGNER: Lohengrin Prelude to Act I. WEBER: Euryanthe Overture. Giuseppe Di Stefano Presenta GDS 5001 (Two Discs). (Mono).

MOZART: Symphony No. 35 in D, K. 385 ("Haffner") Rehearsal. Relief 831 (Mono).

TOSCANINI IN CONCERT: Dell 'Arte DA 9016 (Mono). Bizet: Carmen Suite. Catalani: La Wally: Prelude; Lorelei: Dance of the Water Nymphs. Hérold: Zampa Overture. Humperdinck: Hansel and Gretel Overture. Weber: Oberon Overture.

All items feature Arturo Toscanini and, except where noted, the NBC Symphony.

Arturo Toscanini's longevity and continuing good health (aside from bursitus, a plague of many conductors) kept him before the public's eye (and ear) long after his close contemporaries--Mahler (1860-1911), R. Strauss (1864-1949), Weingartner (1863-1942), Fried (1871-1941),and Mengelberg (1871-1951)--had receded into dusty oblivion. It is a bit sobering to realize that the Maestro's birth date, 1867, really places him closer in time to these "Hall of Fame" figures than to those--Monteux (b. 1875), Walter (b. 1876), and Beecham (b. 1879)--we generally recken his colleagues. Fortunately, his long-spanning career was still in high gear when high-fidelity

recording arrived for the home market, and even more fortunately, being blessed with continuing physical energy and incandescent artistic powers, he in turn blessed posterity with a recorded legacy far more extensive than that of any of his peers.

Just considering the commercial Toscanini recordings alone (which are, of course, the mere tip of the iceberg when we take into account the staggering number of concerts, broadcasts, and rehearsals which were also preserved--some in quite excellent sound), most of the staple items in the great conductor's large repertoire are accounted for, some works even in several versions. But, alas, it has been said that familiarity sometimes breeds contempt, and in certain ways, the Toscanini Legend has been compromised by the (presumed) reality of his recorded performances.

In his earlier years at the Metropolitan Opera, the young Toscanini was a natural for the observant eye and caricaturing hand of Enrico Caruso. Thirty-five years later, fanned by the flames of zealous press agentry and with his unique attributes even better known to the world, the Old Man became grist for the caricaturing RCA microphones. A good caricature, through the process of skillful exaggeration, can sometimes strikingly capture the essence of its subject. Invariably, though, said caricature makes an ephemeral rather than a lasting effect. Many of the best-known Toscanini records tend to caricature his best-known features and as caricatures, necessarily suppress more subtle secondary characteristics that give extra dimension to his more impromptu rehearsal and concert performances.

There are several explanations for this occurrence: First, Toscanini's highstrung temperament, combined with his mania for precision, frequently produced a lessened communicativeness in the artificial ambience of the recording studio--specifically, producing tempos a bit faster than his norm and having less of the subtle give-and-take and feeling of lilt and expansiveness, that almost always enlivened his work at concerts and rehearsals. And because of the much-touted Toscanini penchant for clarity, the RCA engineers tended, more often than not, to place their microphones at close range--thereby giving the impression of an unnaturally taut, almost bodiless fury that often robbed Toscanini's performances of their weight and humanity. Toscanini <u>did</u> show a tendency toward increasing briskness and nervous tension in his years with the NBC Symphony, and I suspect that this was a conscious effort to counteract his own advancing years (being "old" and "tired" and "weak" were among the many scornful epithets hurled at his hapless players during rehearsals, and there are countless admonitions to move the music along--"Don't drag! Via, via, via" he would shout). Even so, the "Late Toscanini" style is largely a myth--an erronious impression conveyed by a multitude of unnaturally miked recordings of performances made even more antiseptic through the purging away of

"imperfections" that were deemed unsuitable in idealized interpretations designed for repeated hearing. Toscanini's 1951 NBC Symphony version of Beethoven's First Symphony on the RCA recording, for example, is the _only_ one of that conductor's performances of the work known to me that fails to capture his impulsive singing at bars 175-176 in the first movement, and the only one that eschews the characteristic _rubato_ at measures 33 and 34 in the _Andante cantabile_. The absences of these ostensible _Achilles Heels_ make the objectively impeccable performance a bit soulless.

In fairness, it may well be that Toscanini _wanted_ it that way: There are artists who feel that improvisatory touches, such as those cited above in the Beethoven First, are inadvisable on a recording which, perforce, ought to be more impersonal because it is permanent, and Toscanini may have been one of these artists; in any event, he evidently preferred the tauter, more objective dress rehearsal performance of Mendelssohn's "Italian" Symphony to the more genial reading heard at the actual broadcast--and although RCA claims that its recording comes from the broadcast of February 28, 1954, a substitution was made, presumably at Toscanini's behest.

Which brings me to another point: Toscanini's reputation, like that of any other performing musician, would be better served if we had access to both his studied "official" recordings _and_ his more impromptu broadcasts and rehearsals: They are foils for one another, and heard together, they tend to put his true image into sharper focus. On page 323 of the excellent Harvey Sachs Toscanini biography (_Toscanini_, 1977), the conductor is reported to have told Gianandrea Gavazzeni: "They say that I have always been the same. Nothing more foolish has ever been uttered about me. I've never been the same--not even from one day to the next. I knew it even if the others didn't." But for those who know Toscanini only from his commercial legacy, he _has_ always been the same--except for those rare instances where one can compare a late NBC Symphony recording with one he made earlier with the Philadelphia, the BBC Symphony, or the New York Philharmonic. The lack of prospective has been stultifying, and would be even if the available recordings were less stereo (or mono-) typed than they are.

Until recently, public access to Toscanini's "private" recordings was a Utopian idea ruled out by commercial reality, stringent union regulations, and even more stringent restrictions of a zealous band of heirs bent on "protecting" Toscanini's posthumous reputation from the slander of flawed performances he didn't approve for release. Happily, a relaxation of copyright laws in Italy and other European countries has brought a much-needed change of direction: Toscanini, at long last, is beginning to benefit from the same arrangement that so helped Furtwängler, Mengelberg, and other conductors whose activity was primarily European-based. In other words,

the enterprising collector without special connections can now obtain some of the great, and hitherto unpublished, Toscanini rehearsals and concert performances.

The availability of the 1946 NBC Symphony rehearsal of Mozart's "Haffner" Symphony, for example, serves Toscanini's interpretation of that score far more usefully than the many hours futilely wasted in "restoring" the dreadful sounding commercial recording made shortly afterward in Radio City's unlistenable studio 3-A (which NBC officials decreed had to be used for tax purposes). The sound quality is light years ahead of the commercial record and is also superior to the sound heard in the version of the broadcast performance once issued by the defunct Arturo Toscanini Society. In addition the playing is a far more characterful and communicative presentation of the music. To be sure, Toscanini's approach is more stringent in 1946 than it was in his 1929 New York Philharmonic version, but--as properly heard here--the changes toward greater mobility and simplicity are plainly an improvement, not the often-claimed deterioration of the "late Toscanini style". Toscanini plays through three of the four movements several times, correcting a few problematical details (the Menuetto is played but once, but there is a meaningful interruption in the trio, where a more expressive _cantabile_--but no reduction of tempo--is requested). Particularly awesome are Toscanini's demands on his string section in the treacherous unisons of the finale. If you think he is being unreasonable in faulting such already impressive orchestral execution, you have only to listen to the final runthrough of the movement at the end of the record. The microphones were placed near the podium to catch the Maestro's every word and the resulting proximity and impact of the music, while not elegant, is simply astonishing. This record, then, is not to be missed on any account--it is one of the great documents of the art of conducting.

It is also highly instructive to have these _three_ different performances of Brahms First Symphony as a gloss on the two commercial Toscanini versions. In this case, as in the instance of Mozart's "Haffner" (but rarely the case with Furtwängler recordings), the live versions actually supersede the studio ones, both in performance and in sound quality. Now one can safely put aside the familiar 1951 RCA recording since the NBC broadcast of three days earlier offers a virtually identical reading, perhaps even a bit more firmly controlled in the finale, and incomparably more accurately conveyed by the lustrous, well-defined, and generally solid sonics. Although this November 3, 1951 broadcast is less surprising than either the Philharmonia Orchestra account of a year later or the monumental version from the May 6, 1940 Carnegie Hall benefit concert, it is nevertheless a wonderfully lithe, invigorating reading in the familiar classical style of Toscanini's late NBC period (the style best known to most of today's collectors). After all of these years of knowing only the caricature, we are finally

brought face to face with the real life interpretation--but thus properly heard, we find that its tempos and phrasings are not nearly so skittery as the RCA record led us to believe.

The 1941 version (released as RCA Victor 78-rpm album DM 875) is, similarly, eclipsed by the May 6, 1940 performance in the Melodram anthology. Not to mince words, this 1940 interpretation is the greatest Brahms First known to me, and one of Toscanini's greatest accomplishments in any music. It will surprise many whose knowledge of his art is only superficial: Although the well-known Toscanini _cantabile_ pervades the entire reading, tempos are somewhat slower than his norm--or, rather, they _seem_ that way since the structural skeleton of the reading is more heavy-boned--and all rhythmic problems are magesterially controlled. What we have, then, is a reading of the symphony conceived in the monumental manner of Klemperer, Haitink, and Giulini, but infused with the brilliant kinetic thrust and dynamism of Toscanini's usual manner. Mortimer Frank, reviewing this performance in _Fanfare_, perceptively drew attention to Toscanini's gifts as a man of the theatre able to bring the development of themes in a sonata form to the same kind of fruition that characters in an operatic drama undergo. The sense of proportion is incredible, and however huge the early climaxes (such as the broadly incisive first movement introduction) nothing is allowed to overshadow the coda to the last movement, where Toscanini's emmendations to the timpani part make more irresistible sense than I have ever heard (either from him or from other conductors who opt for his textual revisions). As noted, this mighty performance originated in New York's Carnegie Hall--most of Toscanini's concerts at that time originated in NBC's studio 8-H--and Melodram's sound is that of an excellent off-the-air AM transcription skillfully restored. Sonically it is not only vastly superior to the distorted 1941 Victor set, but actually preferable to the brighter but thinner-toned 1951 RCA as well. (The lack of high overtones in no way robs the performance of detailed clarity or impact).

The 1952 Brahms cycle with the London Philharmonia was first made available by the Toscanini Society in the late 1960's, a virtually unlistenable off-the-air home recording. This depressing affair was subsequently "licensed" by the ATS to Turnabout. Only with Cetra "Live"'s release (LO 511, 1978), were we able to glean any true impression of what these intriguing performances were like. Now Fonit-Cetra has come forth with a new version and the good news is that it offers almost as substantial improvement over the Cetra "Live" as that in turn offered over the ATS/Turnabout. There is plenty of presence here, and my guess is that the source material used (different from either Cetra Live or ATS/Turnabout's) was from either copies of the inside-the-hall tapes or a very fine off-the-air home transcription. The microphone placement, far more distant than the more familiar NBC Symphony pickup, yields attendant gains and losses: The gains are uppermost among a vivid impression of the

Toscanini dynamic range--his overwhelming crescendos and caressing pianissimos--usually minimized by the proximity of the American engineering techniques of the analogous period. (For the first time on records, I was reminded of the power and tonal beauty of Toscanini's orchestral organization as I experienced it in Carnegie Hall many years ago.) The losses, conversely, relate to disturbing audience noise also picked up by the, perforce, less selective microphoning. The coughs and shuffling are augmented (in the Fourth Symphony's final Passacaglia) by three noisy firecracker explosions said to be the dirty work of union dissidents angry at the dismissal of a trombone player who "fluffed" in the performance of the First Symphony two days earlier.

In his late years, Toscanini generally confined his work to his own NBC Symphony (with occasional summer sojourns to his native Italy where he led the Scala Orchestra, an aggregation of patently lesser virtuosity). This farewell to London audiences, then, is unique since it documents the nearly 86-year-old Maestro's joyful first meeting with an ensemble of even finer stature than his own finely-honed NBC. It is reported that the September 30th concert (comprising the first two symphonies and the Tragic Overture) was played with scarcely any rehearsal at all--Toscanini was so delighted by the players' responsiveness that he dismissed them early with a contented "bene." Perhaps this accounts for some of the surprising details heard in the performances at this concert. The first movement of the First Symphony is played with some rhetorical touches unique to this Toscanini performance alone. There is also a surprising flexibility of tempo here, with fluctuations between a very fast (one is tempted to say "typical") "late Toscanini" nervousness and inflected broadening (as in the first-movement development section). In a sense, Toscanini returned, stylistically, to some of his pre-world war II habits, but by 1952 he no longer had quite the physical power and iron-clad control to generate the sense of conviction he managed in the 1940 version. Some of the playing in the Second Symphony is similarly impulsive--and a bit shapeless: as in the live NBC Symphony performance of February 1951 (once issued by the Toscanini Society), the third and fourth movements threaten to careen out of control in this freely generative reading. The Tragic Overture, on the other hand, has somewhat more fire and thrust than the November 1953 NBC broadcast issued by RCA (it more closely resembles the 1937 BBC Symphony recording). As noted above, there are a few mishaps in the playing of the First Symphony, but the Philharmonia's execution is mostly a paragon of bucolic refinement, with much more incisive timpani than one is used to hearing from this ensemble.

The second concert brought even finer performances: Toscanini's way with the Third Symphony is not only more surefooted than his uncharacteristically choppy, heavyfooted NBC recording of a month later, but also more vital than the deliberate but beautifully wrought

NBC broadcast that immediately antedated the commercial recording. In fact, it compares favorably with any of the several Toscanini Brahms Thirds known to this listener (e.g. 1938, 1941, 1942, 1948 and the aforementioned two of November 1952). The Fourth Symphony resembles the commercial record made a year earlier with the NBC Symphony, but is perhaps even a bit more powerfully inflected and warmtoned. (A very similar account used to be available on Supraphon as played by Antonio Pedrotti and the Czech Philharmonic). As for the Haydn Variations, the Philharmonia version surprisingly bears closer resemblance to the 1936 version with the New York Philharmonic than to the NBC recording made only a few months before the Philharmonia performance. The warmer, more loosely flowing nuance of the Philharmonia's execution combined with the added exuberant thrust in Variation II, the more reposeful tempo in the lilting Variation VII, and the restored weight of the bass line at the beginning of the finale (sadly missing from the NBC recording) joyfully proclaim that there was, in actuality, little difference inherently between the Toscanini of the 1930s and "The Old Man" of the NBC recordings.

Textually, the Philharmonia performances offer a few surprises--with the final measures of the First Symphony omitting the familiar Toscanini timpani doublings heard in all his other versions. (He also restores the timpani/viola strokes at bars 434 and 438 omitted in both the 1951 recording and broadcast performance).

The DiStefano anthology contains in addition to the 1951 Brahms First Symphony, other superb performances drawn from the last seasons of the NBC Symphony. The Weber Euryanthe (from the same broadcast as the symphony) similarly resembles the contemporaneous commercial recording, and again surpasses it in sound quality (both recording and broadcast are slower than the 1945 New York Philharmonic pension fund concert performance). Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet, one of the finest of all Toscanini performances of the work (it rivals even the 1938 broadcast for expansive power), far transcends the 1946 recording in both suppleness and engineering skill. Even more valuable is the 1953 account of Mozart's Fortieth Symphony, arguably the finest extant Toscanini reading of that work (I like the more unpredictably Romantic one from the first NBC Symphony broadcast of December 25, 1937 equally well but certainly no better than this impeccably stern last version). Once again, I am only too happy to forget the two unappealing commercial Toscanini versions of 1938-39 and 1950, respectively. Also included in the DiStefano set is a memento of the farewell broadcast of April 4, 1954--despite the surrounding trauma, the Act I Prelude to Lohengrin was beautifully played. The sound on all of these, if not quite up to the best sources known to me for this material, is rich-toned and agreeable, with generally good pressing quality to match.

Joining the 1940 Brahms First Symphony in the Melodram set is the Second Piano Concerto from the same May 6th concert. Horowitz and Toscanini made their famous RCA recording just a few days after this Carnegie Hall benefit. Their traversal here is basically similar to the studio version--a bit more rhetorical and genially inflected; not quite so impeccable from a technical standpoint (Horowitz is a bit crazier rhythmically and, shall we say, more accident prone). Some listeners might prefer the live account for its looser, improvisatory aspects, though everything considered, I find the recording superior--a stronger exposition of essentially the same ideas. Certainly the balance is better on the studio version: The NBC broadcast pickup tends to favor the piano, and in addition, Melodram's sound here is inferior to that heard in the symphony--somewhat cloudy and muffled and riddled with AM static in a few spots. As a curtain raiser for this May 6 concert, Toscanini led the orchestra through the opening Allegro of Brahms' D-major Serenade. That movement is also included by Melodram, but in a later Toscanini version from the NBC broadcast of November 28, 1948. In comparing the two accounts, I was slightly surprised to discover the later one was a bit more personalized in its phrasing, an impression partly owing to the more closely miked Studio 8-H acoustic, which gives a greater sense of proximity and intimacy to the sonority. Alas, the comparison emphasizes another factor: Paolo Renzi's starved oboe tone serves as a tacit reminder of how much the orchestra lost with the departure in 1946 of Robert Bloom from its ranks.

The other Melodram package, a juxtaposition of the great 1940 performances of Beethoven's Missa Solemnis and Verdi Requiem serves as a rebuke to the allegation that Toscanini chose lesser singers (and soloists) for his performances. Nor did he ride roughshod over the interpretive ideas of his colleagues: It is instructive to note that having chosen a stellar line up--Zinka Milanov, Bruna Castagna, Jussi Bjoerling, and Alexander Kipnis (the distinguished Nicola Moscona replaces the latter in the Verdi)--the Maestro rarely seems to be imposing his whipcracking authority on these collaborators. Particularly in the Verdi (the more tightly knit writing of the Beethoven perforce demands a tighter inter-relation between orchestra, chorus and vocal quartet), Toscanini seems a little more genial and introspective than his authoritarian norm. He seems unexpectedly permissive about letting his soloists make large allargandos when they enter in the Kyrie, and his tempo for the Offertorium has a serene, almost langorous, spaciousness that allows for a richly inflected cello line and for a wonderfully heartfelt placement of the words "Domine Jesu Christe". But as with William Primrose (another far from insignificant soloist) in the 1939 Harold in Italy, Toscanini somehow inspires his associates to pay stricter adherence to the musical score while at the same time drawing from them sharpened imagination and greater passion. The

discipline in the greatest Toscanini interpretations, in other words, is so "right" it never sounds obtrusive or arbitrary. As with the earth's gravity, Toscanini's musical authority compels adherence: compliance is inevitable, not distasteful.

On rehearing these performances that I have lived with for so long (via pirate tapes and earlier disc transfers) candor makes me admit that, of the two, the Beethoven is the greater achievement. In the Verdi, some of the choral work lacks the lustrous clarity of the Robert Shaw-led forces heard in the 1951 composite performance issued by RCA, and the dimness of the sound tends to muffle both chorus and the big orchestral outbursts. One also notes in the first-desk playing that the NBC Symphony was a less polished aggregation in 1940 than it became in later years. (While, everything considered, I prefer this 1940 Verdi to that of 1951, what I would _really_ like to hear--and probably never will--is a Toscanini version that combines the assured vocalism of this one with the arrow-straight progress of the 1950 Scala interpretation, recorded with the bruising impact of the best portions of the commercial version). In other words, the existence of several great but flawed Toscanini Verdi Requiems makes a mental composite tantalizing).

With the 1940 _Missa_, however, the performance of my dreams becomes a gripping reality: To be sure, there is a tiny flaw at the beginning of the _Credo_ where a nervous trombone player doubles his tempo in an exposed passage. The mistake, which the 1970 Toscanini Society issue tried to correct, is permitted to stand in the Melodram version: It might well have been the reason why the performance was never issued commercially. No matter--this is an interpretation of the overwhelming impact. As with the 1940 Brahms First discussed above, one is simply disarmed and overcome by the regal breadth of design, the blazing kinetic vitality, the immediacy of sentiment, the lyricism, and the clarity. The tempo for the sonata-form _Kyrie_ is the slowest, the most profoundly inflected I have ever heard, but for all its deliberation, it has enormous tensile gravity. By comparison, the (very fine) 1953 _Missas_ sound uncomfortably fast and lightweight. Melodram has ably managed the compression of these performances to three sides each, with only one disadvantageous break of continuity just before the _Benedictus_. The Beethoven has been a bit better equalized than in the ATS pressing, and the Verdi--which has some rhythmic surface grind in some sections--suggests a composite between NBC acetates and off-the-air source material. In sum, every serious Beethoven, Verdi, and Toscanini collector will want these performances and this doubleheader as an expediant copy for their acquisition.

The 1938 performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is, likewise, one of Toscanini's most distinguished readings of that work. It begins with a first movement which is more excitable than the

slightly staider, more measured one he recorded in 1952--there are some fine rhetorical adjustments (as at the commencement of the development section) and, in general, the conductor is more improvisatory in his approach, choosing to broaden out in many climactic places and press urgently on in others (the latter stages of the development surge forward with clipped compression). All told, this 1938 reading is the more temperamental, though many will feel that more of Beethoven's qualifying "Maestoso" comes through in the 1952 recording. The Scherzo, played more quickly in 1938 than in 1952, has a more mecurial quality and benefits from more incisive timpani playing (one of Toscanini's alleged misgivings about his 1952 recording was that the timpani playing "was not savage enough"). The double repeat is, of course, observed, and brass doubles the wind parts in some places. (These features were "constants" in Toscanini's interpretations of this work).

It is in the Adagio that this 1938 interpretation differs most from the other Toscanini performances known to me: there is a much more liberal use of portimento in the string playing, and a more open emotionalism to the cantabile. At times, Toscanini can be heard unabashedly singing along (invariably a sign that he was caught up in the performance). In some of the other Toscanini Ninths, this slow movement impressed me as being a bit too nervous and detached--this one, at least for me, is the most direct in its appeal.

The chorale finale has a spacious, inflected quality and shows better rhythmic control at a few crucial junctures (there is a rock-solid impulse and no fluster at the transition from the tenor's alla marcia to the fugal episode--unique among Toscanini recordings of this score). The solo quartet is a bit disadvantageously placed--one hears filler notes from the horns pooping out inordinately --but these singers are plainly the best to be heard on any Toscanini performance of this work. A few curious details: Pinza sings his opening solo with velvety assurance, but mispronounces Freunde as Freude. The young Peerce, singing his first Ninth with the Maestro, sounds in freer voice than he did in later years, but in both the 1938 and 1939 performances pronounces "laufet, Bruder" with an extra syllable ("Bru-u-der" instead of "Bru-der"). Both ladies encompass their treacherous high notes with ease, and the Hugh Ross-directed Schola Cantorum sings with virtuosity. On the whole, Discocorp--Arturo Toscanini Recordings Association--has done a worthy job with the transfer; there is a bit of tape dropout in the first movement coda, and the opening fanfare of the finale, moreover, is muffled in tone, suggesting that the performance was "patched" from another--inferior--source. In addition, the one-disc format has necessitated a side break in the middle of the Adagio (which stops with nasty abruptness). But one accepts these momentary blemishes in the context of sound quality comparable to that of the 1952 version. Everything considered, this seems to me the most satisfying

and interesting of Toscanini's Beethoven's Ninth (though I would someday like to hear his 1936 New York Philharmonic version in the reputedly good-sounding copy that reposes in the family archive).

In the summer of 1952, Toscanini found himself in New York with nothing to do and elected to conduct two extra concerts of light fare before departing for Italy and London. I recall my delight at being suddenly transported by chartered bus from the Belasco Theatre, usual site of the NBC Summer Symphony Concerts, to Carnegie Hall. Dell'Arte's release of the second of these programs is welcome even if all the works heard were played again for the recording microphones a few days later. The live versions are all a bit more communicative, partly because of recorded sound that seems more distant, but detailed and natural, and partly because of Toscanini's greater elasticity in front of an audience. The changes have a subtle effect on the playing, which somehow seems less compressed and more comfortably human--without sacrificing any of the studio versions' virtuosity. All six performances are memorable, but particularly noteworthy is the extraordinary interpretation of Weber's Oberon Overture which is wonderfully enlivened and inflected at every turn of phrase. It is instructive to study Toscanini's interpretation--with its marvelously broadened out coda--alongside those by Leinsdorf (LA Philharmonic-Capitol, deleted) and Szell (N.Y. Philharmonic, Odyssey 35231; Cleveland Orchestra, Epic, deleted): Both younger conductors were ostensibly greatly influenced by Toscanini, but neither of them shows comparable breadth or sensitivity to Weber's harmonies and melodic lines. And if such expansiveness was not surprising enough from Toscanini--who was supposed to have taken everything faster in his late years--his Oberon from an even later broadcast (February 28, 1954 broadcast) is even more majestic: Apart from a few minor dropouts from a master tape which is beginning to deteriorate, dell'Arte has delivered a beautiful sounding record.

Harris Goldsmith