

Fikret AMIROV (1922-1984)

Symphonic Suite on Azerbaijan Folk Tunes

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|------|
| 1 | I. Allegretto | 3:58 |
| 2 | II. Andante sostenuto | 4:33 |
| 3 | III. Allegretto | 2:18 |
| 4 | IV. Mesto | 2:58 |

American Broadcast Premiere

Dimitri SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

Symphony No.1, Op.10

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I. Allegretto – Allegro non troppo | 9:19 |
| 6 | II. Allegro | 4:12 |
| 7 | III. Lento | 9:20 |
| 8 | IV. Lento – Allegro molto | 10:27 |

Recorded – Carnegie Hall, New York, 5 March 1960

Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872-1958)

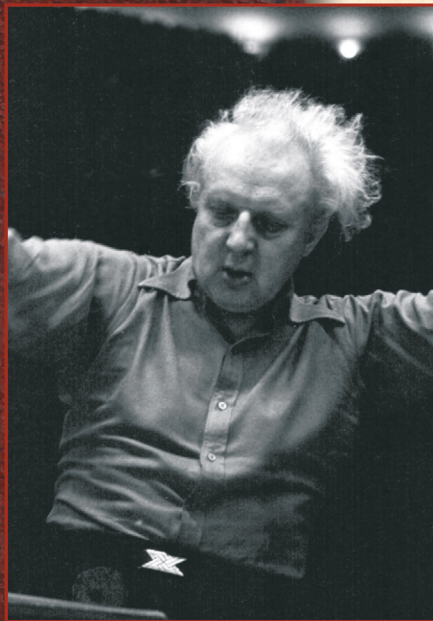
- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 9 | Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis | 17:14 |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------|

Robert KURKA (1921-1957)

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 10 | Symphonic Epilogue on Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar' | 8:07 |
|----|---|------|

Recorded – Carnegie Hall, New York, 3 March 1962

PHILHARMONIC-SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK
LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI



**LEOPOLD
STOKOWSKI**

SHOSTAKOVICH
Symphony No.1

**VAUGHAN
WILLIAMS**

**Fantasia on a Theme
by Thomas Tallis**

with music from
Azerbaijan and America

**PHILHARMONIC-SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK**

Recorded: 1960 & 1962
FIRST COMMERCIAL RELEASE



A GUILD HISTORICAL RELEASE

- Master source: Recordings from the collection of Edward Johnson
- Remastering: Peter Reynolds
- Final master preparation: Reynolds Mastering, Colchester, England
- Photographs: Edward Johnson
- Design: Paul Brooks, paulmbrooks@virginmedia.com
- Art direction: Guild GmbH
- Executive co-ordination: Guild GmbH

- **Guild GmbH, Bärenholzstrasse 8, 8537 Nussbaumen/TG, Switzerland**
Tel: +41 (0) 52 742 85 00 Fax: +41 (0) 52 742 85 09 (Head Office)
- **Guild GmbH, PO Box 5092, Colchester, Essex CO1 1FN, Great Britain**
- **e-mail: info@guildmusic.com World WideWeb-Site: <http://www.guildmusic.com>**

WARNING: Copyright subsists in all recordings under this label. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performances Ltd., 1 Upper James Street, London W1F 9EE.



Stokowski visiting Vaughan Williams, 1957

His early death removed a composer of considerable gifts, yet one who was virtually self-taught, although he did study for a time with Darius Milhaud in Mills College, California. His *Julius Caesar – Symphonic Epilogue after Shakespeare's play* (to give the work its full title), Opus 28, was composed in 1955 to a commission from the San Diego Symphony Orchestra, and for the premiere Kurka provided his own programme note, from which we quote:

'*Julius Caesar* is a 20th-century musical commentary on this particular drama. The music does not follow the action of the play, but rather attempts to bring out, in terms of our contemporary world, the various public and political patterns that range through the play. A great tragedy, such as *Julius Caesar*, rather than depressing us, teaches us an important spiritual lesson.'

The strength and nobility of this music must have appealed strongly to Stokowski, who gives a compelling account of this unjustly neglected score.

the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* for string quartet and double string orchestra. Although regarded as being a quintessentially English work (which it is), it soon helped to make the composer's international reputation – not least in America, where (for example) it became familiar to the strings of the New York Philharmonic, following its New York premiere in 1922 under Walter Damrosch (and who subsequently conducted the work relatively often), with succeeding Philharmonic performances under Willem Mengelberg, Bruno Walter and Dmitri Mitropoulos. There is an intensity to Stokowski's performance which over-rides the occasional audience noises – this is an account shot through with love and understanding.

The American composer Robert Kurka died from leukaemia in December 1957, a few days short of what would have been his 36th birthday.

© Robert Matthew-Walker, 2014

The four works on this CD demonstrate aspects of the quite extraordinary range of Leopold Stokowski's programming throughout his career, for we may be quite certain that no other conductor in the 20th-century – still less a conductor of his eminence – came anywhere near Stokowski's breadth of repertoire, a breadth which it is claimed saw him give no fewer than 2000 premieres in a lifetime of concert-giving spread over more than 60 years.

That figure, in itself, is astonishing for any performing musician – still less, their audience – to contemplate, the more so when we may consider that communication in the modern world has accelerated to the point where events can be instantaneously reported upon throughout the world. Such communication was the stuff of future dreams at the time when Stokowski was born in London in 1882. He studied there at the Royal College of Music and Royal College of Organists, before emigrating to the United States in 1905, where he became music director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in 1909 and of the Philadelphia Orchestra three years later. He stayed in Philadelphia until the late 1930s, by which time his many recordings with the Orchestra allied to what one might call an element of showmanship – the latter in legitimate (and frequently successful) attempts to broaden the appeal of classical music in reaching out to a wider audience – had made him world-famous.

His fame was to prove a double-edged sword: whilst his records sold in their thousands (he could hardly have made as many recordings as he did in Philadelphia had they not), there were detractors who appeared to be somewhat unnerved by the success he undoubtedly enjoyed, to the point where his musical abilities were often questioned. Whatever elements lay behind those criticisms, since the conductor's death at the age of 95 in 1977 the musical world has been enriched by the issue – in many instances for the first time – of live recordings and broadcasts of his performances, which – in the absence of visual counterparts – oblige us to listen solely to the musical results, unencumbered by video or other extraneous distractions.

The result has been a world-wide reassessment of Stokowski's art – and not solely of his art alone, for many broadcasts by other great conductors who were his contemporaries have also been made available during these past 30-40 years – as a result of which that 'quite extraordinary range' of Stokowski's repertoire with which we began our observations is today demonstrably self-evident.

That 'range' has, at its heart, the central point of Stokowski's conducting career: he knew, from a very early age, that what a creative artist needs – and responds to – above all, is practical encouragement. It may be thought that a conductor who had achieved the pre-eminence of Stokowski could perform such music as he wanted, and to a degree that remained true, but even one whose fame virtually guaranteed a large audience could not ignore the established masters in his programming, for not every piece of modern music would sit comfortably alongside familiar works from the repertoire. This is why the concerts Stokowski selected and gave with the New York Philharmonic in 1960

and 1962, from which the music on this CD is taken, contained a judicious mixture of the old, the new, and what one might additionally term music by composers with whom Stokowski evinced a close association.

We begin with music by the Azerbaijani composer Fikret Amirov (1922-1984). This is his *Symphonic Suite on Azerbaijan Folk Tunes*, composed in 1950. Amirov was arguably the most prominent composer from Azerbaijan during the Soviet era; drafted into the Soviet army after the Nazi invasion of Russia in 1941, he was wounded and returned home to continue his musical studies. The ancient country of Azerbaijan lies on the western coast of the Caspian Sea, and is bordered on the west by Armenia. Ethnomusicologists often refer to the folk music of that region being not at all dissimilar, from country to country, and, as a musical patriot, Amirov felt drawn naturally to the folk idioms of his homeland.

It helped that Amirov's father was himself a noted folk-singer of the ancient 'khanande' mugam style, which may briefly be described as music emanating from a multi-ethnic tradition, widely and variedly evolved in the broad region wherein it is found, music which is at all times distinguished by a brilliance and fast-flowing sense of rhythmic and melodic change. To Western ears, the music of Aram Khachaturian (Georgian-born, of Armenian extraction) may appear close in character to Amirov's, but the Azerbaijani's music was such as to appeal strongly to Stokowski: in 1959, he gave the American premiere of what was described as the composer's *Azerbaijan Mugam* with the Houston Symphony Orchestra (there are several works by Amirov to which this generic title can be applied). The following year, on 3 March 1960, Stokowski and the NYPO gave the US Premiere of the present *Symphonic Suite*, followed by its first American broadcast two days later in the performance heard here.

It is clear that, at this time, Stokowski doubtless found Amirov's music attractive: it is vivid and colourful, highly rhythmic (especially in the Suite's third movement), and brilliantly orchestrated throughout (which it undoubtedly is). The virtuoso New York Philharmonic clearly revels in the many opportunities the score calls for display. It is interesting that, at a time when the Soviet Union was keen on the one hand to seek a unified political and social structure throughout the USSR, on the other it was encouraging composers to mine the rich vein of different ethnic folk-based music in their concert works, an artistic stance which Amirov readily and consistently embraced.

An interesting point regarding Amirov's Suite is that the brilliant and lively third movement is marked *Allegretto* whereas the rhythmic drive of the music would suggest a marking such as *Allegro molto*. The apparent dichotomy between tempo indications and metronome markings is also often found in Shostakovich's music – to the point where the composer was occasionally asked for elucidation. Shostakovich invariably replied that the metronome marking is correct, the implication being that the tempo indication refers at all times to the underlying pulse of the music, not the individual beat.



Stokowski applauding Shostakovich, Moscow 1958

Shostakovich's individual approach to this by no means unimportant matter was there from the beginning, and certainly is an aspect of his first undoubted masterpiece, the First Symphony Opus 10, which he completed at the age of 18. It is often quite erroneously claimed that he was 19 when the work was written, but that was his age when the Symphony was premiered on May 12, 1926, under Nikolai Malko, in Leningrad, less than a year after it had gained him his graduation diploma at the Leningrad Conservatory.

Almost exactly a year after that premiere, Bruno Walter conducted the Symphony's German premiere in Berlin, and eighteen months later, on November 2nd, 1928, Stokowski gave the US premiere with the Philadelphia Orchestra – the first time any of Shostakovich's orchestral music had been heard in America. Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra went on to make the world premiere recording of the work, in November 1933, for RCA-Victor, so by the time the conductor came to give this performance almost thirty years later his knowledge of the work was profound, and indeed arguably more detailed than that of almost any other conductor.

Thirty years before Stokowski gave the American premiere of Shostakovich's First Symphony (he went on to give the first USA performances of the composer's Third, Sixth and Eleventh Symphonies, and to make a legendary recording of the Fifth Symphony with the Philadelphia Orchestra, as well as the first American recordings of the Sixth and Eleventh Symphonies) the conductor was in his home city of London. He was in the midst of his studies at the Royal College of Music and the Royal College of Organists, where at both institutions one of his fellow pupils was Ralph Vaughan Williams.

After leaving London for America in 1905, Stokowski never forgot his friend, and thereafter he would often programme music by Vaughan Williams and record it for the gramophone. Stokowski made the world premiere recording of RVW's Sixth Symphony, and gave the US premiere of the Ninth not long after the composer's death in August 1958 aged 85. One work he had a particular affection for was the composer's early (1910) masterpiece,