

Marston's transfers vindicates his decision. The tasteful addition of reverb (a very small amount) simply makes the Philadelphians sound more like their full complement in a real concert hall. Without the originals for comparison, one would not suspect that anything had been done. The labels on the original 78s credit the Curtis Institute Chorus and pianist Sylvan Levin for their performances in *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire*, though Pearl does not mention them. Suffice to say, this set is a mandatory purchase for all Stokowski collectors. *Reviewed by Gary A. Galo*

Endnotes:

1. Daniel O. *Stokowski – A Counterpoint of View* including the discography of Stokowski's Recorded Repertoire by Edward Johnson. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1982.
2. Fagan T. "Pre-LP Recordings of RCA at 33 1/3rpm", Parts 1, 2 and 3 in the *ARSC Journal*, 1981;13(1):20-42., 1982;14(3):41-61., 1983;15(1):25-68.
3. Daniel and Fagan.

Mengelberg and the Concertgebouw Orchestra – The Complete Columbia Recordings, Volumes I and II. Recorded 1926 – 1931. Pearl CDS 9018 and CDS 9070 (2 CDs each).

Willem Mengelberg's recorded legacy was poorly served by the major record labels during the last two decades of the long playing record. Fortunately, the Compact Disc has given his recordings, and those of many of his contemporaries, a new lease on life. Three years ago, Pearl began issuing a number of Mengelberg's recordings with the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York (i.e., the New York Philharmonic), in fine transfers by Mark Obert-Thorne. The first installment (CD-9474) featured short works recorded for Victor between 1928 and 1930, including excellent performances of Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture and the "Forest Murmurs" from Wagner's *Siegfried*. This was followed by a three CD set celebrating the 150th anniversary of the New York Philharmonic (CDS-9922).² That collection featured seven Mengelberg items, including 1925 Victor electrics of Wagner's *Flying Dutchman Overture* and Schelling's *Victory Ball Overture*, plus an unpublished 1924 acoustic Victor of his own *Preludium on the Dutch National Anthem*. His five published Brunswick sides, from 1926 and 1927 were also featured, and include Wagner's "Ride of the Walkyries" from *Die Walküre*, two Strauss waltzes and Tchaikovsky's *March Slave*.

In December of 1928, Mengelberg and the New York Philharmonic made an unsurpassed recording of Richard Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben*. In this writer's opinion, it is the finest performance of this work on record (his 1941 Telefunken recording with the Concertgebouw Orchestra is pale by comparison). RCA reissued this recording in 1992 as part of a two-CD collection entitled *Legendary Strauss Recordings* (60929-2).³ Still waiting to be reissued are complete New York Philharmonic recordings of Beethoven's First and Third Symphonies, both Victor electrics from the late 1920s. Mengelberg also cut twenty-one acoustical⁴ sides with the New York Philharmonic for Victor, including Beethoven's *Coriolan* Overture and the first movement of the Fifth Symphony, a superb performance of Weber's *Oberon* Overture, Liszt's *Les Preludes*, and two abridged movements from Tchaikovsky's *Pathetique*. Ward Marston is currently preparing all of the Mengelberg/New York acoustics for Biddulph. Hopefully, the two electrical Beethoven symphonies will not be far behind.

With the release of the sets reviewed here, Pearl has made available all of the recordings Mengelberg made for Columbia with his own Concertgebouw Orchestra of

Amsterdam. It is not unreasonable to compare Mengelberg with Leopold Stokowski. Both conductors built the finest orchestras on their respective continents, and at their best both rank among the great conductors of the twentieth century. Stokowski and Mengelberg could also be extremely idiosyncratic interpreters, and both frequently made alterations in the scores they performed. Although string portamento was common in orchestral playing of that day, Mengelberg and Stokowski allowed far more than was customary even in their time. Though the eccentric side of Mengelberg is rarely revealed in his New York Philharmonic recordings, the Columbia recordings with the Concertgebouw offer the full range of his interpretive traits.

If there is one composer with which Mengelberg is most closely identified, it is Gustav Mahler. Like Otto Klemperer and Bruno Walter, Mengelberg knew Mahler personally and worked closely with him, preparing the Concertgebouw for Mahler's guest appearances with the orchestra. It is, therefore, an enormous loss that only one Mahler movement was ever recorded commercially by Mengelberg – the *Adagietto* from the Fifth Symphony (there is also a 1939 live recording of the Fourth Symphony with the Concertgebouw, currently out of print). Recently, businessman Gilbert Kaplan offered what he considered a revelation – that Mahler's *Adagietto* (Kaplan conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. GKS 1001) isn't an eleven or twelve minute funeral dirge. It is, instead, a seven and a half minute love song.

Yet this isn't a revelation at all. Mengelberg understood fully the nature of this work nearly seventy years ago. His 1926 *Adagietto* is just over seven minutes, and is one of the most beautifully conceived on record. The *Adagietto* shows Mengelberg at his finest. This is a performance of enormous flexibility in tempo, yet coherent from beginning to end. Only Bruno Walter's 1938 Vienna Philharmonic recording can compare with Mengelberg's (Walter's is available on Music and Arts, CD-749, and Pearl, CD-9413; both are coupled with his live 1936 *Das Lied von der Erde*).

The last three Tchaikovsky symphonies were Mengelberg specialties throughout his career, yet the recorded evidence shows Mengelberg at his most idiosyncratic with these scores. The Concertgebouw Columbias include complete recordings of the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, made in 1929 and 1928 respectively, along with the middle movements of the Fifth, recorded in 1927 and issued only in France. Like Stokowski, Mengelberg often tampered with scores at will. The cuts made by Mengelberg in the Fifth are, by now, infamous to serious collectors, and one is hard-pressed to find any musical justification for them. But cuts aside, these are among the most mannered, eccentric, and wayward performances of these scores on record. Mengelberg's constant and willful alterations of tempi detract from any sense of musical line or direction. Stokowski's performances of these works show him at his worst, as well, for very similar reasons. Surprisingly, Mengelberg's *Romeo and Juliet* is largely free of the problems which plague the symphonies.

One would expect a conductor who fails with the Tchaikovsky symphonies to be completely out of his depth with the symphonies of Brahms. Yet Mengelberg's 1931 recording of Brahms' Symphony No. 3 is not only one of his finest performances, it is one of the great recordings of this work. Mengelberg is extremely free with tempi, but, like Wilhelm Furtwängler, he uses rubato to enhance the musical line and structure rather than detract from it. The raw energy and urgency of Furtwängler's live 1949 Berlin Philharmonic recording of this work (Virtuoso 2699072), particularly in the last movement, make his performance especially compelling. But Mengelberg's phrasing in the second movement is especially beautiful. His 1930 *Academic Festival Overture* is simply hair-raising, and the recording of the third movement from Brahms' First

Symphony, from the same year, makes one regret that he did not record the work complete at that time.

Mengelberg was equally successful in the overtures of Beethoven and Weber. The Beethoven overtures are urgent, dramatic readings. Two versions of *Coriolan* and *Egmont* are offered, but the 1931 remakes are preferable in both recorded sound and performance. One Mengelberg score alteration may offend purists – in both of the *Egmont* Overtures he adds tympani to reinforce the V-I cadences five measures before the end (he made the same alteration in the New York Philharmonic recording mentioned above). Mengelberg is the only conductor to rival Toscanini's intensity in the Weber overtures. In the Overture to *Der Freischütz* Mengelberg combines Furtwängler's weight in the *Adagio* with Toscanini's electricity in the *Molto Vivace*.

Mengelberg's 1927 account of the Prelude to Act I of *Lohengrin* is one of his least successful recordings. This is a plodding performance with little sense of line or direction. Mengelberg has severe competition among his contemporaries, particularly Toscanini's definitive 1936 account with the New York Philharmonic (RCA 60318-2 and Pearl CDS-9373). Other outstanding recordings from this era include Stokowski/Philadelphia from 1927 (Pearl CD-9486), and Siegfried Wagner conducting the London Symphony, also from 1927 (once available on Trax CD-112). His Dresden *Tannhäuser* Overtures are a different matter entirely, with the 1932 version being one of the highlights of this collection.

Mengelberg's Bach must be accepted or rejected on its own terms. These are decidedly old-fashioned performances, not unlike Furtwängler's approach to Bach. Although Mengelberg uses two flutes for the solo part in the *Suite in B minor*, to balance the solo line with his large string orchestra, he does nothing which could be regarded as tasteless (in contrast to his live 1939 *Passion According to St. Matthew* which is difficult to accept on any terms). Some of the short pieces clearly qualify as "pops concert" fare. Few collectors will purchase these recordings to obtain a definitive *Poet and Peasant Overture*, though Mengelberg's performance surely is. Both recordings of the "Scherzo" from Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are cut, resulting in an annoying disruption of the music. There was absolutely no reason for Mengelberg to do this – the piece fit comfortably on a twelve-inch, 78 rpm side, as Toscanini demonstrated on six different occasions.

The transfers by Mark Obert-Thorne are extremely well done. Although many of these recordings were sonically outstanding for their time, some of the originals are especially problematic in terms of pitch stability. Several discs change speed from the beginning to the end of each side. The 1928 Tchaikovsky Fifth has random variations in pitch throughout each side. Obert-Thorne has taken great care to correct these problems.

Some of these recordings have previously appeared on CD. EMI issued a single disc of Columbias in 1988 in dreadful sound (CDH7-69956-2). These were obviously the same transfers that had been made for LPs decades ago. Symposium featured three of these recordings in a 1990 release (CD 1078). This disc also included three New York Philharmonic Victors and three mid-30s Concertgebouw recordings made for other labels. The noisy, amateurish transfers are typical of Symposium's work. More recently, Claremont issued a two CD set containing both of the Tchaikovsky symphonies and the Brahms Third (GSE 78/50-48/49). The transfers, by Donald Graham, were adequate but inferior to Obert-Thorne's work. The Pearl collection must, therefore, be regarded as the definitive edition of Mengelberg's Columbia recordings, and essential for anyone interested in twentieth century orchestral performance. *Reviewed by Gary A. Galo*

Endnotes

1. Volume I:

J.S. Bach: Suite No. 2 in b Minor, BWV 1067 (June 2, 1931); **J.C. Bach:** Sinfonia in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 2 (June 10, 1927); **Cherubini:** *Anacreon* – Overture (June 10, 1927); **Beethoven:** Symphony No. 8, Op. 93 – 2nd Mvt. (June 10, 1927); *The Ruins of Athens*, Op. 113 – Turkish March (May 31, 1930); *Leonore* – Overture No. 1, Op. 138 (June 2, 1931); *Coriolan* – Overture, Op. 62 (June 1, 1931); *Egmont* – Overture, Op. 84 (June 2, 1931); *Leonore* – Overture No. 3, Op. 72b (May 30, 1930); **Weber:** *Der Freischütz* – Overture (June 1, 1931); *Euryanthe* – Overture (June 1, 1931); *Oberon* – Overture (May 12, 1928); **Mendelssohn:** *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op. 61 – Scherzo (May 12, 1938); **Berlioz:** *The Damnation of Faust*, Op. 24 – Dance of the Sylphs and Hungarian March (May, 1926); **Liszt:** *Les Preludes* (June, 1929); **Wagner:** *Lohengrin* – Prelude to Act I (June 10, 1927); *Tannhauser* – Overture (Dresden Version; May 9, 1932); **Brahms:** Symphony No. 3, Op. 90 (May 10, 1931); Symphony No. 1, Op. 68 – 3rd Mvt. (May 31, 1930); *Academic Festival Overture* (May 30, 1930)

Volume II:

Suppé: *Poet and Peasant* – Overture (May 11, 1932); **J. Strauss, Jr.:** Perpetuum Mobile, Op. 257 (May 11, 1932); **Tchaikovsky:** Symphony No. 4, Op. 36 (June, 1929); Symphony No. 5, Op. 64 (May 10, 1928); Symphony No. 5, Mvts. 2 and 3 (June 10, 1927); Serenade for Strings, Op. 48 – Waltz (May 12, 1928 – 2 takes); *Romeo*

and Juliet (May 30, 1930); **Bizet:**

L'Arlesienne – Adagietto (June, 1929);

Grieg: Two Elegiac Melodies, Op. 34 (June 3, 1931); **Mahler:** Symphony No. 5 – Adagietto (May, 1926); Ravel: *Bolero* (May 31, 1930); **Beethoven:** *Coriolan* – Overture, Op. 62 (May, 1926); *Egmont* – Overture, Op. 84 (May, 1926); **Wagner:** *Tannhauser* – Overture (Dresden Version; May, 1926); **Mendelssohn:** *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – Scherzo (May 12, 1928)

2. Pearl's *New York Philharmonic* – *A Sesquicentennial Celebration* features recordings by Stransky, Mengelberg, Toscanini, Beecham, Reiner and Barbirolli, made between 1917 and 1939. Pearl included an unpublished Brunswick recording of Brahms' *Haydn Variations* which they attributed to Toscanini, but the performance is grossly inferior to Toscanini's 1936 Victor recording. No one who knows Toscanini's work could possibly credit him with this second-rate reading. Someone should check the log books to see if Henry Hadley, Associate Conductor of the orchestra at that time, made any test recordings for Brunswick.
3. Also included in this collection are the 1935 Koussevitzky/Boston *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, the 1932 Beecham/Wallenstein/N.Y. Philharmonic Don Quixote, the 1934 Stokowski/Philadelphia *Death and Transfiguration*, and the 1941 Stock/Chicago *Aus Italien*.
4. Moses JM. *American Celebrity Recordings, 1900-1925*. Dallas: Monarch Record Enterprises, 1993.

Enrico Caruso: *The Complete Electric Re-Creations.*¹ Re-recorded 1927-1939. Pearl CDS 9030 (2 CDs).

Enrico Caruso died in 1921, four years prior to the introduction of electrical recording. The Victor Talking Machine Company, like most record companies, was anxious to replace the acoustical recordings of their most popular artists with electrical remakes. Caruso would never be afforded this opportunity, and by the late 1920s most consumers were reluctant to purchase records made with the antiquated acoustical process regardless of the stature of the artist. In an attempt to revive the public's interest in Caruso's recordings, Victor embarked on an ambitious project which they