

Subject: [NEWS] PRISTINE CLASSICAL 29th October 2010: Furtwängler conducts Schubert Symphonies, Mussorgsky's rare opera Sorochyntsi Fair
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Pristine News: Friday 29nd October, 2010



Sorochyntsi Fair - the real one!

(from <http://en.ukrainecityguide.com>)

In this week's newsletter:

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- [New this week](#) - Rare opera from Mussorgsky: première recording of Sorochyntsi Fair
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Editorial - 24-bit Ambient Stereo, and getting a few things off my chest!

This week we are releasing our first Ambient Stereo 24-bit FLAC downloads, in place of the previous mono-only (or true stereo where possible) 24-bit issues, for each of today's two new issues. Right now we don't intend to go back and replace previous mono 24-bit files with their Ambient Stereo alternatives, but for future releases I would expect to be offering Ambient Stereo in 24-bit and 16-bit FLAC releases, with mono in 16-bit FLAC and MP3 formats. Both mono and Ambient Stereo will continue to be available for CD purchasers. In doing so I follow not only my own personal preferences, but also those of our downloaders: the recent issue of Bruckner's 9th Symphony, conducted by Furtwängler in 1944, attracted more than ten times as many Ambient Stereo purchasers for 16-bit FLAC downloads than

it did mono purchasers.

Meanwhile interest has continued to grow in 24-bit downloads and this, in conjunction with the switch to Ambient Stereo got me thinking and talking: over the last couple of days I've had two very interesting conversations which have served to focus those thoughts, the first with Peter Harrison, for a long time a regular contributor to our catalogue, and now a regular producer of new high quality classical music recordings, and also with Nick Morgan, a man with many strings to his bow – including radio producer, music academic, and currently author of a series of articles for Classical Recordings Quarterly, entitled The Download Revolution.

Both of these conversations turned, in different ways, around matters of sound quality. Peter and I discussed whether we were reaching, or had reached, the end of the road when it comes to methods of storing sound for reproduction. My own feeling is that, given the option, I would prefer to listen to 24-bit recordings, and I note that increasingly our downloaders have the means to do so, something which could not have been stated so clearly when we began offering them in April 2008. For a variety of technical reasons*, 24-bit masters are what I produce, and although every logical bone in my body knows that when I listen to the 16-bit versions of these files, which are the only ones which can be copied to CD, there is no audible difference I can detect, I'd still opt to buy the 24-bit version of one of my recordings if it was available in Ambient Stereo! (Hence the change.) For my ears the latter has by far the greater effect, but I can and do listen in 24-bit at home so why not? It's the ultimate in quality and cannot be surpassed, as the laws of physics dictate that no electronic circuitry can ever be capable of fully resolving 24-bit audio**, let alone any greater bit depth. Likewise there are good reasons why Peter makes his recordings using 24-bit audio and not 16-bit audio, and then masters in 24-bits – even if one can resolve this down to 16-bits in such a way as not to audibly degrade the sound, one can also leave it as it is and listen in 24-bits. This is my perhaps slightly illogical justification for my preference, though it is easily argued that it's as irrelevant (the dynamic range of your living room is considerably less than that of a CD) as what I'm about to come onto.

(*For those who are interested, a lot of the processing I do is carried out at 32-bits and higher – in some cases 64-bits – but this is at a stage where the numbers are being crunched and prevents an accumulation of rounding errors which eventually might otherwise have an audible degradation effect on the music. **As for the impossible full reproduction of 24-bit audio, I'm reliably informed this is a thermionic effect – you could do so if you lowered all your hi-fi equipment into a vat of liquid helium, but beyond such ultra low temperatures it's noise levels caused by the movement of electrons which prevent it from being achievable.)

Anyway, all this led on to a discussion about sampling rates, in which the sky (as inhabited by bats) really is the limit. Whereas the bit depth effectively determines how quiet a sound can be captured, and therefore determines the dynamic range of a recording, the sampling rate determines the highest note which can be recorded – or rather, the highest frequency.

The CD sampling rate of 44.1kHz dates back to PAL and NTSC video scanning frequencies in the late 1970s and the need to find one which could work with both video formats, as early digital recordings were generally made by putting what looks like an endlessly changing bar-code onto a video tape, with the black and white stripes representing the ones and zeros of the digital music. You can watch these

recordings on a TV, though the plot is generally rather thin! Anyway, decode them and you've got an audio recording which contains all and more of the frequencies we can hear - although some young asthmatics have unusually extended hearing ranges, generally most hearing in young adults starts to roll off quite steeply from around 16-17kHz, and this upper limit diminishes as we get older. Thus the absolute upper frequency limit of a 44.1kHz recording, at 22050Hz, is something you and I cannot hear. It's also beyond the highest harmonics made by a very wide range of instruments, however carefully they're recorded - the highest notes of a bright piano, struck hard, might just reach these heights in their highest detectable harmonics, but most piano recordings tail off quite quickly between about 5kHz and 12kHz in harmonic content, and that's because of the noise a piano makes, not our ability to capture it. Get up to 18-19kHz and beyond and there is literally nothing there, leaving 3-4kHz of data which contains nothing but high frequency background noise, AKA hiss, albeit at a very low level.

However, that's not stopped people from increasing their sampling rates and entrancing people with big numbers. First in the 1980s came DAT recordings, which we could make at 32kHz, 44.1kHz or 48kHz, the latter extending the frequencies available up to a limit of 24kHz (the Hammerklavier now has a spare 6kHz of unused background hiss instead of 4kHz). More recently, as digital recording has taken advantage of hard drive recorders, much greater storage space and increased processing power, we've seen this multiply, with advent of the 96kHz, the 192kHz and even the 384kHz sampling standards (that Hammerklavier recording now has a whopping 174kHz of redundant data). There's no doubt that some musical sound can occupy some of the higher frequencies that these recording rates capture, and they're also very useful options for those who like to record conversations between bats, but to you and me they are pointless. Take them away and you are physically incapable of hearing any difference (because you could no more hear them than you have ever heard a dog whistle); play them in isolation and you'll be greeted by the sound of silence (for exactly the same reason).

It's an excellent example of Emperor's New Clothes Syndrome, and I came up with what I think is a rather good analogy to think about. In making recordings of sounds we cannot hear and then reproducing them (I'll assume we are – we'd never know by listening) we are indulging an irrational and pointless urge to go “beyond perfection”. Now take the same urge and apply it to TV pictures: extend the frequency range here and you'll be emitting not just visible light but also ultra-violet and infra-red. The former will give you a tan and the latter will heat your living room, but crucially neither will enhance the picture on your TV one jot, any more than extending the frequencies in recordings even further beyond what you can hear will enhance their sound quality. (There's a whole load of other colours a TV can't handle but we'll keep it simple for now.)

This is not to say that we've reached the end of the road in sound reproduction – far from it – but rather that we have reached a limit as to what can actually be usefully captured, the end of the usefulness of the numbers game. Adding more bits cannot make any difference (“ye cannae change the laws of physics” - Star Trek), adding more frequencies won't make them audible to us. What can and must continue to improve is the equipment which captures the sound and the equipment which reproduces it – but it's far, far easier to double your sampling rate (which looks great on paper) than it is to make real, let alone dramatic, advances in sound recordings and reproduction quality, and so we carry on playing the numbers game.

And if you didn't like the previous analogy, listening to 384kHz recordings is like

driving a 220mph Lamborghini with a moped's speed limiter attached – you ain't never going to get over 30mph, just as you ain't never going to hear above 20kHz, and in all likelihood you'll fall far short of that too.

If you're still with me, congratulations, because I'm not finished yet! One aspect of sound reproduction has not been touched on (and it leads this train of thought into whole new vistas), which is this: what happens when we progress beyond two channels of audio to embrace multi-channel recordings? Surely this is the future? CD may be resolutely stereo-only, but SACD offers surround sound, as does DVD and Blu-Ray. Likewise FLAC can handle multi-channel audio (not a lot of people know that), but I wonder whether this will ever catch on in the vital mass market? Those who have multi-channel music systems have nothing but good things to say about them, but they surely have plenty to moan about when it comes to the paucity of material produced for them to listen to.

Which brings me to something Nick Morgan bemoaned. Once upon a time all of this development in music technology was driven by classical music and classical listeners – coincidentally it was generally they who had the money. It was they who “demanded” the quiet surfaces and extended playing time of the vinyl long player, and then the silence and even greater playing time of the CD. Popular music eventually caught up but classical drove the innovation, goes the argument. So why has this virtually stopped? Why doesn't the innovation which produced the classical SACD spill over into the mass market in the way that the CD, allegedly designed to fit Beethoven's 9th onto a single disc, ultimately captured the public's attention?

I would counter this argument with two pertinent points regarding the general take-up of first the CD and later the DVD: both required huge mass-market tipping points before they really became established, although in both cases the original raw material was already in place to serve their content requirements – thousands of high quality stereo music masters and Hollywood movies. This is not the case for multi-channel audio or 3D TV.

Prior to the release of the Dire Straits album *Brothers in Arms* in 1985 the CD was a minority interest – very few people had a CD player; discs were hard to find outside of the classical market (which had already embraced digitally-recorded LPs). Suddenly the synergy of newly-affordable players and a huge-selling album with which to show-off one's new hardware created the drive CD needed to establish its success. Classical listeners may have been the early adopters, but the huge pop and rock audience were suddenly equally aware of the benefits of CD and they wanted one too. A few years later and the movie release *The Matrix* performed the same trick for the DVD – it was the first DVD I ever saw, and that's no coincidence; I was one amongst many millions in this respect.

But I sense that technological developments in TV are about to hit the same wall that music has suffered lately. If the music industry had a bonanza in the 1980s and 1990s with the introduction of the CD, this is surely nothing by comparison to the TV manufacturing industry's ability to get us to upgrade from 4:3 cathode ray tube colour sets, first to wide screen, then flat screen, then ever larger sets, then high definition. The next big thing, we're told, is 3D. But is it? Most 3D sets require special glasses to view 3D content, 3D costs broadcasters a huge amount to make (or remake), is difficult to transmit, makes some viewers feel sick, and has perhaps limited appeal (your news, weather and stock market reports in 3D?). Stereo photography has been around since the early 1800s yet we've stuck resolutely to 2D photos. Likewise, the first 3D TV was demonstrated in 1928, and 3D movies have

come and gone several times before. I'm sure the TV manufacturers are hoping that a 3D movie like Avatar will provide them with a Matrix moment in the sale of the latest sets, but so far take up has been marginal-to-abysmal, and expensive new developments, including sets which don't require 3D glasses, have been if not shelved, then postponed by some major manufacturers. It seems for now that the future is likely to be flat-screened, high resolution, big-yet-thin, and for many, resolutely stereo.

Meanwhile another technological revolution has been taking place and it's one which I began this article with yet which one senses many of the big music and film companies wish would go away – to borrow the title of Nick's series, it's the download revolution. In a world of music and video format wars which date back as far as cylinder vs. disc, suddenly the whole subject has for many people become irrelevant. Open-source replay software such as XBMC really doesn't care whether you're offering it MP3, MP4, FLAC, AAC, WMA or any number of other music formats, any more than it worries about the kind of video file you want to watch, its resolution or its number of audio channels. If it's digital it can be played, and that's that – and if its digital it can be delivered online, whatever the format, and done so very easily. There's no new bonanza to be had by the release of a new music or video format, no sonic or portability advantage to be demonstrated with a shiny new silver disc, which cannot be more easily achieved by Internet file transfers.

In many ways it's the end of what has been a very lucrative road for some very large companies, and one can only hope that the ultimate winner will be the listener and viewer. We cannot add colours which cannot be seen or frequencies which cannot be heard and then expect mass-market adoption at a premium price. We cannot introduce new equipment to play new discs when the same results can be achieved for a fraction of the expense using a cheap PC and existing equipment. We're never again going to see the re-purchasing of CD-based record collections to mirror what so many of us did 25 years ago, as our LPs were consigned to attics and jumble sales and replaced by silver discs.

The only way that the music industry in particular is going to move forward is through the pursuit of real artistic quality, and by making the results of that artistry available in ways their customers want. It's suggests shifts of focus which few have seemed willing to embrace so far, which is why you won't find any legal Beatles downloads, yet FLAC downloads of their most recent (and hugely expensive) remastered box sets topped the pirate download charts within minutes of being issued, and why illegal file-sharing sites are chock-full of CD-quality copies of out-of-print classical titles, and why The Pirate Bay states that 15759 people are currently engaged in sharing a video file of last night's episode of South Park in a week where the RIAA has finally managed to close down a file-sharing website which became irrelevant five years ago.

The rules of the game have changed, and will continue to change. Discerning people will demand quality and availability, which is partly why Pristine exists – it's not just about copying an old LP and sticking it online, it's about the hours of painstaking restoration work and the years of research which led to that being possible. But it's utterly daft that EMI let Kempe's Meistersinger fall out of the catalogue once their last run of CDs sold out, and that Amazon or iTunes won't sell you a FLAC of anything, let alone an MP3 of the Kempe. Give people quality at a reasonable price and the majority will pay for it – take it away, or refuse to release it, and they've now got alternatives, some more reputable than others. Quality and availability would surely be a more enlightened route to take than hounding

grannies through the law courts, forcing ISPs to cut off internet access to households due to little Johnny's secret file-sharing, or arm-twisting governments into enacting ever-more draconian copyright laws which move ever further away from their original intent and into the realm of propping up the status quo for the benefit of perhaps half a dozen global conglomerates.

Demand real artistic and technical quality – but know when you're being hoodwinked with either – and demand it now, at the click of a mouse, whatever it is you want to see or hear, wherever you are in the world. There can be very few musicians who would want to deny you that, but plenty of people in the music business who spend their working lives doing so.

Andrew Rose

New release today:

[SCHUBERT Symphonies 8 and 9](#)

Pristine Audio PASC 253



Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra
conductor **Wilhelm Furtwängler**
Recorded Berlin, 1942 & 1953

XR remastering by Andrew Rose at Pristine Audio, October 2010

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Furtwängler

Total duration: 74:23
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The FLAC downloads:



- **SCHUBERT** Symphony No. 9 'Great' in C, D944 [[notes](#) / [score](#)]
- **SCHUBERT** Symphony No. 8 'Unfinished' in B minor, D759 [[notes](#) / [score](#)]

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra
conductor **Wilhelm Furtwängler**

Recorded: 1. Alte Philharmonie, Berlin, 8th December, 1942; 2. Titania Palast, Berlin, 15th September 1953

FURTWÄNGLER conducts Schubert Symphonies

This release completes our trilogy of Furtwängler's wartime "Ninth" symphony recordings, following on from the exceptionally well-received Beethoven and Bruckner issues. A live recording from 1942, the Schubert 9th has survived in better condition than the other two and its resurrection here by XR remastering is quite astounding to hear.

It's coupled with a 1953 Berlin concert recording of Schubert's 8th "Unfinished" Symphony with truly superb sonics, once again demonstrating brilliantly the unforgettable and unbeatable combination of Furtwängler and his Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.



Symphony No 9, First movement
Andante - Allegro ma non troppo
(*Ambient Stereo version*)

Notes on the transfers:

Having worked on Furtwängler's other two great wartime Berlin Ninth Symphony recordings, those of Beethoven and Bruckner, I was prompted to complete the set with his wonderful 1942 Schubert Ninth, a recording which was better made than the other two and which, apart from a tendency to top-end hiss during louder sections, offered more sonically than I had thus far achieved in this series.

Once the restoration was complete I fished around for some other recording to add to the release; a number of shorter wartime recordings were considered but rejected on both sonic and artistic grounds, and my attention turned to his later Schubert recordings and most obviously the 'Unfinished' for reasons of duration. Eleven traumatic years later, and in the twilight of his career, we find the same magic still alive and well in concert, coupled with the sonic advances of the time. It seemed a fitting companion to the Ninth.

For an excellent article by Peter Gutmann on Furtwängler to be found online [here](#), the following section is particularly pertinent to the Schubert and other wartime recordings:

"Other than his own Symphonic Concerto and some snippets from Wagner operas, we seem to have no further live Furtwängler recordings until 1942 to 1944, when Radio Berlin taped twenty concerts. By then, Furtwängler's artistry had become completely transformed.

The pickup consisted of a principal microphone at the podium, mixed at the back of the hall with 3 others; all were omnidirectional and picked up a lot of audience noise. The sound was relayed by telephone line to Radio Berlin headquarters, where it was recorded on machines in 20 minute segments on 14 inch reels of iron oxide tape running at 30 inches per second. Although 49 pieces reportedly were recorded, many of the tapes were lost, damaged or erased for reuse. The survivors were removed by Soviet occupation forces. After generating decades of Russian LP bootlegs, 22 were returned to Berlin in 1987. Nineteen were issued on ten DGG CDs in 1989. Now out of print, many have emerged on the American Music & Arts label.

Admittedly, it is rather difficult to listen to them today, knowing that the recordings originally were made to boost combat morale and that the highly audible audience coughs arose from the pampered throats of Nazi military and government elite. But such perverse uses of art aside, perhaps we can take some comfort in Furtwängler's hope that these broadcasts would also bolster the courage and humanity of civilian listeners. In any event, our ears know little of political correctness; none of the performances is less than fascinating, and more than a few are among the most intense of all time.

If there is a single common quality to all of these performances, it is the extreme cohesion between conductor and orchestra, hard enough to find in standard readings but nearly impossible to achieve when the interpretation is impulsive and radically reconceived. This remarkable quality arose from the symbiosis between Furtwängler and the Berlin Philharmonic, whose mutual needs were both artistic and practical. The orchestra needed Furtwängler, without whose adoration by Hitler they would have lost their government subsidy and faced disbandment; indeed, the intensity of their playing has been ascribed to the fear that each performance might have been their last. And Furtwängler equally needed his players, his self-described "right arm," whose 20-year association enabled the musicians to understand and respond meaningfully to his bizarre gestures in a way that no other ensemble ever approached.

The magic bond is confirmed by both records and anecdotes. Wartime concerts have recently surfaced featuring Furtwängler conducting the Beethoven Symphony # 9 with the Stockholm Philharmonic (on Music & Arts CD-2002) and the Bruckner Symphony # 8 with the Vienna Philharmonic (on Music & Arts CD-764). Both works were Furtwängler specialties, but the readings lack even a hint of the gripping tension he regularly achieved with the Berlin Philharmonic. Also indicative of the Berlin players' unique understanding of their leader are the abundant tales from other orchestras, ranging from the Italian concertmaster who mistook Furtwängler's incomprehensible baton motions for nervousness and sought to reassure him, to the quip of a German musician that he knew when to start playing only by sitting down and counting to ten."

Andrew Rose

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New release today:

[MUSSORGSKY Sorochyntsi Fair](#)

Pristine Audio PACO 053



Slovenian National Opera, Ljubljana
conductor **Samo Hubad**
Studio recording from 1955

Vienna Symphony Orchestra
Der Singverein der Gesellschaft der
Musikfreunde, Viemna
conductor **Willem van Otterloo**
Studio recording from 1958

XR remastering by Andrew Rose at Pristine Audio, September-October 2010

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Mussorgsky
Total duration: 2hr 6:09
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For more download and CD options, see our [website](#)

The FLAC downloads:



- **MUSSORGSKY** - Sorochyntsi Fair [[notes/score](#)]

Cast

Cherevik - **Latko Koroshetz**

Khivria - **Bogdana Stritar**

Parassia - **Vilma Bukovetz**

Kum - **Friderik Lupsha**

Gritsko - **Miro Branjnik**

Afansy Ivanovich - **Slavko Shtrukel**

Gypsy - **Andrei Andreev**

Chernobog - **Samo Smerkolj**

Slovenian National Opera Orchestra & Chorus

conducted by **Samo Hubad**

World première recording, 27th November 1955, Salle Apollo, Ljubljana
Transfer from Philips 12" white label test pressings ABL 3148-49

- **MUSSORGSKY** - Night on the Bare Mountain [[notes/score](#)]
- **BORODIN** - Polovtsian Dances [[notes/score](#)]

Vienna Symphony Orchestra

Der Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna

conducted by **Willem van Otterloo**

Recorded at Grosser Saal, Musikverein, Vienna, 23 February 1958
Transfer from Fontana 10" white label test pressing EFR 2012

CD, MP3 and FLAC information:

CDs: Double set - CD1 = Acts 1 & 2, CD2 = Act 3; Night on the Bare Mountain; Polovstian Dances

FLACs: Continuous tracks with a short pause between acts.

MP3: Two MP3s in a Zip filed which correspond to the two CDs as outlined above, complete with individual cue sheets

Please check our help section for help with FLAC, MP3, Cue and Zip files. Downloads also include PDF files with printable covers and JPG files with front cover artwork, which is also embedded into individual music files. A score of Sorochynsti Fair is included with all downloads.

"Whenever one comes up against a Russian stage work, the first thing is to establish who composed it ; for it often seems as if the main occupation of Russian musicians is writing each other's operas—after which everyone quarrels and claims it would be better another way. The habit of leaving works incomplete—whether through illness, loss of interest or plain indolence—seems to have been endemic among the famous nineteenth - century Russians ; so that it should come as no particular surprise to learn, from an admirably comprehensive accompanying note by Paul Lamm, that Mussorgsky's Sorochintsy Fair has had to be orchestrated and completed by Liadov, Karatygin, Cui, Tcherepnin and, finally, Shebalin, whose version is the one here employed.

The story—a grotesque one, full of digressions and typically Russian muddles—is set in the Ukraine, whose national musical characteristics are mirrored in the score. Some form of lifeline, either the complete libretto (available for an extra 7s. 6d.), or the detailed account of the plot in the booklet issued with the discs, is absolutely imperative if anything whatever is to be made of this work. For, though the lyrical passages are easy enough to bang on to, the - music of the broad humorous parts is scrappy to a degree ; and it must be admitted that, attractive as are some of the melodies, their treatment is frequently very crude and thin. Only two sections are likely to be known to most people—the final Gopak and the Night on the Bare Mountain, which reappears here in a choral version to accompany the scene of Gritzko's nightmare.

The piece is played with gusto by the Ljubljana company, and the sheer high spirits they bring to it are infectious, even while one recognises the shortcomings in the performance. The orchestra is enthusiastic rather than polished, and the chorus very rough indeed, but the soloists are, many of them, of a high calibre. At the top of the list I would put Mme Stritar as the discontented scold and the tenor Shtrukel, who proves himself a first-rate character comedian, in the part of her gluttonous paramour. Their comic lovescene in Act 2 is a joy. The Parassia—a small part—is good, and the Gritzko has a suitably young-sounding ringing tenor. The Cherevik is too often

careless about the exact pitching of his notes.

The recording has been made as if from a concert performance, with little suggestion of stage perspective or dramatic placing of the voices, and one cannot help regretting that for so unfamiliar a work (which, so far as I can recollect, has not been seen in this country since Jay Pomeroy's production at the Cambridge 'Theatre in the early days of the war) more attention was not given to production ". Those with perfect pitch must also steel themselves to transposing the recording down a semitone mentally. Still, as a curiosity, this recording is well worth hearing." - Gramophone [review](#), November 1957

MUSSORGSKY Sorochyntsi Fair

Mussorgsky's unfinished opera Sorochyntsi Fair has received little western attention - and surprisingly few recordings. This was the first, using the completion of the opera by Shebalin from 1931 which seems generally to have found most favour.

It's a well-recorded studio version which largely omits stage noises, with some excellent soloists. If you don't know the opera, you may be surprised to hear a sung version of Night on a Bare Mountain appear in the Third Act! Rimsky-Korsakov adapted this opera version for his own orchestration of the piece not long after Mussorgsky's death, and a 1958 Vienna recording of this is also included in this intriguing and rewarding issue.



Act 3:

Parassia's Meditation
(Ambient Stereo version)

Technical notes:

This is the second of two rare Russian opera recordings by the Slovenian National Opera which came my way from the collection of the former art director of Philips UK. It was sold as a boxed set of two LPs; in this case I was working from white-label test pressings for these transfers and had no notes or indication of where anything started or finished.

This lack of information turned out to be one of the greatest challenges, and it took a while to track down an alternative copy of the recording which I could both download as a reference and use to work out where the acts began and ended! Thus the tracks here are more or less split using the template of a mid-1990s recording by Yevgeni Brazhnik, and I've had to do what I can with the badly-translated Russian titles provided with that release, the most recent of only four complete recordings of this opera.

As the Gramophone reviewer points out, the version heard here is that completed by Shebalin in 1931, which is fortunately also used by all the other recordings to date. Unfortunately the score I tracked down, and which is included in the downloads, is an earlier version completed by Cui in 1917, which diverges from the recording in a number of places, not least the entire relocation of the Dream section to the third act.

This Dream music had been adapted by Mussorgsky from his earlier composition, *Night on the Bare (or Bald) Mountain*. Ironically the version we know now of that piece is one which Rimsky-Korsakov adapted from *Sorochyntsi Fair!* As I had space left over I took the opportunity to add Willem van Otterloo's 1958 recording of this, together with the flip side (Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances*) to the second disc of this set for comparison.

As far as the recording quality goes, both recordings were very well made. A side effect of the non-staged style of the opera as noted by Gramophone's 1957 reviewer is that all the words are exceptionally clear and well captured and nobody singing away from the microphones - as I've failed to find a libretto and the score is in Russian script, this may prove handy to the listener! What was less welcome in *Sorochyntsi Fair* is the prevalence of pre- and post-echo throughout the recording, something which took a great deal of time and effort to eliminate.

Overall, however, both recordings here have come up very nicely indeed, and are excellent examples of the progress made in sound quality during the 1950s. XR remastering has helped bring them forward a decade or two, and I recommend the Ambient Stereo issues.

Technical notes by Andrew Rose

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by **Dr. John Duffy**
in Ambient Stereo

Beethoven Violin Sonatas from Rostal and Osborn



Max Rostal

Beethoven

Violin Sonata No.2 in A, Op. 12 No 2

Beethoven

Violin Sonata No.10 in G, Op. 96

Max Rostal, violin
Franz Osborn, piano

Sonata No.2: Recorded West Hampstead Studios, London, 28th June 1948, issued in May 1949 as Decca AK1958-9. Matrix Nos AR12434-37

Sonata No.10: Recorded West Hampstead Studios, London, 29th January and 17th February 1948, issued in October 1948 as Decca K1950-3. Matrix Nos AR11999-12005

Max Rostal: [wiki](#)

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

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'Hambourg's major statements stand as lasting examples of his too-often overlooked art.'

**Mark Hambourg****Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)**

Piano Concerto No.3 in C minor Op.37 (1803) [31:38] ¹

Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

Piano Concerto No.1 in B flat minor Op.23 (1875) [31:50] ²

Mark Hambourg (piano)

London Symphony Orchestra/Malcolm Sargent ¹

Royal Albert Hall Orchestra/Landon Ronald ²

rec. November 1929 (Beethoven) and September 1926 (Tchaikovsky), Kingsway Hall, London

PRISTINE AUDIO [PASC223](#) [63:28]

Let me start with a collateral pleasure that this disc brings with it, and that's the increasing representation on CD of the conductorial art of Landon Ronald. Historic Records has been going great guns on his behalf, and their restorations of his major Tchaikovsky symphonic recordings have been of real merit. So too is this collaboration with Mark Hambourg in the Piano Concerto, a traversal that has never before been transferred either to LP or CD.

Engineer Mark Obert-Thorn has utilised US Victor 'Orthoionic' pressings for this – whereas he used standard domestic HMVs for the companion Beethoven concerto. The Victors have more presence than the HMVs and have been transferred at a somewhat higher level as well. The 1926 early electric recording copes as well as could be expected with the thunderous octave flourishes and manages a good frequency response with regard to the basses of the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra. The strings of the band are on typically expressive and romantic form, though their portamenti are somewhat more predictably placed here than could often be the case with Ronald's Tchaikovsky, where he varied this flavoursome and expected device with alluring intelligence. The winds are highly effective in their own way. Hambourg plays with authority and control. As Obert-Thorn notes, he does indulge some interesting narrative paragraphs in his slowing for the waltz passage in the slow movement, which is rightly accommodated by Ronald, and which brings out the balletic implications of the writing. One can explicitly contrast this with another Russian performer, Sapelnikoff, who had earlier recorded the concerto with the Aeolian Orchestra and Stanley Chapple for Vocalion and who is the more rectitudinous here. Hambourg's performance however is characterful, powerfully personalised (with some textual emendations) and echt romantic.

Hambourg only recorded two commercially released concerto performances. The other was Beethoven's C minor Concerto in 1929 which staked HMVs electric marker after the first ever recording, William Murdoch's acoustic reading for Columbia with Hamilton Harty, had been superseded by the new technology. Are we going to get that one soon? The conductor for Hambourg here was Malcolm Sargent, already well versed in studio matters by now. The pianist's opening statements are laced with rubato, and this fluid approach to metrics is a constant of his performance, a pre-Schnabelian one if you will, though that's a reductive idea in itself. It's only in retrospect that Schnabel has come to dominate the early concerto and sonata discography. How different things would have been, for instance, had Rachmaninoff accepted the offer to record the sonatas for Victor. Or had Lamond recorded more of them. Nevertheless this fluid approach to structure is complemented by a lovely tone, and by the use of Moscheles's cadenza; Hambourg knew Moscheles's son, Felix, which perhaps explains it. He plays it certainly with marvellous élan. The refinement and poetic phrasing of the slow

movement, played with treble-based filigree, explains in part Hambourg's position as one of the most elegant and admirable of pianists of his time. And it chimes with his view of the concerto as a whole, which is light, bright and the opposite of stentorian – though some of the brass figures in the finale do tend toward that effect. Hambourg's runs are not wholly accurate but who's counting.

This performance has been released before by Pearl [GEMM 9147] back in 1995. That one had far more pops and clicks than this newer entrant but it also had more presence. Obert-Thorn has had to trade presence for a lower level smoother ride. I ran my own 78 set alongside both these transfers and rather wished that he could have gone for a touch more room presence and allowed a bit more surface noise from the admittedly rather noisy HMVs.

Still, this is fine work on behalf of Hambourg, whose major statements stand as lasting examples of his too-often overlooked art.

Jonathan Woolf

[MusicWeb International](#)

'This Beecham set should find an honoured place as an historic alternative in many a collection.'



Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756 - 1791)

***Die Zauberflöte* (1791)**

Helge Roswaenge (tenor) - Tamino; Tiana Lemnitz (soprano) - Pamina; Gerhard Hüsck (baritone) - Papageno; Irma Beilke (soprano) - Papagena; Old Woman; First Boy; Wilhelm Strienz (bass) - Sarastro; Erna Berger (soprano) - Queen of the Night; Heinrich Tessmer (tenor) - Monostatos; First Man in Armour; Hilde Scheppan (soprano) - First Lady; Elfriede Marherr (soprano) - Second Lady; Rut Berglund (contralto) - Thitd Lady;

Third Boy; Carla Spletter (soprano) - Second Boy; Walter Grossman (bass) - Speaker; Ernst Fabbry (tenor) - Priest;

Favres Solisten Vereinigung; Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra/Sir Thomas Beecham

rec. Beethovensaal, Berlin, 8-10, 12, 13, 15 November 1937; 24 February, 2, 8 March 1938

PRISTINE AUDIO [PACO 045](#) [61:30 + 69:26]

We have come to expect impressive sound from Andrew Rose's XR re-mastering and he has ensured both clarity and dynamic power. I haven't listened to this set for quite some time - not since the LP era in fact although I have heard some re-mastered excerpts, but I wasn't prepared for such 'modern' sound. Without knowing the origin I would have guessed it was a good mono recording from the 1950s. So on these grounds alone this set can be heartily recommended to all lovers of *Die Zauberflöte*. Keep in mind, though, that it was recorded without the spoken dialogue. This means that the individual numbers come in quick succession, very much as they would do on a highlights disc.

What I had forgotten was the weightiness of Beecham's reading. The powerful first chord rings out with almost Wagnerian solemnity and this is an impression that prevails throughout the overture. Even the quick second half has more dramatic weight than Singspiel jollity.

This impression is reinforced when we are confronted with Helge Roswaenge's Tamino.

Roswaenge was known more for his brilliant top notes and dramatic heft than lyrical flexibility and elegance. Here one associates the results more readily with Wagnerian effortfulness than Mozartean warmth. He is closer in approach to Siegfried than to Tamino. I must qualify this verdict to some extent. In *Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön* he is more nuanced and actually quite lovable. Maybe he was inspired by Gerhard Hüscher's famous reading of Papageno and his interpretation of *Der Vogelfänger bin ich ja*, which was heard just before the Tamino aria. Listening closely to Hüscher I have to admit that there are baritones from more modern times who have imbued the aria with greater spirit and/or elegance. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Walter Berry are two singers who, in their contrasting ways, have come closer to the character. Hüscher feels 'every-day-penny-plain'. He is much better later on in the opera and in particular in *Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen*, where his Lieder singer experience and care for words is a great asset. And the suicide scene is deeply moving.

Erna Berger was also a quite successful Lieder singer towards the end of her career in the 1950s. I still treasure a couple of Deutsche Grammophon LPs with her. More than fifteen years before that she was a brilliant Queen of the Night. In her first aria she also displays a warmth that makes 'die sternflamme Königin' more human. Her runs are occasionally smudged and a couple of her top notes are slightly out of pitch. This is however a worthy reading of this exacting aria and *Der Hölle Rache* in the second act is sung with awesome accuracy.

Tiana Lemnitz is a lovely Pamina, some scooping apart. The duet with Papageno *Bei Männern* is one of the highlights of the recording and her aria *Ach, ich fühl's* is lovely and sensitive. Wilhelm Strienz is a lightweight Sarastro but sings with great warmth and has the required low notes. Both his arias are good. His legato in *In diesen heil'gen Hallen* is admirable - and so is his diction. Walter Grossmann is a warm and fatherly Speaker and in the musically remarkable confrontation scene between him and Tamino, Roswaenge is at his most heroic with biting defiance. Heinrich Tessmer is a splendid Monostatos.

I find that Pamina and Tamino are a curiously mismatched couple - especially in the *Der, welche wandelt* scene: she delightful as a lily, he knotty as an oak-tree.

In spite of some misgivings this is still a desirable recording. When it was new, more than seventy years ago, it must have been a revelation to many. Berger, Lemnitz and Hüscher can stand comparison with some of the best singers on modern sets and most of the others are more than acceptable.

For a comparable modern recording without spoken dialogue, Klemperer is a first recommendation with Gundula Janowitz (Pamina), Lucia Popp (Queen of the Night) in her first recording, Nicolai Gedda (Tamino), Walter Berry (Papageno) and Gottlob Frick (Sarastro). Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Christa Ludwig are luxury casting as First and Second Ladies. For complete recordings with dialogue Karl Böhm's DG set, roughly contemporaneous with Klemperer, is still my favourite: Fritz Wunderlich (Tamino), Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (Papageno), Franz Crass (Sarastro) and Hans Hotter (Speaker) are top contenders. Evelyn Lear (Pamina) and Roberta Peters (Queen of the Night) are not quite in their league. I also have a soft spot for the Wolfgang Sawallisch version. With remarkably refurbished sound this Beecham set should find an honoured place as an historic alternative in many a collection.

Göran Forsling

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