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| [1] Announcer | 1:40 |
| [2] Richard WAGNER (1813-1883) RIENZI – Overture | 11:52 |
| [3] Announcer | 2:20 |
| [4] Comments by Leopold Stokowski | 0:34 |
| [5] Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)
LE NOZZE DI FIGARO – “Non più andrai” | 3:57 |
| [6] Alexander BORODIN (1833-1887)
PRINCE IGOR – “No rest, no peace” | 8:16 |
| [7] Charles GOUNOD (1818-1893)
FAUST – “Vous qui faites l’endormie” | 2:59 |
| [8] Announcer | 0:36 |
| [9] Giacomo PUCCINI (1858-1924) TOSCA – “Vissi d’arte” | 3:41 |
| [10] Announcer | 1:38 |
| [11] Giuseppe VERDI (1813-1901) AIDA – Duet Act III “Ciel, mio padre” | 8:26 |
| [12] Announcer | 0:34 |
| [13] Richard WAGNER – LOHENGRIN – Prelude Act 1 | 9:19 |
| [14] Announcer | 0:41 |
| [15] Richard WAGNER – GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG
“Brunnhilde’s Immolation” (Final Scene) | 18:47 |
| [16] Announcer | 1:25 |

GEORGE LONDON [5-7]; [11] BIRGIT NILSSON [9]; [11]; [15]
 PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA conducted by LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI
 Stereo broadcast - Philadelphia, 20 January 1962

**Guild**
HISTORICAL**STOKOWSKI****GALA NIGHT
AT THE OPERA****BIRGIT NILSSON
GEORGE LONDON****WAGNER**

Rienzi Overture

Lohengrin Prelude Act 1

*arias from***MOZART**

The Marriage of Figaro

BORODIN Prince Igor**GOUNOD** Faust**PUCCINI** Tosca**VERDI** Aida**WAGNER**

Götterdämmerung

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA

Stereo broadcast - 20 January 1962



A GUILD HISTORICAL RELEASE

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first American to sing the title role in Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov* in Moscow, the opera being recorded there complete and issued by American Columbia in 1960. By January 1962 therefore in Philadelphia London was internationally famous and, as we can hear, at the height of his powers. Sadly, London was not to enjoy a long career; within a few years, health issues began to plague him, obliging him to curtail his appearances. Consequently, such recordings as this live concert are valuable mementoes of a truly outstanding singer.

The great Swedish soprano Birgit Nilsson was also at the height of her powers when this concert in Philadelphia took place. Two years older than London, her international breakthrough came when she was invited by Fritz Busch to appear at Glyndebourne in 1951 (Busch's last season); her debut at the Vienna State Opera two years later reinforced the critical and public acclaim that had greeted her earlier appearances. In January 1962, of course, she was at the height of her recording career, but she had not at that time recorded any of the three operas which featured in Stokowski's concert, although she had recorded Puccini's *Turandot* and *La fanciulla del West*, and two operas from Wagner's Ring cycle – *Die Walküre* with Erich Leinsdorf conducting and Siegfried – the latter with Solti as part of the famous on-going Decca *Ring* (she was to re-record *Die Walküre* with Solti), but the point is that with Stokowski this is one of the first extant recordings of Nilsson in Brünnhilde's Immolation scene at the end of *Götterdämmerung*; it is preceded by the orchestra alone, in the Prelude to Act I of Wagner's *Lohengrin*, which Stokowski had recorded twice before for Victor in Philadelphia in 1924 (acoustic) and 1927 (electric).

The concert is also of exceptional interest in that we have possibly the only surviving recording of Nilsson and London together, in the duet from Act III of Verdi's opera *Aida*, 'Ciel, mio padre! .. Rivedrai le foreste imbalsamate', wherein Amonasro (London) seeks to persuade Aida to obtain from Radamès the location of the Egyptian army. Quite apart from the quality of these two great singers, we should be equally impressed by the sympathetic partnership of Leopold Stokowski – particularly in the myriad changes within the solo episodes of this excerpt, to make one wonder what the opera world had lost in not engaging the great conductor when opportunities were there.

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Stokowski in Opera

Such is the large quantity of recordings of performances conducted by the great Leopold Stokowski that have been issued – many for the first time – since his death in 1977 at the age of 95 that the world of music is now far better placed to evaluate his artistry through the gramophone than it ever was in his lifetime. And yet an aspect of his career, that of him conducting opera, remains little-known, even today.

This is perhaps as it should be, for Stokowski but seldom ventured into the opera house. When he did, of course, and certainly when his reputation had been fully established, it was almost literally front-page news – for he was considered to be an orchestral conductor, first and foremost. In that regard, he stood to one side of other great conductors who were his contemporaries, both older and younger: Toscanini – perhaps especially – and Herbert von Karajan, alongside such as Fritz Busch, Bruno Walter, Wilhelm Furtwängler – to take a few names at random: these great artists were equally at home in the opera house as in the concert hall, but there is another, more practical, element to consider with regard to Stokowski and opera. This was that his career as a conductor, unlike those we have mentioned, was launched in the United States, where his fame – especially in Philadelphia – grew considerably (in this instance, the international spread of gramophone recordings played a major role), but his career was, in operatic terms, circumscribed by the fact that despite the vastness of the USA in terms of area and population, there was but one opera house worthy of inclusion in the highest echelons of world class companies – the New York Metropolitan.

This is not the place to embark upon a discussion of the machinations and internal politicking of Opera Houses the world over – suffice it to say that it has always formed part and parcel of the world of opera administration, but the fact remains that an opera house, despite employing hundreds of people – musicians, of course, and other staff 'behind the scenes' – can, at any one time, only have one 'Music Director', or 'Chief Conductor'. Administrators are always on the look-out to engage the most famous opera stars of the day, whose demands have to be considered alongside those of the conductor in charge of the particular production. In such circumstances, clashes of temperament are often more frequently encountered than in other areas of music – and it is also often the case that some artists, notably conductors, simply do not wish to get involved.

As Stokowski was for the best part of 30 years music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, his activities were of course concentrated there, with relatively few engagements outside of the large city in Pennsylvania, and opportunities for building a meaningful relationship with, say, the Metropolitan Opera were virtually chimerical. Not that Stokowski himself was always autocratic in his demands – occasionally, as with any great musician, he could be scathing towards those whose standards were manifestly less than his own, but those who – perhaps fearful of his reactions – met him for the first time with some trepidation were often surprised by his warmth and understanding. Of course, in Philadelphia, if he was to conduct opera it would have to be concert performances, not staged in costume, and a glance at the operatic music he did perform in Philadelphia reveals a surprising range and empathy. In 1930, Stokowski conducted the American premiere of Arnold Schoenberg's *Die Glückliche Hand* – a staged performance in Philadelphia – and the following year the US premiere of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* in a concert performance. It is not generally realised that Stokowski was the only conductor to perform all of Schoenberg's orchestral music during the composer's lifetime, giving the world premieres of both the Violin Concerto and Piano Concerto. But as early as 1923, Stokowski had conducted the American premiere of music from another rarely-heard opera – Rimsky-Korsakov's *Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh* – although it was not given wholly complete.

It is a matter for regret that commercial recordings of these works under Stokowski's baton were not made at the time, but with regard to the gramophone, in general terms Stokowski's large-scale orchestral transcriptions from opera were the best-known examples of his work in that field. Yet there were relatively few of these, almost all of which were what he called 'symphonic syntheses' from Wagner's music-dramas (together with one of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, an opera he had introduced to America in 1929 in a collation of its two original versions). However, for RCA, Stokowski did record substantial excerpts from *Boris Godunov* in San Francisco in 1952, with Nicola Rossi-Lemeni, as well as a companion selection from Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila* in 1954 with Risë Stevens, Jan Peerce and Robert Merrill with the NBC Symphony (one of the first recordings to be made after Toscanini's retirement that year). Over twenty years earlier in Philadelphia, Stokowski had recorded excerpts from Wagner's *Die Walküre* with the great baritone Lawrence Tibbett, and

also *Parsifal*. And in 1933, Stokowski had given the first broadcast in the United States of *Parsifal*, from which off-air excerpts exist, with Nelson Eddy, Rose Bampton and Robert Steel.

Stokowski's most significant series of operatic performances in America were of Puccini's *Turandot* at the Metropolitan Opera in 1961, with a superb cast including Birgit Nilsson, Franco Corelli, Anna Moffo, Alessio de Paulis and Bonaldo Giaiotti. A broadcast recording of one of the performances has survived, demonstrating Stokowski's mastery in a field with which he is little associated, and on this present CD we can hear Birgit Nilsson again, with George London, from a gala concert given in Philadelphia in January 1962, in music by Wagner, Mozart, Borodin, Gounod, Puccini and Verdi.

Interestingly, to make a suitable concert programme (and to give the singers some rest!) there are two purely orchestral items in the programme, which opens with Wagner's overture to *Rienzi*. This was a work which played a not insignificant part in the Stokowski discography, for he made the first ever recording of the Overture (admittedly, slightly cut owing to the exigencies of 78rpm discs at the time) in 1919 with the Philadelphia Orchestra, and again the first electrical recording of the complete overture, also in Philadelphia, in 1927; he re-recorded the Overture in New York twenty years later and for a fourth time in London with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 1973.

George London sings three arias, by Mozart, Borodin and Gounod (demonstrating his multi-lingual abilities! – the Borodin not sung in English, but in Russian). The first, 'Non più andrai', from Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, is a very rare example of Stokowski conducting Mozart. Parenthetically, we may note that Guild has released a CD of every known performance of Stokowski conducting Mozart's orchestral music, including two piano concertos, on GHCD 2405. We may further note that perhaps the most widely-known example of Stokowski conducting Mozart is the 'Alleluia' from the *Exsultate Jubilate* in the 1937 film '100 Men and a Girl' where the conductor starred with Deanna Durbin, a film nominated for several Academy Awards, one of which was won by the film's music director, Charles Previn, uncle of André.

Returning to the 1962 Philadelphia concert, this occasion was a reunion for London and Stokowski. As a young man of 29, in 1950 London sang in a famous performance of Mahler's Eighth Symphony at New York's Carnegie Hall conducted by Stokowski. London went on to become the