

**Subject:** [NEWS] PRISTINE CLASSICAL 8th October 2010: Furtwängler's 1942 Choral Symphony, Glazunov plays Glazunov

**From:** Pristine Classical <music@pristineclassical.com>

**Date:** Fri, 08 Oct 2010 16:20:02 +0200

## Pristine News: Friday 8th October, 2010

### Celebrating 250 Orchestral Issues



**Furtwängler with the Berlin Philharmonic at the Philharmonie (early 1930s)**

(from <http://www.furtwaengler-gesellschaft.de/en/home>)

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

- [New this week](#) - Furtwängler's superlative Beethoven 9th, Berlin 1942 is our 250th orchestral release
- [New this week](#) - Elena Glazunov plays her adoptive father's two piano concertos
- [Editorial](#) - 250 Orchestral Recordings
- [PADA](#) - Ansermet conducts Roussel's 3rd and 4th symphonies in Geneva
- [Recent Reviews:](#)

**Krips conducts Brahms and Mozart** - MusicWeb International

'The transparency of Josef Krips' classical, objective performance makes all this clear. It comes

across lyrically and freshly with no special luxuriating. In sum, a refreshing, classical Brahms 4'

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**Editorial - 250 Historic Orchestral Recordings**

I do like big round numbers. They provoke a challenge to come up with something special, or something different, or something which has a personal resonance. A few weeks ago we released our 50th recording in the Vocal section of our catalogue, and I held back last week's Prokofiev opera in favour of Toscanini's wonderful 1943 Brahms *Eine Deutsche Requiem* from a truly excellent source - a major work from a major conductor and orchestra in an exceptionally fine recording, as opposed to a good recording of an infrequently recorded opera from a little-remembered cast and conductor. Our 200th orchestral release was a remastering of Decca's first SXL-series stereo LP, Kenneth Alwyn's disc of Tchaikovsky with the London Symphony Orchestra (a good number of copies of which have since gone out to Mr. Alwyn for his family and friends!) - it was preceded and followed by music by the composer Ernest Bloch.

This week's "big number" has been approaching for some time and I've been watching it arrive with a growing amount of trepidation. When I think back to our launch, some five and a half years ago, with a dozen somewhat hastily assembled recordings (some of which were very short indeed) it seems astonishing to me that we could have reached such a milestone, and in such a short space of time. So what to release to mark it?

Alas I don't currently have any more accidental-stereo Toscanini Verdi Requiem up my sleeve, though I'm sure more will turn up in due course. That release has been by far our best seller of this year, and continues to provoke rapturous comments - though I've yet to see a review of it (have I missed one?). Another like it would have been an obvious choice.

I'd had half a mind to issue Furtwängler's final Beethoven 9th from 1954, a remastering of which is very close to completion, but then I remembered a number of requests for the infamous 1942 concert recording (actually drawn from more than one performance) and decided to investigate. In the course of this I feel like I've spent almost as much time reading up on the extensive history of the event, what lead up to it and what was to follow, as I have carrying out the remastering. There certainly was a lot I thought I knew but didn't really, and I think I've a lot more to find out and to hear, but what was ultimately of greatest importance to me was the performance, its recording, and my ability (or otherwise) to manage a substantial improvement in what had come before - and sufficiently substantial to make it worth issuing as PASC250 when so many others already have it in their catalogues.

(This isn't to ignore the politics behind it - which may well have been the rather unfortunate (to put it mildly) driving force which triggered Furtwängler's astonishing performance. For some the politics will remain a problem or an obstacle - I've read the reviews at Amazon.com for other issues and noted how many references there are to having to put up with "Nazi coughs", to take a somewhat tame example; in the same week I read a lengthy series of comments from pop music fans decrying the decision of the drummer of late-60s alternative rock band the Velvet Underground to come out in favour of the US Republican Tea Party movement - no doubt someone, somewhere is setting fire to a previously precious vinyl copy of Venus In Furs right now in protest. Yes the politics of a musician can matter to some in their audience, even if the music they play is entirely apolitical. But in this case my choice of release was far more about the performance and the restoration of it than the historic significance and politics which surround it, even though these might be seen by some as particularly pertinent.)

Anyway, back to the music and the remastering of this recording. The one tool I dearly wish someone could invent to tackle a recording such as this (and many others) is a sure-fire method of repairing the damage done by overload distortion. For large sections of the Beethoven 9th the recording sounds really lovely - then it gets all loud and passionate and exciting and vibrant and, well, distorted and fuzzy around the edges. I do have a number of techniques to reduce the effects of this for the listener, but a little like the common cold, as yet there is no cure - just "remedies" which try to dull the symptoms a bit - and nothing new seems about to appear. I hope I'm wrong, but right now the physics behind all this suggests we'll have to learn to live with a little distortion around the edges of this particular recording.

Which leaves me wondering whether this is as good as it is likely to get for Furtwängler's 1942 Beethoven 9th. Whilst I passionately hope it isn't, and that someone in the near future will devise some new, as-yet unimagined method of further extracting and enhancing the musical content of the recording, I do sometimes wonder if this is the last time anyone will seriously bother spending lots of hours restoring it. In this particular case, I suspect not, but for many of the recordings we issue this may well be the case - there simply isn't the demand or interest to make it economically worthwhile to do too many repeats, however much further improvement might be possible in the future.

All of which reinforces the need not to stand still now - to keep on improving standards, keep on striving for excellence, and hope that the next 250 orchestral releases can hit as many highs as the first 250 have and leave no room for future doubts. Pristine probably won't release a second 1942 Furtwängler Choral Symphony, but there are bound to be many more recordings of Beethoven, of his 9th Symphony, of Furtwängler, of the Berlin Philharmonic, and recordings dating from 1942 in the coming months and years. Frankly, I can't wait to hear them.

*Andrew Rose*

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## New release today - our 250th orchestral issue:

### [BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 9 "Choral"](#)

Pristine Audio PASC 250



Tilla Briem, soprano  
Elisabeth Höngen, alto  
Peter Anders, tenor  
Rudolf Watzke, bass  
Bruno Kittel Choir  
Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra  
conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler  
Recorded Berlin, 1942

XR remastering by Andrew Rose at Pristine Audio, September-October 2010  
Cover artwork based on a photograph of Furtwängler

Total duration: 73:02  
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### The FLAC downloads:



## *Furtwängler, Berlin 1942: perhaps the greatest Beethoven 9 ever*

*The infamous, astonishing performance in an outstanding sonic resurrection*

- **BEETHOVEN** Symphony No. 9 "Choral" in D minor, Op. 125 [[notes](#) / [score](#)]

**Tilla Briem**, soprano

**Elisabeth Höngen**, alto

**Peter Anders**, tenor

**Rudolf Watzke**, bass

**Bruno Kittel Choir**

Recorded live in Berlin, 22-24 March, 1942

**Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra**

conductor **Wilhelm Furtwängler**

### **BEETHOVEN** Symphony No. 9 "Choral"

For many people, Beethoven's 9th Symphony stands as one of humanity's greatest cultural peaks, a monumental musical and artistic achievement which continues to resonate today.

In 1942, conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler's controversial Berlin performances in front of the Nazi top brass took this remarkable music and elevated it to another sphere, as the conductor vented feelings through music he was forbidden to state in words.

Long regarded as one of the greatest of performances, the downside to this recording has always been the sound quality - hence this astonishing new XR remastering, capturing the full drama and scope of Furtwängler's vision as never before. Truly essential.



First movement

*Allegro non troppo, un poco maestoso*

(Ambient Stereo version)

### Notes on the transfers:

The history of this recording is well known and takes us deep into one of the darkest eras of human history: Nazi Germany, the performances around the celebration of Hitler's birthday in March 1942, and a conductor who some saw as a collaborator, others as a naive tool of the regime, others still as someone who chose to oppose from within rather than leave Germany like so many other top-ranking musicians. The wider subject is covered in some depth in the further notes which accompany this release, and of course in much greater depth elsewhere.

It is pertinent to mention here, however, that many have come to see Furtwängler's Beethoven 9th Symphony of March 1942 as a kind of protest against Hitler and his henchmen, present for at least one of the performances that week. It has been hailed as one of the greatest and most powerful renditions of this momentous work ever captured by the miracle of recorded sound, as multiple five-star reviews on sites such as Amazon.com testify. Naturally it has seen numerous releases on different labels.

Each previous issue has, no doubt, attempted to deal with the rather poor quality of the original recording in one way or another, so why come back to it for another go? Well partly this has been due to requests received from those desperate for someone to crack the major sonic shortcomings of the recording, in the hope that XR remastering might achieve something where previous efforts have failed, and partly (as is often the case) through sheer curiosity on my part. I had been working on another performance by Furtwängler of the same work, and while I had the various elements of an XR restoration to hand curiosity got the better of me and I experimented with the 1942 *Choral Symphony*.

The results you'll hear in our lengthy sample on this page, comprising the full first movement. Despite some occasional fuzziness caused by peak distortion (much of which I've been able to tame considerably) during the loudest passages, the transformation has been exceptional, allowing the full power and impact of Furtwängler's vision to be experienced as perhaps never before (unless you had the "luck" to be in the hall at the time). Background hiss and noise has been reduced to near-silence, a number of audience coughs have been removed, and XR remastering has brought a fullness and depth of sound, matched by a new openness and clarity lacking in all previous issues.

Experience now one of the most powerful and charged music performances you'll ever hear - in a whole new sonic light.

Andrew Rose

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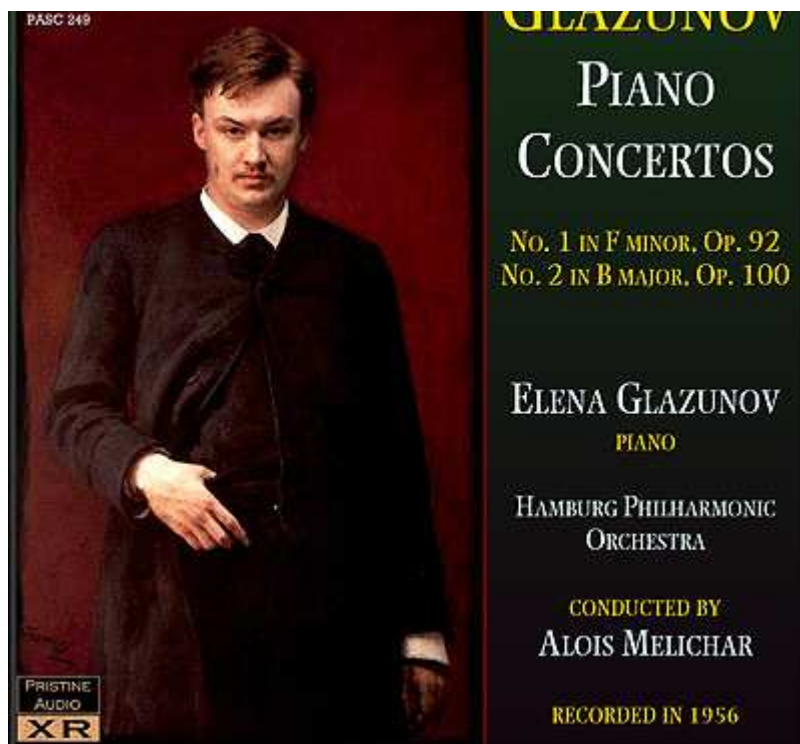
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## New release today:

[GLAZUNOV The Piano Concertos](#)  
Pristine Audio PASC 249



Elena Glazunov, piano



Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra

conductor Alois Melichar

Recorded 1956

Transfers from Telefunken GMA 54 in the Pristine Audio Collection

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

Cover artwork: portrait of Glazunov by Ilya Repin, 1887 (detail)

Total duration: 51:00

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The FLAC downloads:



## *Glazunov's two piano concertos in revitalised recordings*

*XR remasterings bring his adopted daughter's 1956 performances alive*

- **GLAZUNOV** Piano Concerto No. 1 in F minor, Op. 92 [[notes](#) / [score](#)]  
Recorded 31st October 1956
- **GLAZUNOV** Piano Concerto No. 2 in B major, Op. 100 [[score](#)]  
Recorded 29th October 1956

Elena Glazunov, piano

Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra

conductor Alois Melichar

### GLAZUNOV Piano Concertos 1 and 2

In 1928, composer Alexander Glazunov asked a young pianist, Elena Gavrilova, to perform in the Paris première of his second and last piano concerto. A year later, he married her mother and adopted Elena as his daughter.

One can only guess at the insights the pianist may have therefore received into the music of Glazunov and his intentions for these two concertos - but here

is a rare opportunity to hear a family member interpret her (step) father's music.

The original 1956 Telefunken recordings were rather flat - this new XR remastering has really brought them very much to life!



**Piano Concerto No. 1 in F minor, Op. 92**

1st mvt. - Allegro moderato

*(Ambient Stereo version)*

#### Notes on the transfers:

The notes which accompanied this Telefunken LP, issued in the UK in conjunction with Decca, refer to the pianist Elena Glazunov as the composer's daughter. Elsewhere she is referred to as his step-daughter. Certainly there is room for confusion! In fact Glazunov got to know Elena as a pianist in the 1920s and subsequently married her mother, thus making the pianist his step-daughter. That he then formally adopted her technically makes both statements correct, though to imply any kind of blood relationship is to perhaps confuse the reader and blur the truth.

The fact that Glazunov asked Elena to give the Paris première of his second concerto is perhaps more pertinent - he clearly held her pianistic abilities in great store, and one would assume that composer and player/daughter collaborated to a significant degree in preparing for that performance. How much Elena kept to the composer's intentions some thirty years later when making the present recording is of course impossible to know, but this is a rare opportunity to hear the interpretations of a composer's ideas by someone not only of great ability but also with a particular and unusual insight into the mind of the man.

The recording here was generally well-made, if a little acoustically dead, and transferred from an excellent near-mint British Decca pressing from the early 1960s. It responded very well to XR remastering, which has lifted something of a dim veil from the original and brought it greatly to life.

*Andrew Rose*

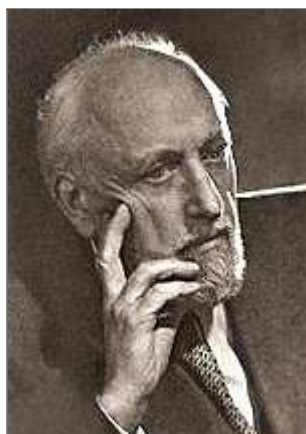
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by Dr. John Duffy

in Ambient Stereo

### Ansermet conducts Roussel Symphonies



Ernest Ansermet

#### **Roussel**

Symphony No. 3  
in G minor, Op. 42

#### **Roussel**

Symphony No. 4  
in A major, Op. 53

**Suisse Romande Orch.  
Conductor Ernest Ansermet**

Recorded at Victoria Hall, Geneva, Switzerland  
1-11 May 1956

Producer: Victor Olof  
Eng: Gil Went

First issued as Decca LXT5234, Dec. 1956, transfer from  
London LL1495 (1957)

Ansermet: [biography](#)

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

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## Pick of the reviews

### [MusicWeb International](#)

**'A refreshing, classical Brahms 4 but a somewhat uneven Mozart 39 '**



**Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)** Symphony No. 4 in E minor, op. 98 (1885) [39:35]<sup>1</sup>

**Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)** Symphony No. 39 in E flat major, K543 (1788) [25:19]<sup>2</sup>

London Symphony Orchestra/Josef Krips

rec. Kingsway Hall, London <sup>1</sup>17, 19, 20 April 1950, <sup>2</sup>18 December 1951.  
ADD

**PRISTINE AUDIO** [PASC 231](#) [64:54]

Listening to this Brahms Symphony 4 I was struck how cleverly constructed it is to defy expectation. For instance, the first movement second theme (tr. 1 1:28) starts with what seems just a fanfare introduction to a broad theme on the cellos, but it's that introduction that gets explored and becomes more powerful late in the exposition and still more in the development. Then what sounds as though it's going to be a repeat of the exposition (3:53) turns out to be the start of the development. And the recapitulation (6:35) begins in slow, philosophic fashion before picking up exposition speed.

The transparency of Josef Krips' classical, objective performance makes all this clear. It comes across lyrically and freshly with no special luxuriating. A good example (from 5:49) is the clarinets' duet. It's in brief alternation with the oboes followed by that sequence of 16 chords alternating between strings and wind headed by and surveying the beginning of the second half of the first theme. Krips presents this with an admirable coolness and appreciation of its progression. You won't hear this passage better done anywhere. Later he allows himself just one extravagance: an acceleration from 10:25 in the coda which I find entirely acceptable because it ensures it is thrilling, as it should be.

So are there any drawbacks? The sound is clear but very bright which makes the violins rather glassy in upper register, the oboes acidic. The bass is correspondingly dry. The timpani is

almost inaudible - a pity in the 4 *ff* crotchet beats at the very end of the movement, the only articulated beats at that point. This is a bit hypercritical for a 1950 recording but I say it so your expectations regarding recording quality will be realistic. This transfer still has more clarity, presence and impact than those of the contemporary recordings I compare below. And you can sample the entire first movement for yourself on the Pristine Audio [website](#).

I compared the 1951 New York Philharmonic/Bruno Walter (IDIS 6392/93). I cite this because it's currently available. You can also hear it in cleaner sound on Sony France 5081732 from the original masters; sadly no longer available. Here are the comparative timings:

| <i>Timings</i> | <i>I</i> | <i>II</i> | <i>III</i> | <i>IV</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|----------------|----------|-----------|------------|-----------|--------------|
| Krips          | 11:34    | 11:17     | 6:41       | 10:03     | 39:35        |
| Walter         | 12:12    | 12:14     | 6:05       | 10:54     | 41:25        |

Walter's performance is, in the main, more measured, more full-blooded, romantic and dramatized. The opening has a crestfallen cast, the second theme is starchier. Walter makes more of the mysterious elements, in particular the strings' semiquaver rustlings which are generally contrasted with the martial aspect of the second theme.

Krips' refusal to gild the lily is again apparent in the slow movement (tr. 2) with a second theme which is an ingenious, broader, higher register idealized version on violins (2:40) of the opening of a first theme they have only hitherto played *pizzicato*. It too transforms into something more vigorous to allow a greater contrast for the even broader and, in Krips' hands, calmer third theme (3:40) on the cellos delicately embellished by the first violins. Krips starts the development (5:48) with dreamier strings cleanly offset by more alert woodwind. The crown of the movement is the return of the third theme on full strings which Krips makes serene, stately and dignified.

Walter's slow movement is more ruminative and savoured. As a result the second theme doesn't evolve naturally from the first as it does with Krips, nor does it progress as naturally. Walter's third theme, however, is beautifully rich and suddenly freer in flow but its return is glutinous.

Krips' scherzo (tr. 3) opens a mite formally. Its reprise is much better with a graceful second theme (0:54), just as marked and a warm and rosy central interlude. Piccolo, triangle and a third kettledrum, all added for this movement, are clearly evident with the timpani focus much improved. Walter's scherzo opens in a rather heavy-handed manner. It too improves after the reprise but his slow treatment of the second theme is mannered.

The thirty variations of the passacaglia theme which make up the finale (tr. 4) are presented starkly and clearly by Krips. Notable is the jagged outline in Variation 4 of the first entry of the violins and violas not playing *pizzicato* (1:03). I would also highlight the creamy yet also relatively dispassionate flute solo in Variation 12 (3:14), the woodwind sympathizing in Variation 13 (3:53) and the trombones adding their comforting weight in Variation 14 (4:30). The woodwind confirm the E major sunlight of these last three variations in Variation 15 (5:01) before we are back to stark reality in E minor and Variation 16 (5:38). For me, in the alternating strings and woodwind of Variation 19 (7:18) Krips is a touch too laid back but his coda (8:56) displays due increase of tension.

Walter's finale is darker-hued and heavier. His slower approach lumbers and is over-rhetorical, though powerful and more sonorous than Krips in the later variations. Walter's flute solo is a distraught, insistent lament, his trombones' variation more grave.

Krips' Mozart Symphony 39 makes a generous but not for me as striking a bonus. The *Adagio* introduction to the first movement (tr. 5) is spacious but also rather marmoreal and shapeless; its strong climax lacks real tension. The *Allegro* main body has more grace in its opening and panache in its *tuttis*. I compared the 1949 recording by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra/Herbert von Karajan (EMI 4768762). Here are the comparative timings:

| <i>Timings</i> | <i>I</i> | <i>II</i> | <i>III</i> | <i>IV</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|----------------|----------|-----------|------------|-----------|--------------|
| Krips          | 8:47     | 8:16      | 4:11       | 4:05      | 25:19        |
| Karajan        | 8:38     | 8:13      | 4:01       | 3:46      | 24:38        |

Karajan's imposing introduction is slower than Krips' (2:58 against 2:42) yet more successful because of its sense of direction, shape and tension. His *Allegro* opening appears much lighter and, if his *tuttis* have a touch more verve than Krips', that might be because the timpani focus (here we go again) of EMI's recording is better. In one respect, however, I prefer Krips: his violins' slithering semiquaver cascades are more cleanly articulated, not so much thrown off as those of Karajan.

In the slow movement (tr. 6) Krips dances neatly, but I felt rather cautiously. His determination and direction are reserved for what are its darkly contrasted yet transitional passages in F minor, the first at 1:47. Moreover, in the opening section intonation is a bit dodgy. Karajan, on the other hand, offers sweetness of violin tone, lovingly shaped and moulded phrases. Everything is fitted beautifully into place, while incorporating dramatic passages in F minor.

Krips makes the Minuet elegant and lilting, if rather more at a leisurely *Andante* than the marked *Allegretto*. His Trio is blithe. Karajan's Minuet has more impetus and with it majesty, though less relaxation than Krips. His Trio is more mellifluous. Krips' finale is scintillating in its rigorous articulation, though the recording of the strings is again somewhat glassy. Karajan here is faster yet lighter and more frolicsome, less effortful.

In sum, a refreshing, classical Brahms 4 but a somewhat uneven Mozart 39.

## **Michael Greenhalgh**

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