

**Subject:** [NEWS] PRISTINE CLASSICAL 15th October 2010: Furtwängler's Bruckner 9; London String Quartet play Schubert's Quintet  
**From:** Pristine Classical <music@pristineclassical.com>  
**Date:** Fri, 15 Oct 2010 16:13:27 +0200

## Pristine News: Friday 15th October, 2010



**Anton Bruckner**

### **In this week's newsletter:**

- [New this week](#) - Furtwängler's stunning Bruckner 9 - his only recording, live in 1944
- [New this week](#) - A marvellous 1928 recording of Schubert's String Quintet by the London String Quartet +1
- [Editorial](#) - I have 5,500 CDs in my collection - what do I do?
- [PADA](#) - The Gertler Quartet's world première recording of Bartók's 6th (and final) String Quartet
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**A Felix Slatkin Compendium - MusicWeb International**

'Showcases Slatkin and his top-notch collaborators with verve, aided by the rich acoustic.'

**Toscanini's stereo Verdi Requiem - MusicWeb International**

'A benchmark performance in unprecedentedly fine sound.'

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**Editorial - I have 5,500 CDs in my collection - what do I do?**

Earlier this week I received an e-mail from Bruce Graham, a long-time customer here at Pristine Classical, and clearly a devoted music-lover. With his permission, I'm reproducing some of that e-mail here as an introduction to a difficult topic:

"My CD collection, acquired over the last 25 years now numbers 5,500. I am now semi-retired and destined to live in smaller quarters than when in parish rectories. Therefore, space has become a real issue in my life – and in my wife's thinking! Both she and my kids are urging me to 'download' my CDs onto my computer, a storage device, MP3 or whatever, and get rid of the CDs. Here is where I need your advice.

a. I've read your 'Beginner's Guide' and believe FLAC would be the best format. While musical detail is important to me, I must also admit to some high frequency hearing loss, so my ears aren't perfect. Nevertheless, I value good sound quality greatly. Questions:

(1) For 5,500 CDs, what sort of storage device do I need? (I understand the Brennan is not ideal.)

(2) What does one then do for notes and librettos?

(3) What internet speed would be ideal for downloading FLAC from your site?

b. I do not possess the same high level of IT 'savvy' that my son and grandson have (besides, they live thousands of miles away in Oregon), so any advice you can give me as to how best to go about this, or even whether it's feasible, would be greatly appreciated."

The main difficulty with this question is that there are too many potential answers, and I suspect that none of them would be ideal - certainly not for everyone. Any number of equations come into play: how much of your own time do you wish to spend on this? how much money can you afford to spend? and so on.

First of all a little mathematics. Let us suggest, for the sake of argument (and being rather generous perhaps, but better to overestimate here) that each disc will, when converted to lossless FLAC - which means that on replay there is absolutely and literally no sonic difference between the music file and the CD it came from - require approximately 400MB of storage space. (You will probably get away with a little less than this, but we can stick to nice round numbers and assume full-to-the-brim discs). This adds up to a little over 2TB of disc storage - 2.09TB if my sums are correct.

This constitutes a problem! The largest drives currently available top out at 2TB - once formatted you'll actually have a bit less than this available to you. Now I'm guessing that actually there'll be enough shorter CDs and overhead available to squeeze 5,500 CDs onto a 2TB drive, but only just, and with little room left for future purchases.

Still, that does leave one option immediately available for those with deeper pockets, and it comes highly recommended by one of our regular correspondents: the Olive O4HD player will handle FLAC and includes a 2TB hard drive inside. What's more, the company will do all the hard work for you, and digitise your entire collection onto your player - at a price. The player itself is their top-of-the-range model, currently retailing for around \$2000. The "estimated cost" of digitizing a collection of this size will add a further \$2815 to the price. You can of course do this yourself, feeding the discs in one at a time. As far as I can see you cannot add additional storage directly to the Olive but you can persuade it to join your network and read tracks in an "Olive library" stored on your PC or Mac.

At this point I start to wonder whether the \$2000 for the machine is worth it. The "Best-in-breed" DAC, a Texas Instruments PCM1792A, costs around \$13 - it's very good, and I'm sure will more than satisfy your needs, but add this to a hard drive, a CD writer and a trimmed-down PC and I find the price tag a bit steep myself.

Somewhat down in the price scale is the Brennan you mention, the JB7. One factor immediately presents itself: the Brennan (as far as I can tell) is an MP3 player. It will not play FLACs. Next up, the biggest JB7 holds just 500GB of data. They claim this

is adequate for 5000 CDs, but by my reckoning the storage requirements for 5000 copies of Furtwängler's 1942 recording of Beethoven's Choral Symphony are considerably greater at 320kbps, which is what I'd be looking for in order to get the best sound quality out of the device - that 500GB would struggle with 3000 copies of that particular release. So what about your other 2500 CDs?

All of which brings me around to my own solution to this question - the Do-It-Yourself approach. Using an existing PC or Mac, or purchasing a small PC, a notebook computer or similar, you have a device which can handle the replay. Kit it out with a good external DAC (again, how much do you want to spend? I found the EMU 0202 USB to be very good for the \$100 price tag - its internal DAC chip is admittedly in the \$6 range to the Olive's pricier \$13, but then an Olive does cost \$2000), and you have the makings of a good replay system. But what about the storage question?

Well I've written here before about the merits of having two drives for each sound file - using a 'mirror' system called RAID1 two hard drives simultaneously record and store everything they are sent. You don't need to concern yourself with lengthy back-ups (Olive suggests allowing 10 uninterrupted hours for doing this with their system attached to an external drive) as if one drive fails the other has the back-up. Drop in a new hard drive to replace the broken one and the system sorts itself out and makes a copy of the remaining good drive onto the new one.

These drives (which can be very silent) needn't be in the same room as your PC if you link up to a wireless network as I do - and by using a self-contained drive with a NAS Server I don't need to leave another PC running in order for the audio drive to be read. (A NAS server in this context looks very much like an external hard drive, but contains extra computer 'bits' inside which allow it to run autonomously on a network.)

Returning then to the question of storage capacity: we still have a 2TB limit to our current hard drives - we're running from a 4TB (that's 2x2TB) server set up in mirror mode, so we have that much to play with - but we also have a USB port on the back of our NAS server (which of course looks like a hard drive but is a kind of PC as well) which allows us to connect another drive. In my case I've added a regular external mirror drive (i.e. not a NAS server), also configured with 2 drives inside it, providing an extra 1TB of mirrored drive space and available over the network via the NAS server.

If that last paragraph sounds complex, I promise you that in reality it's the opposite. I now have 3TB of data storage - more than enough for Bruce's 5500 CDs. This I can access by any computer on my network, including the small machine in the living room which is driving my sound system and sounding good because I upgraded the output DACs using a USB sound card. The biggest expense so far has probably been the NAS server - a 4TB Western Digital model will cost around \$540 bought direct, though you may find it cheaper elsewhere. An inexpensive Netbook or laptop PC will cost considerably less, but then you may have a computer you are happy to use already, or you could opt for something like an ASRock Ion 330 bare-bones PC. The software to handle playback and indexing is free (XBMC is recommended), leaving finally the question of getting those discs onto the drive.

This is a tough one. The cheapest solution is to sit down and play them in one at a time. Use free industry-standard software ExactAudioCopy for best results (it does

exactly what it claims) - or use other software which may do a quicker job but be less picky about correcting errors. Or you might scour the Internet for someone to do this for you. Either way, it's a lengthy job - but one in which you can prioritise the most important discs and the ones you'd most like to hear, and you can listen to one recording whilst transferring another.

This also offers a solution to a part of the question I've not touched on yet - the niggling problem of sleeve notes, librettos and so forth. Access to the Internet can increasingly be seen as a viable alternative - at least up to a point. There's a wealth of information on sites such as Wikipedia on composers, works and performers, whilst sites such as IMSLP contain an ever-growing number of scores, and a number of sites offer librettos both in original languages and in often multiple translations. Not a direct replacement for the original notes, which you might want to file somewhere, but a possible alternative.

As for download speeds and Internet connections I always think the faster the better. Currently I have a 20Mbps link, which I've seen produce file transfers of 2.4MB per second from very fast download sites. However, our own speeds tend to be a little more sedate, certainly on this side of the Atlantic, and I usually see somewhere around 350KB/s for Pristine Classical downloads, so a 6-8Mbps broadband link should more than suffice - though remember, other download sites may be able to offer greater speed than we currently can.

In conclusion there is no single option which solves all the points raised right now. The Olive is pricey if well-specced, and will struggle to hold a collection of this size. The Brennan falls down on both capacity and quality. Neither is especially well-equipped for disk drive failure unless you do all the hard work of backing up. The home-made solution may present something of a learning curve, though once mastered you'll be in charge, and as a more modular system can be tweaked and developed to your own requirements. And only by spending a lot of money can you take the strain out of the work of digitising all those CDs - though of course our own collection of fully-FLACed hard drives mean that the Pristine Classical collection can be easily added to your replay system if you go the Olive or PC route.

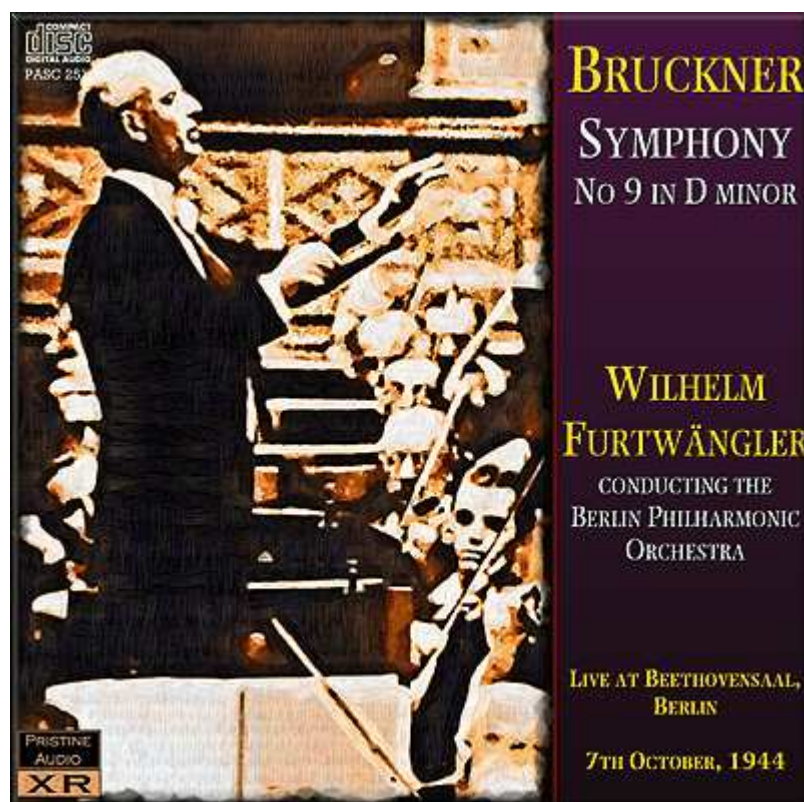
Perhaps there is an easier answer out there - or perhaps someone, somewhere is developing such a thing. But with a mass-market that's generally happy with MP3s on iPods and much smaller music collections, I wouldn't be holding your breath for one to arrive right now. My recommendation is the Do-It-Yourself route - but I don't envy you the transfer of all those CDs!

*Andrew Rose*

## New release today:

### [BRUCKNER Symphony No. 9](#)

Pristine Audio PASC 251



**Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra**  
conductor **Wilhelm Furtwängler**  
Recorded Berlin, 1944

XR remastering by Andrew Rose at Pristine Audio, October 2010

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Furtwängler

Total duration: 58:49  
©2010 Pristine Audio.

For more download and CD options, see our [website](#)

### The FLAC downloads:



## *Furtwängler, Berlin 1944: among the greatest Bruckner 9's ever*

*The only known recording by Furtwängler sounding terrific in this XR remaster*

- **BRUCKNER** Symphony No. 9 (ed. Orel) [[notes](#) / [score](#)]

**Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra**  
conductor **Wilhelm Furtwängler**

Recorded Beethovensaal, Berlin, 7th October, 1944

### **BRUCKNER** Symphony No. 9

Last week we issued one of Furtwängler's greatest wartime recordings, the Beethoven 9th from 1942. This week - and by much popular request by those who heard the Beethoven and loved it - we've endeavoured to work the same magic on what is perhaps an even greater performance from the same era - the conductor's only recording of Bruckner's 9th Symphony.

Long regarded as one of the greatest interpretations of it ever to be captured for posterity, the Pristine XR magic has worked here to completely transform the cramped historic sound into something marvellously fresh and immediate. This is truly a recording that no music lover should be without.



**Second movement**

Scherzo: Bewegt, Lebhaft; Trio: Schnell  
*(Ambient Stereo version)*

**Notes on the transfers:**

There are two 9th Symphony recordings made by Furtwängler in wartime Germany which stand out for their astounding musical excellence: the Beethoven 9th of 1942 (issued here a week before this as [PASC250](#)), and the Bruckner 9th of 1944. Both have, over the years, captured the hearts and minds of music lovers in spite of their poor sound quality.

So when we reissued the Beethoven following the transformation it received thanks to XR remastering, it was only to be expected that e-mails would start arriving asking for this Bruckner as well. Fortunately I had already anticipated the demand and work was well underway on the Bruckner, which has if anything survived the years considerably better than the Beethoven.

Here we finally have a Bruckner 9 from Furtwängler (his only known recording) which conveys the full majesty (one reviewer at Amazon calls it "the most "spiritually scary" Ninth I've ever heard, if not the most spiritually scary recording of ANYTHING that I've ever heard!") of the performance as perhaps never before. The sound is clear, exceptionally clean, full and well-rounded - the Ambient Stereo version might fool some listeners into imagining a good live recording from the 1960s rather than 1944. Only at points of absolute maximum volume do we get a hint of distortion, and then most of this I have been able to tame; there is also an occasional slight "fuzziness at the edges" during some sections which gives the age and provenance of the recording away, but again do not serve as more than the mildest very distraction and may even add something for some listeners as they feel the hairs on the backs of their necks standing up at the end of the first movement...

Performed live but without an audience, there are no coughs or other interruptions to distract the listener from what is surely one of the all-time great recordings of one of the greatest of conductors. In [an article](#) which discusses (among other things) the remarkable wartime recordings of Furtwängler, Peter Guttmann comments:

"But even these extraordinary achievements pale beside the miracle of the 1944 Bruckner Symphony # 9...

Furtwängler once said that "an interpreter can render only what he has first lived through." Of all the conductors who have grappled with the complex challenges of the Bruckner Ninth, Furtwängler was best positioned to understand what Bruckner had achieved. Bruno Walter had hinted at this when he observed that he never understood Bruckner until he became mortally ill. The Ninth is not a failed attempt at a cohesive artistic statement. Rather, it is a complete and perfect musical depiction of a tortured mind: a desperate snatch at a vision that grew ever more elusive, a vain quest for understanding and fulfillment in a world that would not provide

it, a fevered groping for fragments of life in the lengthening shadow of death. As he wrestled with his Ninth Symphony, Bruckner stood at the very edge of that abyss. By late 1944, Furtwängler stood there too.

The first climax of the first movement heralds his emotion. The Berlin Philharmonic is fully controlled and its ensemble perfectly together, and yet the tempo is so unstable and dynamically alive that no note falls quite where its predecessors would suggest, as if to reflect the entire orchestra's heaving, nervous desperation. Furtwängler often spent entire rehearsals polishing crucial transitions, but not here; he chops the first movement into dozens of inconclusive fragments, deliberately wrenching the mood from lilting lyricism to raw savagery, the tempos from standstill to runaway, and dynamics from inaudible to heavily overloaded. The movement ends in screaming trumpets, a primordial burst of sheer abject terror as both Bruckner and Furtwängler confronted the most horrifying fear of all: that at the very end of their struggles there would be only a void.

Although nothing could eclipse the unparalleled power of the opening, the wonders of this radical reworking of the Bruckner Ninth do not end with the shattering climax of the first movement. Furtwängler whips the scherzo and trio from a slightly menacing waltz and bucolic pastorale into a furiously driven, vertiginous ride to damnation. He then gradually builds the unintended adagio finale to a terrifying dissonance, after which the exhausted fragments wither into eternal silence.

None of this is explicit in the score. It took Furtwängler to recognize and recreate an absolutely perfect depiction of a single mind and, by extension, an entire world on the brink of collapse."

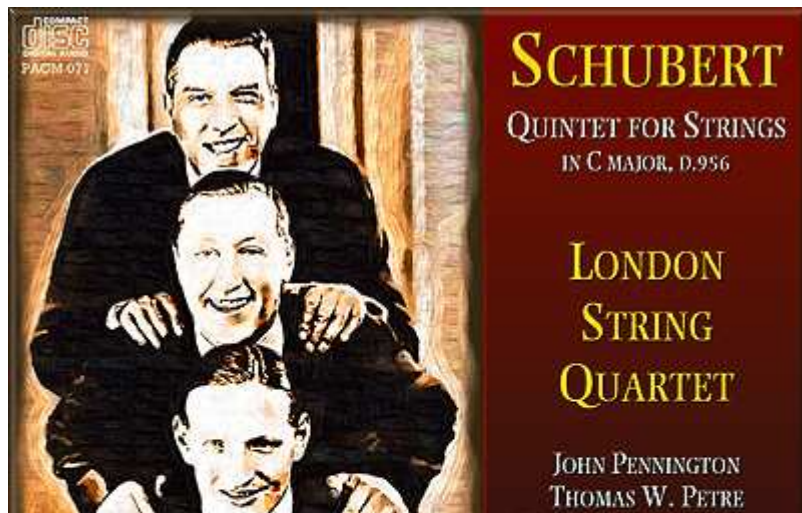
Andrew Rose

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or listen on demand with [Pristine Audio Direct Access](#) (PADA)

## New release today:

### [SCHUBERT String Quintet](#)

Pristine Audio PASC 249



#### London String Quartet

Horace Britt, cello

recorded in 1928

Transfers supplied by Jack Kamerman from US pressings XR remastering by Andrew Rose at Pristine Audio, June-October 2010  
Cover artwork based on a photograph of London String Quartet, c.1931  
(NB. At this stage Warner had been replaced in the quartet by William Primrose)

Total duration: 43:30  
©2010 Pristine Audio.

For more download and CD options, see our [website](#)



The FLAC downloads:



*One of the great British quartets of the early-mid 20th century*

*Excellent interpretation in a remarkably good 1928 recording*

- **SCHUBERT** String Quintet in C major, D.956 [[notes](#)\score]

**London String Quartet:**

**John Pennington**, violin

**Thomas W. Petre**, violin

**Harry Waldo Warner**, viola

**Charles Warwick Evans**, cello

with

**Horace Britt**, cello

Recorded 18-19 April, 1928

Issued as UK Columbia 9485-9490, US Columbia set M95

### **SCHUBERT** String Quintet

In 1928 the celebrations for Schubert's centenary were in full flow, largely bankrolled by the Columbia Record Company. Among the recordings made that year was this, from one of the great quartets of the day, assisted by Belgian cellist Horace Britt.

It's a remarkable performance, and surely one which deserves to be heard again - more than that, it comes from excellent pressings of a really good-quality recording, so much so that you'll forget from time to time that it dates from the earliest years of microphone recording.

In all, a superb recording of a great ensemble playing one of the masterpieces of the chamber

repertoire - what more could you want?



**SCHUBERT** - String Quintet in C, D.956  
4th mvt. - *Allegretto*  
(*Ambient Stereo version*)

#### Notes on the transfers:

A few months ago I received a call from one of Pristine Classical's regular and long-standing customers, Prof. Jack Kamerman. Amongst other things he had to discuss, he was especially keen to recommend to me the recording made by the London String Quartet of Schubert's C minor Quintet for the Schubert centenary of 1928. In Prof. Kamerman's view this was one of the truly great performances of this work - one that had been remarkably well recorded for its time, and one which appeared to have been completely overlooked and not since reissued.

All very interesting, I replied, but would you happen to have a copy? At this point these conversations usually come to something of a halt, or a vague promise to look out for one, or the admission that the caller's discs are either worn out, broken or scratched beyond use. But no, here we had not only a good set of discs, but a good transfer of a good set of discs - would I like him to post me a copy for evaluation?

When I received the CD I realised quickly that he had a very strong point. Despite a slightly rough start in terms of disc quality, the transfers were excellent and the playing marvellous, with the quartet sounding both of and ahead of its time. A forgotten treasure indeed, and one which has responded exceptionally well to XR remastering. The playing is for the most part crisp, precise and highly accomplished, whilst the recording is generally clean with an unusually well-extended treble response marred only occasionally by a slight peak distortion that comes (when it comes) as quite a surprise - and reminds you that this is a recording from the 1920s and not significantly later.

This is not the first recording to me made of Schubert's Quintet - that honour went to the Cobbett Quartet in [an acoustic recording for the NGS](#) some three years earlier - but the London String Quartet's take is miles ahead of its predecessor in almost every way, and shows what one of the top chamber ensembles of the day was really capable of. A recording to treasure.

*Andrew Rose*

Available as **320kbps mono MP3, 16-bit mono & Ambient Stereo FLAC, 24-bit mono FLAC, Mono & Ambient Stereo CD**  
or listen on demand with [Pristine Audio Direct Access](#) (PADA)

## New MP3 transfers only at PADA Exclusives

by Dr. John Duffy

in Ambient Stereo

The first recording of Bartók's 6th String Quartet



André Gertler

### **Bartók**

String Quartet No. 6

in D major, Sz.114

#### **Gertler Quartet:**

**André Gertler**, violin

**Frédéric Ghigo**, violin

**Rolbert Courte**, viola

**Marcel Louon**, cello

Recorded West Hampstead Studios, London 27-28 March, 1946

First issued as Decca K1433-36,

Matrix numbers AR 10168-74

Gertler: [website](#)

This transfer is presented with Ambient Stereo remastering by Dr. John Duffy.

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## Pick of the reviews

### MusicWeb International

**'Showcases Slatkin and his top-notch collaborators with verve, aided by the rich acoustic.'**



### **A Felix Slatkin Compendium**

CD 1

#### **Ernst von DOHNÁNYI (1877-1960)**

Variations on a Nursery Theme, Op.25 (1914) [25:07]

Victor Aller (piano)

rec. 29 September 1956

#### **Aram KHACHATURIAN (1903-1979)**

Piano Concerto in D flat (1936) [36:45]

Leonard Pennario (piano)

rec. 5-6 October, 1956

#### **Benjamin BRITTEN (1913-1976)**

Variations and Fugue on a theme of Purcell (Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra), Op. 34 (1947) [16:53]

rec. 18 and 20 August 1956

Concert Arts Symphony Orchestra/Felix Slatkin

All rec. at Samuel Goldwyn Studios, Stage 7

CD 2

#### **Heitor VILLA-LOBOS (1887-1959)**

Bachianas Brasileiras No. 1 for an orchestra of cellos (1930) [18:13]

Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5 for voice and eight cellos (1938, 1945) [11:31]

Marni Nixon (soprano)

#### **Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)**

Prelude and Fugue No. 8 in E flat minor (arr. Villa-Lobos) [5:45 + 5:28]

Concert Arts Cello Ensemble/conducted by Felix Slatkin

rec. 10-11 January 1959, Capitol Tower, Studio B

#### **Carlos CHÁVEZ (1899-1978)**

Toccata for Percussion (1942) [11:57]

rec. 17 October 1954

#### **Darius MILHAUD (1892-1974)**

Concerto for Percussion and Small Orchestra Op. 109 (1930) [7:27]

rec. 10 January 1955 Hal Reese (percussion)/Concert Arts Orchestra and Percussionists/Felix Slatkin

Mono recordings presented in Ambient Stereo, made at Capitol Records, Melrose Studio

**PRISTINE AUDIO [PASC218](#) [74:46 + 60:23]**

Firstly let's address some technical matters. In a previous [review](#) of the Slatkin recordings reissued by Pristine Audio (Delius, Ibert, Saint-Saëns) I commented on the dry studio acoustic accorded the performances. For this splendidly exciting twofer Andrew Rose has clearly taken pains to get to grips with this concern and has employed a 'relocation' technique called 'convolution reverberation'. The last time I encountered this - to my knowledge, at any rate, as doubtless it goes on 'under the radar' more than one might think - was a few weeks ago when [reviewing](#) a recording in which Lars Hannibal had relocated a violin and guitar recording made in a church by adding to the mix, inter alia, the acoustic of Symphony Hall, Boston. For this 1950s compilation made in the Hollywood studios - dead and dry - Rose has ingeniously relocated the original source material to the acoustics of Sala Santa Cecilia and Sala Sinopoli, dependent on the original recording and reverberation matters. I have read his notes regarding this with interest and have noted his initial concerns about this technique and those too of one of Slatkin's sons, Frederick Zlotkin. Rose has stated his case clearly, concisely and honestly. For optimum analysis one should line up the original commercial LPs with his restorative work, but as I don't have the originals I'm going to extrapolate from my experience of that previous Delius-Ibert-Saint-Saëns release.

Does one preserve the integrity of the original or does one take steps to present it in as attractive and as sensitively applied a form as one can, given current technological advances? This is the age-old question. But for now let me say that I think Rose has done a fine job. There will doubtless be those who recoil at thoughts of - dread memory - 'artificial reverb', but though this is early days for Rose in this kind of wholly different and advanced mechanism, I think he has applied the technique with due sympathy. Other transfer engineers can have their own take on this. If they reissue this material we can experience another aesthetic.

That's the background. It wouldn't be so important if the performances were duff, but they're not. Victor Aller, best known on disc perhaps for his association with the Hollywood Quartet, casts his net more virtuosically wide in presenting Dohnányi's *Variations on a Nursery Theme* in September 1956. It's a fine performance too, one that can be reckoned against the composer's own effervescent recordings. The 78 set with Collingwood is my favoured one but the Boult-directed one, made pretty much at the same time as Aller's, is obviously in more up to date sound and almost as good. William Kapell gave the US premiere of the mighty Khachaturian Concerto in 1943 and recorded it with Koussevitzky. Leonard Pennario took it up in the 1950s and one can cite this recording alongside those of other fine players, including Kapell, who dominated its early discography; Oborin, Lympny, Katz, Flier, de Larrocha, and others. In fact Katz set down his recording just a week after this Pennario traversal. Of the two the Katz is the more virtuosic but Pennario and Slatkin offer ripe rewards too, and their recording makes a valuable reappearance here. The acoustic tweaking renders Purcell's *Variations and Fugue on a theme of Purcell* doubtless far more expansive than it could ever have sounded on the commercial LP of the time.

Disc two offers a cornucopia of evocative delights. The two Villa-Lobos *Bachianas Brasileiras* are augmented by his Bach arrangements. There is lusciously committed string playing here, buttressed by an equally fine rhythmic attack. Noteworthy too is the pathos evoked in the first BB, as well as its inherent drama. Marni Nixon articulates finely in her contribution, whilst the Bach Prelude and Fugue is movingly declaimed. After this the solo Chávez - challenging and unusual repertoire for the time - receives a virtuoso demonstration of the percussive arts via the adroit dexterity of Hal Reese, who finds plenty of *misterioso*, colour and charge in it. Milhaud's pocket Concerto is equally a fine sonic vehicle for Reese who proves well up to the sassy challenges embedded in it.

These tracks derive from the contents of four LPs and this two disc compilation certainly ranges widely, stylistically speaking. It showcases Slatkin and his top-notch collaborators with verve, aided by the rich acoustic alluded to in my opening paragraph.

**Jonathan Woolf**

[MusicWeb International](#)

**'A benchmark performance in unprecedentedly fine sound.'**



**Giuseppe VERDI (1813-1901)**

***Requiem***

Herva Nelli (soprano), Fedora Barbieri (mezzo), Giuseppe Di Stefano (tenor), Cesare Siepi (bass)

NBC Symphony Orchestra & Robert Shaw Chorale/Arturo Toscanini  
rec. live, Carnegie Hall, New York, 27 January 1951

**PRISTINE [PACO 048](#) [77:45]**

This is the famous 1951 Carnegie Hall Verdi *Requiem* recreated in "accidental stereo". For a technical explanation, I refer you to sound engineer Andrew Rose's liner-notes, but in essence what we have here has been achieved by taking two separate, simultaneously taped mono recordings independently made on microphones presumably placed in different locations, thus permitting Rose to combine them to create a stereo effect. Rose has used the latest technology to synchronise the two recordings, remove extraneous noises, correct drop-outs and address the pitch fluctuations resulting from tape deterioration. The sound retains a high level of hiss but has far greater warmth and clarity; the blare and shatter of the mono release has been tamed and many more details emerge.

There is, however, one big caveat. Although the sound here is much less boxy than the mono Toscanini Edition LPs, be warned: this is not the commercial NBC version we have known and loved for years, which benefits from RCA's later patch-up sessions and bars snipped from rehearsals, but rather the original, unedited live recording containing many mistakes - some really quite serious. It is surely disingenuous of Pristine not to warn the prospective buyer of this and make that difference very clear on the cover, as otherwise it would be only natural to assume that this is the same recording with which many are so familiar.

Apart from quite a few minor glitches of ensemble and pitching there's a really obvious fortissimo bass drum entry a bar early in the first "Dies Irae", di Stefano quite often indulges his tendency to running ahead of the beat, Herva Nelli attempts a false entry a bar early on "sed" (but is quickly quelled by Toscanini) and, most damning of all, temporarily falls apart completely in the "Libera Me": first she sags horrifically in pitch, then she loses her place and omits the B-flat at the close of "requiem aeternam". Even allowing for the vagaries and vicissitudes of live performance, these are fairly major flaws, and constitute major disadvantages in comparison with the official, mono issue, despite the sonic advantages of this stereo confection.

Nonetheless, it is possible to listen with enormous pleasure to long stretches of this most impassioned of performances. The attack of both choir and orchestra is stunning - especially the thunderous impact of the bass drum specially commissioned by Toscanini, supposedly the biggest ever made. Despite the mistakes, Nelli gives one of her most radiant and convincing impersonations of a true Verdi soprano; she employs portamento most artistically, delves into a trenchant lower register and allows her vibrant top notes to expand thrillingly; she positively soars above the ensemble. Barbieri is stern and monumental, combining beautifully with Nelli.

The ever-reliable Siepi is in superb, saturnine voice, intoning his music balefully with absolute security of pitch and rhythm. Di Stefano is virile and highly expressive, and attempts the requisite tender mezza-voce in the "Hostias", even if he cannot trill like Pavarotti. Despite the prominence of the orchestra owing to Toscanini's preferred placement of his soloists behind them, all four singers achieve tremendous "face" and really impose themselves on the music.

So my advice is to acquire this if you want to hear this benchmark performance in unprecedentedly fine sound, but do not throw out your original Toscanini edition mono disc, as the trade-off between accepting a more error-strewn version in exchange for stereo sound might not always satisfy.

### **Ralph Moore**

NB. In response to the criticism in the above review of this being the live performance and not the LP, Pristine Classical has sent the following to MusicWeb International:

"The website page (which is the only place this can be ordered from) states:

"Source information:

**Unedited NBC broadcast recording and "a tape made directly from the Hall" supplied by private collectors"**

One would assume that anyone with a working knowledge of this well-known recording might therefore conclude that it doesn't include all the out-takes and rehearsal material RCA dubbed in for the LP release. This has been on our site since the day of release, though it's not stated explicitly on the cover. Perhaps Mr Moore might care to visit the site and make note of this in his review, as I reject the suggestion that "It is surely disingenuous of Pristine not to warn the prospective buyer of this" when we surely have done so?

With regard to the cover itself, what is clearly stated is that this is the "concert of 27 January 1951", "Live at Carnegie Hall" - should we really be expected to add the line "and not with bits of rehearsal stuck in to cover mistakes in the live concert"? I fail to see that we have not made it all plain enough both online and on the cover..."

It is of course highly unlikely that two recordings exist of all of the rehearsals as well as the concert itself in order to perform such a reconstruction! Our comments have been passed on to the reviewer, from whom we await a response - but are we right, or should we be more explicit here?

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Andrew Rose

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