

CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, From the Archives, Volume I, The Reiner Era. BERLIOZ: Benvenuto Cellini, Op. 24, Overture; VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Fantasy on a Theme by Thomas Tallis; SCHOENBERG: Verklärte Nacht, Op. 4; WAGNER: Rienzi Overture; SCHUMANN: Symphony No. 2 in C major, Op. 61. Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Fritz Reiner conducting. (Stephen F. Temmer, Producer; Steve Smolian, Project Coordinator.) CSO 86-2 (2 monaural, long-playing records)

CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, From the Archives, Volume III, To Honor the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Fritz Reiner. Interview with Fritz Reiner by Stephen F. Temmer; HAYDN: Symphony No. 104 in D major "London"; BEETHOVEN: Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60; BERLIOZ: Overture, Le carnaval Romain, Op. 9; HINDEMITH: Concerto for Violoncello (1940) (Janos Starker, violoncello); WAGNER: Tristan und Isolde, Prelude and "Love-Death"; WAGNER: Parsifal, "Good-Friday Spell". Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Fritz Reiner conducting. (Stephen F. Temmer, Producer and Recording Engineer; Steve Smolian, Project Coordinator.) CSO 88/2 (2 monaural, long-playing records; 2 monaural Compact Disks)

Issued in 1986 and 1988 in special editions for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's "Radiothons", these performances date from the orchestra's 1957-58 season when Fritz Reiner conducted twenty-one of twenty-eight weeks, during which the Thursday evening subscription concerts were broadcast by WBAI in New York City. These recordings constitute an important documentation in "live" performance of the orchestra and conductor in their prime, often with a spontaneity missing from their legendary recordings for RCA Victor. However, they are not without serious flaws in their presentation as a memorial to Fritz Reiner: CSO 88/2 in particular suffers from carelessness in production and documentation that only the performances themselves can redeem.

One of Reiner's neighbors in Weston, Connecticut, was the New York industrialist Louis Schweitzer, who owned FM station WBAI in New York, which he had developed as an outlet for serious music. Reiner eagerly embraced Schweitzer's proposal to broadcast concerts of the full Chicago Symphony Orchestra in New York only, thus by-passing the reluctance of the Trustees of the Orchestral Association to allow radio broadcasts of the full orchestra in Chicago where, they feared, ticket sales might suffer. (The local telecasts over WGN-TV were another matter, for they did not present much more than half the orchestra.) A further inducement to both the Trustees and the Musicians Union was Schweitzer's contribution to the Orchestra's pension fund. Since Reiner regarded New York as the most important music center in the world, he welcomed this exposure to its radio audience.

When it was impossible to obtain from AT & T a suitable high-frequency (30-15,000 Hz) telephone line from Chicago to New York,

WBAI sent its engineer/producer Stephen F. Temmer to tape-record the first eight Thursday evening concerts in Orchestra Hall on a portable Ampex 350 (15 ips) located at stage right beside a window through which the operator could see Reiner's podium. Although RCA Victor had been making stereo recordings in Orchestra Hall for nearly four years, FM stereo was not yet in common use, and all of these tapes are monaural. Temmer suspended one Neumann U 47 microphone over the third row of the auditorium, slightly further back from the location used for Mercury's famous Olympian series a few years earlier. The following day, Temmer flew with the tapes to New York, where WBAI broadcast the concerts at 7:30 Friday evening. Eventually, WBAI persuaded the telephone company to provide a high quality line offered in its rate schedule. Beginning December 12, 1957, WBAI broadcast the Thursday evening concerts "live" at 9:15 (Eastern time).¹ Slightly more than half of the music conducted by Reiner has been preserved, either on tapes made for the Friday delayed broadcasts or on a few tapes made in New York from the Thursday evening "feed" from Chicago.

At the time of these broadcasts, Orchestra Hall had not yet been remodeled with resultant changes in its acoustics. Earlier, some of the openings for a large pipe organ, in back of and beside the stage, had been closed with plywood, to improve the projection of the orchestra's sound. The playing area, then as now, was wide and shallow, curved both front and rear, in cross-section rather like a lens. The surrounding walls curved upward to a high apex, surrounding the orchestra like a shell. The auditorium itself was and still is rather high and wide in proportion to its depth. To soften the impact of the brass and percussion against the back wall of the stage, there had long been velvet drapes from the floor up to the lower level of the permanent chorus platforms. At that time, the acoustics of Orchestra Hall was variable: there were "good" and "bad" locations on the main floor and in the boxes, but both the balcony and gallery had excellent, detailed, sound. However, the players on stage found it very difficult to hear one another, especially across its wide expanse, requiring a conductor with Reiner's keen ear and authoritative control to maintain balance and ensemble. With an audience, the hall was substantially "drier" than when empty. Obviously, since WBAI taped actual concerts, the presence of the audience substantially reduced hall resonance, and Temmer commendably refrained from adding any artificial reverberation in his original taping or in processing them for these releases.

These WBAI tapes documented one of the "vintage" seasons of Reiner's direction of the Chicago symphony Orchestra, the fifth year of an association by which time the notoriously exacting conductor had shaped an already more than professionally able corps of musicians into one of the finest orchestras anywhere. The following season, he would lead its two-week tour to the East Coast for a memorable series of concerts. Three years later, the seventy-two year old conductor would be stricken with a heart

attack that severely restricted his activity. Even so, as John Von Rhein pointed out in a Chicago Tribune review of the 1988 release of these records, Reiner in ten years of association with the orchestra conducted it in more concerts than Sir George Solti had in twice that time. That kind of close association has, regrettably, become a matter of history with major American orchestras.

In 1985, at the invitation of the Orchestra's General Manager, Henry Fogel, Temmer made copies of such tapes as had survived for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and or the Reiner Library in the Music Library at Northwestern University. It is from these tapes that the Orchestra chose the repertory for these four records. Obviously, nothing that Reiner recorded with the CSO for RCA Victor could be included, nor concertos featuring soloists from outside the orchestra. Given the circumstances of live concerts, a very few performances were rejected as unworthy of the orchestra and conductor. This left not more than twenty selections, of which twelve have been included in these two releases. Consequently, the music offered there is not necessarily representative of what has been considered Reiner's typical repertory. However, as a corollary, in many respects these performances add a new dimension to the documentation of Reiner's artistry.

These performances are a good cross-section of the high quality that Reiner and his orchestra were offering the Chicago audience week after week in Orchestra Hall. For all their occasional blemishes, they had a frequent spontaneity and excitement that Reiner and his orchestra found it difficult to carry over to their RCA Victor recordings, where the pressure for precision produced impressive, but quite different, results.

The earliest performance on these records was of the Schumann C major Symphony on October 31, 1957² (in CSO 86-20), for which I do not share Roger Dettmer's enthusiasm in his liner notes. Although I agree that Reiner's unconventionally broad tempos made sense and have nothing but admiration for his command of the score, I find the overall performance lacking in what I can best describe as "ardor". When he first conducted this symphony in Pittsburgh in 1939, the program noted that it was "arranged by Fritz Reiner". His conducting score at Northwestern University contains extensive re-scoring meticulously written in red ink.

A week later, on 7 November, he programmed Schoenberg's Verklärte Nacht (in CSO 86-2), preceded by Anton Webern's Six Pieces for Orchestra, Opus 6, a juxtaposition typical of Reiner's imagination as a program-builder. Despite his long and deep commitment to contemporary music, Reiner lacked sympathy for atonal and twelve-tone music: in both Pittsburgh and Chicago he seldom played anything by Schoenberg, Berg, or Webern. Another "Radiothon" record might well include the Webern Six Pieces as well as his version of the Ricercare a 6 from The Musical Offering that Reiner programmed the following week; he was quite delighted with these pieces, his only venture into this idiom that has been

documented, although he conducted Stravinsky's score for *Agon* the next season. Reiner's performance of *Verklärte Nacht* exploits the full sonority of the Chicago strings in an expressive but not overwrought reading.

Two performances from the program of 28 November have been preserved: the Vaughan Williams's *Fantasy on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (in CSO 86-2), in honor of the composer's eighty-fifth birthday; and the Haydn *Symphony No. 104 in D major, "London"* (in CSO 88-2). Neither work could be regarded as central to Reiner's repertory: he had played each once before in Pittsburgh in the 1940s. As in the preceding Schoenberg, the strings played the *Fantasy* superbly; despite sometimes expansive tempos, Reiner maintained a forward flow with his command of phrasing and rhythm. Although he played Haydn symphonies with real *élan*, they never held the place in his affections that those of Mozart did; he was inclined to spread his interest in Haydn quite widely, playing eleven different symphonies between 1922 and 1963, but none of them more than three or four times. This performance of No. 104, though occasionally untidy, was considerably more relaxed than the three Haydn symphonies he recorded for RCA Victor; the slow movement was especially rich in phrasing detail.

Another pair of performances, the Berlioz *Benvenuto Cellini Overture* (in CSO 86-2) and the Hindemith *Concerto for Violoncello* with Janos Starker as soloist (in CSO 88-2) came from the concert of 5 December. Two weeks earlier he had programmed the latter's *Violin Concerto*, with Joseph Fuchs as soloist, and both critics and audience were somewhat put out with such an overdose of Hindemith; as with playing Webern in two successive week, it was characteristic of Reiner to have planned such concentration provocatively. Janos Starker, who came from the Metropolitan Opera with Reiner to play in his first five Chicago seasons, was a frequent soloist with the orchestra, especially in repertory that visiting soloists might not offer. This was a real collaboration with a fellow Hungarian in an excellent reading of a seldom-heard, but nonetheless important, work of Hindemith, one of many composers whose music Reiner actively promoted during his forty-year American career. The Berlioz *Overture* that opened this program reveals Reiner's delight in performing this sort of virtuoso music. As with his all too infrequent performances of that composer's larger works, he conducted the *overture* with great rhythmic verve and sense of orchestra color.

During Reiner's mid-season vacation, Leopold Stokowski made his first-ever appearance with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Orchestra Hall, not unexpectedly dissatisfied with the acoustics. After some experimentation, he had all of the draperies surrounding the orchestra removed. On his return, Reiner agreed that the orchestra sounded better without the fabric. And so it remained for the rest of this season and, in fact, for the remainder of Reiner's tenure in Chicago. The next Reiner performances on these records are from the concert of 27 March, 1958, when he offered

three of his most popular Wagnerian excerpts: the Rienzi Overture (in CSO 86-2), the Prelude and "Love-Death" from Tristan und Isolde, and the "Good Friday Spell" from Parsifal (both in CSO 88-2). The Rienzi Overture in the earlier LP-only "Radiothon" release was a rousing performance, superbly played, and with fuller sound than anything else in CSO 86-2, very possibly because the curtains had been removed. If the excerpts from Tristan und Isolde and Parsifal from the same concert, but issued in the 1988 collection, have a greater transparency of texture and detail of phrasing than the Rienzi Overture, the reason probably lies in Reiner's more subtle treatment of the later scores. However, unlike the earlier Overture, some listeners may want to increase the reproduction of the bass.

These three excerpts should have been a welcome addition to the all-too-sparse recorded documentation of one of the great Wagnerian conductors of the time. However, the first four bars of the Tristan und Isolde Prelude are missing: according to Temmer they are not on his original copy, nor has he any explanation of how the recording started late.³ Apparently no one involved in the production and processing of the 1988 release caught this. However, once the listener gets past these historic opening phrases, he will hear a superb performance of this standard Wagnerian concert piece. The Parsifal excerpt was equally good, with some extraordinarily beautiful playing by oboist Ray Still.

At various times during his years with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Reiner discussed with RCA Victor recording all of the Beethoven symphonies, but such a project had to be coordinated with the concert programs to save costs and to obtain recordings based on thoroughly rehearsed performances, over several years. Unfortunately RCA Victor recorded but six of the Beethoven Nine. Two of the missing three were played during the 1957-58 season, the Fourth and the Eighth. Of these only the Fourth on 17 April has survived in the WBAI tapes (in CSO 88-2). It was a performance of great spontaneity and crackling energy. The transition at the beginning of the first movement is a text-book example of Reiner's control of tempo change, phrasing, and rhythm. It was a performance that I personally recall vividly in its larger contours and of which this recording has reminded me in detail. As I had remembered, the performance was not free of occasional poor ensemble and, especially in the finale, of some scrambling by the players to keep up with Reiner's brisk temp. It was not the kind of performance that Reiner would have played for a commercial recording, which would have inhibited him. Nor was it one that he would have approved for publication. But it was a performance representative of an exciting night in Orchestra Hall under Reiner's baton.

It is interesting to compare the sound of the two Berlioz Overtures, Benvenuto Cellini from 6 December and that of Le Carnaval Romain the following 24 April (in CSO 88-2). The latter, another brilliant Reiner performance, has slightly better presence

and detail, possibly because of the removal of the drapes.

Both in the original taping and in the preparation of the disks, Temmer avoided any processing intervention except in the case of the Rienzi Overture, which required minor equalization of a 7.5 ips taping to match the rest of the recordings. This may also be true of other material from the second half of the season; if so, the difference cannot be detected. The long-playing records were directly taped to copper and processed by Teldec's Direct Metal Mastering.

Inevitably under the acoustic conditions of "live" performances with an audience present, the sound lacks hall presence, in varying degrees. The "takes" from the March and April concerts show some slight improvement, for which we may thank Leopold Stokowski. The LP surfaces on CSO 86-2 are extremely quiet with surprisingly little hiss from the pre-Dolby tapes. The CDs of CSO 88-2 are even more impressive; I have not heard their LP counterparts.

For all my gratitude for these important recordings of Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, I cannot forbear comment on the sloppy printed documentation accompanying them. Neither set explicitly lists the dates of performance, although Roger Dettmer's enthusiastic, and sometimes effusive, annotation includes, some of that information in his text. There is none whatever in the leaflet accompanying the CD version of CSO 88-2, not even the timings of the individual selections, although overall timing for each CD disc is given. Thomas Willis's all-too-brief comments in CSO 88-2 are to the point, especially when he refers to the Reiner scores at Northwestern University. He was not responsible for the introductory biographical note, which retails in its meager span an extraordinary collection of misinformation. Apparently the Chicago Symphony Orchestra does not even know the years of Reiner's tenure as its Music Director: from 1953 to 1962 (not 1963), when ill health forced his retirement, although he returned in 1962-63 as guest conductor. There was no such thing as the "Budapest Opera"; Reiner began his operatic career in one of the city's "popular" opera theaters, for which "Volksoper" would be the Viennese term. After he moved to Dresden in 1914, he could hardly have met Gustav Mahler who had been dead for three years. If he left the Curtis Institute in 1938, he could hardly have taught Leonard Bernstein who did not enroll there until 1939; although Reiner became conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in 1938, he retained his Curtis post until 1941. (These nuggets of misinformation parallel similar howlers in the New Grove of 1980.)

These lapses, taken together with the missing music in the Tristan und Isolde Prelude, which apparently passed by several responsible people unnoticed, betray a sloppiness in production unworthy of a great orchestra and one of its most notable conductors, and certainly lacking the care appropriate to the observance of Fritz Reiner's centenary.

Nevertheless, both sets deserve inclusion in any serious collection of recordings of major conductors and orchestras of the mid-20th century. At present, the 1986 release is out of print and, by the time these comments reach the reader, the 1988 pair may be likewise. However, both are well worth seeking out.

-Philip Hart-

NOTES

1. This information based mainly on Temmer's comments printed inside the folder of CSO 86-2, in my correspondence with him in May 1988, and on a phone conversation in June.
2. All dates here are from bound volumes of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra programs for 1957-58.
3. There is some dispute as to precisely which four bars are missing, Temmer arguing for bars 5-8 on the basis of a splice in the original tape. However, to my ears, the recording opens with that second phrase and its clarinet continuation, rather than the first four bars with the oboe continuation.
4. Temmer gave these data for the 1986 release, and I assume they apply equally to the mastering or both Long playing and Compact Disk two years later.