

Great Conductors of the 20th Century Vol.13 - Eugene Ormandy



CD1 Brahms: Symphony No 4 1. *I. Allegro non troppo* (12:23) 2. *II. Andante moderato* (11:54) 3. *III. Allegro giocoso - Poco meno presto - Tempo I* (06:25) 4. *IV. Allegro energico e passionato - Piu Allegro* (10:29) 5. Strauss - *Don Juan* (16:56) 6. Webern- *In Sommerwind* (12:24)
Philadelphia Orchestra (1-4,6) Bavarian Radio
Symphony Orchestra (5) CD2 1. Kabalevsky: *Colas Breugnon - Overture* (04:48)
Rachmaninov: Symphony No.2 in E minor, Op.27
2. *I. Largo - Allegro moderato* (18:49) 3. *II. Allegro molto* (09:39) 4. *III. Adagio* (13:01) 5. *IV. Allegro vivace* (14:55) 6. Sibelius - *Lemminkainen Suite, Op.22 - Lemminkainen's Return* (06:18)
Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (1) Philadelphia Orchestra (2-6) Eugene Ormandy - conductor

The 'Great Composers of the 20th Century' series is a joint project between IMG Artists and EMI Classics. And most worthwhile it is proving, since reassessments are being made and new material entering the catalogue.

This 2CD set of recordings conducted by Eugene Ormandy offers ample testimony of his stature as a major figure in the music of the 20th century. When he left Europe in 1921 to make a new life across the Atlantic, he determined that a change of name might help his cause. He had been born Jenő Blau, but despite the success he had already achieved as a violinist in his native Budapest, he felt that the German colloquialism associated with his surname might prove an obstacle to his career. He took his new name - Ormandy - from the Normandie, the ship on which he made his transatlantic crossing.

Having worked in Minneapolis through the 1920s, he took over the Philadelphia Orchestra from

Leopold Stokowski in 1936. This was undoubtedly a hard act to follow, but follow he did, for no fewer than 44 years, which probably ranks as the longest collaboration on record between an orchestra and a principal conductor. Together they made recordings galore, across a wide range of repertoire, and many favourite pieces were recorded more than once.

For example, this is the fourth of four recordings of Rachmaninov's Symphony No. 2, and the only one without the cuts that used to be made until quite recently. It is a fine performance, and sumptuously recorded, which suits the music. Tempi flow at just the right pace, and the subtle changes of phrasing bring the diversity of the material to the fore without sacrificing the line of symphonic development. There is no lack of expressive emotional tension, and while others may profess favourite interpretations, this one has the benefit of modern technology, always a telling factor in romantic music.

Ormandy, like all the great conductors, loved the music of Brahms and frequently performed the symphonies. This version of the Fourth Symphony dates from 1967 and again the sound is most pleasing. There is no lack of drama in the performance, which is strong and purposeful, particularly in the outer movements where the symphonic momentum is at its height. Perhaps there could have been rather more poetry in the slow movement, but that too is keenly shaped.

These two symphonies dominate the two discs, of course, but the additional items are no less interesting. The Munich recording of Strauss's Don Juan is in somewhat opaque mono sound, certainly less colourful than the version Ormandy recorded in Philadelphia for CBS. He was a committed Straussian, understandably enough with such orchestras as these at his disposal. The Don Juan performance is well paced, of course, but some subtleties are missed in the more poetic moments, largely because of the recorded sound, I would suppose. There is no lack of excitement, however.

The shorter items are particularly worthwhile. It was Ormandy who was responsible for bringing Webern's early romantic idyll *Im Sommerwind* to wider attention, and he conducted its premiere in 1962, some 27 years after the composer's death, and some sixty years after it was composed. The performance is atmospheric and beautifully pointed.

These words are hardly appropriate for Kabalevsky's *Colas Breugnon* Overture, however. This opts rather for virtuosity and brilliance, and Ormandy and his Bavarian players rise to the challenge. Virtuosity of an even more uplifting kind can be heard in the programme's closing item, *The Return of Lemminkainen* from Sibelius's *Legends*. Here was another composer with

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whom Ormandy had a special empathy, and in one of his later recordings, from 1978, he and the Philadelphia Orchestra can be heard at their very best. The words of Sibelius exactly fit with Ormandy's performance: 'I think we Finns ought not to be ashamed to show more pride in ourselves. Let us wear our caps at an angle! For Lemminkainen is an aristocrat, without question an aristocrat!'--- Terry Barfoot, MusicWeb International

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