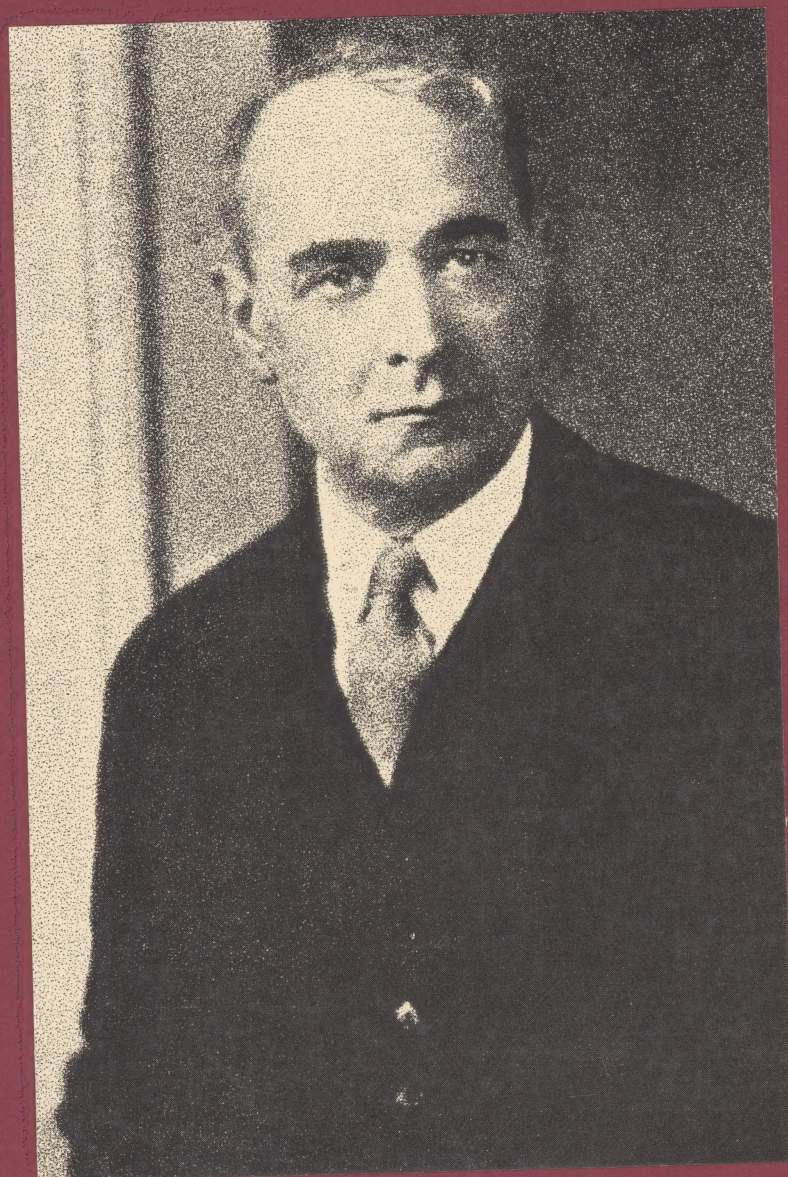


Treasury of Immortal Performances



SERGE KOUSSEVITZKY
BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
TCHAIKOVSKY: SYMPHONY No. 5
RACHMANINOFF: VOCALISE
RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF: THE BATTLE OF KERSHENETZ

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Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 5
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Fifth is tighter and more highly disciplined than that of any other Tchaikovsky symphony. There is about the whole work a quality of inevitability that sets it apart from the composer's other symphonic creations. Yet Tchaikovsky himself, who was assailed by self-doubt throughout his lifetime, found the Fifth the least satisfying of his symphonies. In November 1888, after the first performances, he wrote to his patroness, Madame Nadejda von Meck: "I find the Symphony a failure. There is in it something repellent, something superfluous, patchy and insincere. Am I really played out, as they say? Can I merely repeat and ring the changes on my earlier idiom? Last night I looked through *our* Symphony [the Fourth]. What a difference! How immeasurably superior it is! It is very, very sad!" The judgment of posterity, of course, has overruled Tchaikovsky's appraisal; the Fifth Symphony is universally beloved as a cornerstone of the literature. To have it available once again in the inimitable performance by Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra is to discover the unique power and passion of the music as though for the first time.

Rachmaninoff and Rimsky-Korsakoff

The two brief Russian selections included in this album were recorded originally as "filler" works in 78 rpm albums devoted to larger scores: Rachmaninoff's *Vocalise* was included in the album devoted to Koussevitzky's impassioned performance of the composer's *The Isle of the Dead*; the Rimsky-Korsakoff excerpt first saw the light of day as the odd side in the Koussevitzky album devoted to the orchestral version of Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz*.

The Rachmaninoff *Vocalise* figured on Boston Symphony Orchestra programs during three different seasons of Koussevitzky's era. Twice it was given as Rachmaninoff conceived it originally: a wordless song with a singer humming the brooding melancholy of the melodic line. Interestingly, a performance in 1944 brought to Boston two performers, then husband and wife, who were reigning popular idols: André Kostelanetz as conductor

and Lily Pons as soloist. The following year Koussevitzky conducted the work in the composer's arrangement for instruments alone, and it was then that the present recording was made.

The *Vocalise* was the last of a series of fourteen songs that Rachmaninoff composed just prior to World War I as his Opus 34. The mood throughout is autumnal, and the song is a perfect example of Rachmaninoff's ability to compose a long, extended, haunting melody. As played by the Boston Symphony under Koussevitzky's direction it is also a perfect example of the rich, velvety string texture that was so much a part of the sound of the orchestra during the Koussevitzky years.

The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevronia was the next to last of Rimsky-Korsakoff's fifteen operas. It has sometimes been called "the Russian *Parsifal*" because of the mystical and allegorical elements in the story. The orchestral excerpt titled *The Battle of Kershenetz* is taken from the third act and is a vivid portrait of warriors on horseback. A suite from the opera figured in a Koussevitzky concert in Boston in 1927, and twice in 1939 he conducted *The Battle of Kershenetz*. He recorded the excerpt shortly thereafter.

Mr. Bookspan is Program Director of WQXR, New York, and Producer and Commentator for its weekly broadcasts of the Boston Symphony Orchestra concerts.

Library of Congress Card Numbers R66-3126, 3127, 3128 apply to this recording.

KOUSSEVITZKY

A Reminiscence by LUKAS FOSS

Serge Koussevitzky was not only a famous conductor but also a controversial figure in the world of music. Those who knew him loved him. Those who did not know him were either violently for or against him. He remained a controversial figure to his death. With him died an entire era of "Russo-Americana." Boston, while remaining a city with a great symphony orchestra, ceased from one day to the next to be a mecca for young composers, a center of symphonic premières that made the nation sit up and take notice. Prokofieff, Stravinsky and Shostakovich works were no longer launched in Boston when Koussevitzky left. Launched is the right word. Koussevitzky knew how to present a work when he believed in it. He demanded that everyone around him concern himself with it. A première under Koussevitzky was the event in town simply because it was the event in his life. His enthusiasm was sincere, unqualifying, catching, childlike, sometimes spent on an object unworthy of such missionary zeal, but by and large his instincts led him to many a compositional talent. Certainly his tastes were limited. Atonal music was a closed book to him. Perhaps American concert life was not ready for atonality. Certainly Koussevitzky was not ahead of his time; he was of his time, full of the prejudices of his time, and like every strong personality he impressed his prejudices, his tastes, his likes on everything around him. What was unique about Koussevitzky was not his foresight but his interest, zeal, love. It was this love which made him a great conductor, a great teacher. With it he silenced his critics, even those among them who were perhaps his intellectual peers. Through this love he managed to imbue a Tchaikovsky symphony again and again with an intensity, a spontaneity which our more blasé interpreters lose somewhere between the second

and the twenty-second performances. With Koussevitzky one heard the great 19th-century literature as if for the first time.

I was pianist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra during his last years at the helm of this great institution, and I witnessed this miracle time and again. He used the simplest language to rally the musicians to greater concentration or greater warmth or greater precision. His demands, commands and reprimands are recorded in the form of scribbles made by the orchestra men into the orchestra parts at rehearsals. No librarian would dare erase them. They are part of the Boston Symphony's sacred heritage. Couched in inimitable "Koussi" grammar, they are read now with a mixture of nostalgia and disbelief. "*Kinder*, how can you play so cold when the sun is shining . . . I make a *geste* like I want to kill, gentlemen, and you give me something nothing . . . *Bassi*, you hold the most beautiful instrument and all you do is scratch . . . A thousand times, until I will have . . ." After trying the passage, "thousand times, magical word," etc., etc. He scolded, he cajoled, he threatened. The blood rushing to his face: "If you do not give me the sound, I will resign." And then, his face so red we would begin to worry: "I will not resign—you will resign," the "you" accompanied by a gesture encompassing all 105 men of the orchestra.

Simple methods; but they worked because of the man, because he said it and meant it, because it mattered. The music, the musicians, America—everything mattered. Everything was all-important. Music was his whole life, and the young in music his children, his hope for the future.

His students will never forget him: Leonard Bernstein, Thor Johnson, Eleazar de Carvalho and many others including the undersigned, who was the recipient of much of his love, generosity, help, praise and sometimes furious critique and reproach. Tanglewood was the physical plant that reflected his dream as Bayreuth reflects Wagner's. Now Tanglewood still keeps Koussevitzky's dream alive. So does the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, which is celebrating its twenty-fifth anni-

versary this year. The Foundation can look proudly to a commissioning feat which includes many of the great works of recent vintage and almost all the composers of note. What a legacy! And this album promises to stretch the lifetime of some of Koussevitzky's favorite performances. The reissuing of these recordings means a great deal indeed to all those who are nostalgic or curious about Koussevitzky and the era which died with him.



SIDE 1

TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64

First Movement: Andante; Allegro con anima

(Recorded in Symphony Hall, Boston—November 22, 1944/Matrices: D4-RC-616-2, 617-1, 618-1 and 619-1A)

Second Movement: Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza

(Recorded November 22, 1944/Matrices: D4-RC-620-1A, 621-1A, 622-1 and 623-1 [part])

SIDE 2

Third Movement: Valse; Allegro moderato

(Recorded November 22, 1944/Matrices: D4-RC-623-1 [part] and 624-1A)

Fourth Movement: Andante maestoso; Allegro vivace

(Recorded November 22, 1944/Matrices: D4-RC-625-1, 626-1 and 627-1; the Symphony was first issued as M-1057)

RACHMANINOFF

Vocalise, Op. 34, No. 14 (Arranged for orchestra by Rachmaninoff)

(Recorded in Symphony Hall—April 24, 1945/Matrix: D5-RC-927-2; first issued as the final side of M-1024)

RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF

The Battle of Kershenetz (from *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh*)

(Recorded in Symphony Hall—November 7, 1939/Matrix: CS-043573-2; first issued as the final side of M-870)

Timings: Side 1—14:58, 13:35 • Side 2—6:08, 11:30, 4:53, 4:07

Notes by MARTIN BOOKSPAN

The orchestral works of Tchaikovsky—and especially the last three symphonies—always drew from Serge Koussevitzky the last full measure of his conducting devotion. His were highly personalized interpretations that penetrated far beneath the surface of the printed notes. He never hesitated to indulge in unmarked tempo changes for the sake of heightening the drama inherent in the music. He was able to achieve dynamic contrasts that were awesome in their ferocity. And as no other conductor in my experience, Koussevitzky was able to endow Tchaikovsky's orchestral scores with a grandeur and a nobility that were larger than life. During the course of his quarter century as Music Director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra (1924-1949) he recorded for RCA Victor the last three Tchaikovsky symphonies, along with the C Major Serenade for String Orchestra, the *Romeo and Juliet* Overture-Fantasy and the orchestral fantasy *Francesca da Rimini*.

The Fifth Symphony figured on the programs of Koussevitzky's very first season in Boston, and he came back to it in fifteen subsequent seasons. To conclude his 1933-34 season Koussevitzky arranged a Tchaikovsky Festival, and the Fifth Symphony was one of the scores on those programs. And the closing weeks of the 1939-40 season were devoted by Koussevitzky to the celebration of the centennial of the birth of Tchaikovsky; on each of three programs one of the last symphonies was coupled with a Beethoven symphony. The present performance of the Tchaikovsky Fifth was recorded during the 1944-45 season, the last time Koussevitzky turned his attention to the score during his Boston tenure.

There are those who consider the Fifth the most organically unified of all the Tchaikovsky symphonies—and this is not only because of the recurring motto theme that appears at the very opening of the score in the clarinets and then returns in each of the succeeding movements, finally to cap the Symphony in blazing triumph at the very end. The formal structure of the

RCA VICTOR



TCHAIKOVSKY
SYMPHONY No. 5 IN E MINOR, Op. 64

LM 2901
(TPRM-2285)

SIDE 1
RED SEAL

I. Andante; Allegro con anima
II. Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
SERGE Koussevitzky, CONDUCTOR

TRADE MARK REGISTERED • MARCA(S) REGISTRADA(S) • RADIO CORPORATION OF AMERICA—MADE IN U.S.A.

MONAURAL

TPRM-2285-15

RCA VICTOR



HIS MASTER'S VOICE

TCHAIKOVSKY
SYMPHONY No. 5 IN E MINOR, Op. 64

LM 2901
(TRRM-2286)

SIDE 2
RED SEAL

III. Valse: Allegro moderato
IV. Andante maestoso; Allegro vivace

RACHMANINOFF

VOCALISE, Op. 34, No. 14

RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF

THE BATTLE OF KERSHENETZ

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
SERGE Koussevitzky
CONDUCTOR

MONAURAL

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