

Nathaniel SHILKRET (1889-1982)

Trombone Concerto

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Broadcast announcement | 1:19 |
| 2 | I. — | 11:08 |
| 3 | II. Andante piu mosso | 5:12 |
| 4 | <i>Stokowski requests silence</i> | 0:22 |
| 5 | III. Allegro – Bright Boogie-Woogie | 4:25 |

TOMMY DORSEY trombone

NEW YORK CITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA Recorded: 15 February 1945

Morton GOULD (1913-1996)

Latin-American Symphonette (Symphonette No.4)

- | | | |
|---|---------------|------|
| 6 | I. Rhumba | 5:43 |
| 7 | II. Tango | 6:16 |
| 8 | III. Guaracha | 3:51 |
| 9 | IV. Conga | 6:07 |

RADIO ITALIANA ORCHESTRA OF TURIN Recorded: 6 May 1955

Paul CRESTON (1906-1985)

Saxophone Concerto, Op. 26

- | | | |
|----|------------------------|------|
| 10 | Broadcast announcement | 0:51 |
| 11 | I. Energetic | 6:03 |
| 12 | II. Meditative | 8:17 |
| 13 | III. Rhythmic | 5:05 |

JAMES ABATO saxophone

HOLLYWOOD BOWL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA Recorded: 26 August 1945



STOKOWSKI

**20th Century
Americana**

TOMMY DORSEY

SHILKRET

Trombone Concerto

GOULD

Latin-American Symphonette

CRESTON

Saxophone Concerto

JAMES ABATO

New York City

Symphony Orchestra

Radio Italiana Orchestra of Turin

Hollywood Bowl

Symphony Orchestra

Broadcasts from 1945 & 1955



Tommy Dorsey and Leopold Stokowski

A GUILD HISTORICAL RELEASE

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Gould's Latin-American Symphonette and Paul Creston's Saxophone Concerto of 1941 are excellent examples of works Stokowski did not premiere but later championed. The Concerto is one of several pieces by Creston featuring the saxophone, including a fine Sonata for saxophone and piano (Opus 19, 1939) and this Concerto (Opus 26, 1941). James Abato, the soloist on this occasion, some years later recorded Creston's Saxophone Sonata with the composer at the piano for Columbia. The Concerto reappeared in a version for saxophone and concert band, Opus 26a, in 1944.

Creston was the son of Sicilian immigrants, born as Giuseppe Guttovoggio in New York City in 1906. It is claimed that a childhood visit to his parents' homeland exposed him to Sicilian folk-music, sparking the boy's natural musical gifts which quickly flourished. Creston did not pursue popular music alongside more seriously-intentioned work and although his later music for radio and television was much admired, by the time the United States entered World War II Creston had been awarded the coveted New York Critics' Circle Award for his First Symphony, a work which had been premiered in February 1940 by Fritz Mahler.

Creston's First Symphony soon caught the attention of Leopold Stokowski, particularly its attractive Scherzo movement – so much so, indeed, that he recorded it with the All-American Youth Orchestra, coupled with the 'Guaracha' movement from Morton Gould's Latin-American Symphonette. Stokowski thereafter took a keen interest in Creston's music, and, following this performance of the Saxophone Concerto, which had been premiered by Abato with the New York Philharmonic under William Steinberg in January 1944, Stokowski's first concert as Chief Guest Conductor of the New York Philharmonic late in 1946 included Creston's tone-poem *Frontiers* (inspired by early American settlers), a work which had been commissioned by André Kostelanetz – Toscanini had given the American premiere in 1945. In 1958, in a programme marking the 50th anniversary of his conducting debut, Stokowski included Creston's *Toccata* as well as the American premiere of Vaughan Williams's Ninth Symphony.

Creston's Saxophone Concerto is in three movements, the titles at once indicating the character of each: 'Energetic', 'Meditative' and 'Rhythmic'. Creston's individual approach to composition is found in each movement presenting a series of highly contrasted variants of an initial idea, albeit contained within a strong rhythmic structure. In this performance under Stokowski we can admire the soloist's superb command throughout – especially in the second movement cadenza and the dazzling brilliance of the finale.

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Such a vast country as the United States will invariably contain large numbers of people whose ancestors came from many different races and backgrounds, but what is remarkable in the relative brevity of the country's history has been the emergence and identification of what are considered to be essentially 'American' characteristics.

Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the evolution of a new global art-form at the dawn of the 20th-century – the cinematographic film. This may not have been invented in the United States, but it was certainly brought to its most potent state through the immense output of a number of great film studios in Hollywood, the results of which spread the essence of what it was to be American across the planet.

Yet it was not solely film that spread the 'American message' as it were. Music – more especially the rise of international jazz music – became the audible equivalent of the new life American offered to immigrants, one that had begun before World War I. Such music was given a powerful impetus by the arrival in Europe of American forces to join the conflict and bring about peace, and by the development of the gramophone and radio broadcasting – with the fusion of sound-on-film by the end of the 1920s reinforcing the world's understanding of the nature of the American dream, a dream that, less than twenty years earlier, had remained purely parochial, confined by geography.

Almost immediately following the post-war Armistice, America had become a world power for the first time, and yet within any artistic expression of the country's individuality, the concurrent flowering of American film, music and drama naturally could not but help reflect the diversity of wide influences which remained powerful and staunchly individual, free at last to expand and develop without political or social constraints.

It is that very diversity that may initially confuse the music-lover confronted – as on this disc – by three very different works by three very different American composers, albeit united in being contemporaneous and possessing a sense of outward-looking positivity. It was doubtless the latter characteristic, surely defining so much 20th-century American art, which appealed so strongly to the English-born musician Leopold Stokowski – who had travelled to New York in 1905, an immigrant of mixed Polish and Irish parentage.

Stokowski was by no means the only émigré conductor to go on to make a significant career in the United States, but in the forty years he had lived in America at the time the first of these performances took place, he had established himself as arguably the most famous symphonic conductor. His repertoire was surely more widely-based than that of any of his contemporaries – eventually encompassing over 2,000 premieres, alongside the broadest range of the 'standard' repertoire.

For example, Stokowski was the only conductor to programme all of Schoenberg's orchestral works during the composer's lifetime (conducting the world premieres of the Violin and Piano Concertos); he was also the first conductor to make an integral recording of the four Symphonies of Brahms (with the Philadelphia Orchestra).

Additionally, Stokowski was the only leading conductor in the USA who frequently gave subsequent performances of recent works which had been premiered under other conductors. This indicated an aspect of Stokowski's remarkable generosity of spirit and, as many of his concerts were broadcast, we have surviving examples of music which might very well not have been considered for commercial recording at the time.

Naturally, broadcasting is 'live', and with very few exceptions any errors that might occur in a performance cannot be corrected by the insertion of alternate 'takes', so the recordings on this disc are of complete surviving broadcast performances. We begin with the world premiere of the Trombone Concerto by the long-lived (1889-1982) Nathaniel Shilkret, an astonishingly widely-experienced musician. Shilkret was a member of Sousa's band as a teenager before joining the New York Philharmonic under the émigré Russian Vasily Safonov (one-time principal of the Moscow Conservatoire), playing in the final concerts of Safonov's successor, Gustav Mahler. Shilkret joined Modest Altschuler's Russian Symphony Orchestra in New York and the Victor Herbert Orchestra, supplementing the Paul Whiteman Band at the famous February 1924 premiere of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, a programme which concluded with the premiere of Herbert's last composition, *A Suite of Serenades*. Both works were recorded by Eldridge Johnson's Victor Company soon after that concert. In the 20s, Shilkret's varied talents enabled him to follow a notable career as conductor and composer, record company executive, recording artist and producer, before moving to Hollywood in the 1930s.

Shilkret played a significant part in the fortunes of the Victor Company in the 1920s and early 30s; he conducted the first recording of Gershwin's *An American in Paris* in which Gershwin played the celeste part. Shilkret composed several popular songs alongside serious music, which latter works culminated in his Trombone Concerto, commissioned by Tommy Dorsey in 1944, whose band had enjoyed a palpable hit in the American popular charts with Shilkret's most famous song *The Lonesome Road*.

The concert in which Shilkret's Trombone Concerto, one of the many hundreds of new American works Stokowski premiered throughout his career, was given was by the New York City Symphony Orchestra, one of several orchestras Stokowski founded after he finally left Philadelphia in 1940, the first being the All-American Youth Orchestra. Regrettably, the AAYO disbanded after the USA entered World War II, as the orchestra's young men became eligible for military conscription, but other orchestras Stokowski founded

during the war years were the New York City Symphony – at the invitation of Mayor La Guardia – and the Hollywood Bowl Symphony.

A proposed commercial recording of Shilkret's Concerto came to nothing, although that may have been as a result of Dorsey asking Shilkret to make revisions to the work, which the composer refused - Dorsey was known as having a quick temper and often took offence when none was intended. This broadcast recording is therefore the only one to have been made with the original performers; nor should it be thought that Shilkret's Concerto is written in pop-music style. It is a seriously-intended composition in three movements, notwithstanding the undoubted popularity of the soloist – something we can hear from the mostly teenage audience's enthusiasm at this premiere, which at one point appears to obscure the music itself, as we may hear in Stokowski's plea to be quiet and listen to the music.

The notion of popular musicians 'crossing over' to modern classical genres, or vice versa, was by no means confined to Dorsey or Stokowski at that time: the jazz clarinettist Benny Goodman had recorded Mozart's Clarinet Concerto with the New York Philharmonic, and commissioned works from Bela Bartók and Darius Milhaud, and the multi-gifted Morton Gould composed, among other works, a Concerto for Tap-Dancer and Orchestra in 1952.

Gould was an American-born musician who enjoyed a distinguished career as composer, pianist and conductor, and – like Shilkret – he traversed popular and classical areas. Gould's compositions were also championed by Stokowski, who had given the world premiere of the composer's *Chorale and Fugue in Jazz* in Philadelphia in January 1936. Gould's *Latin-American Symphonette* (the Americanised 'symphonette' replacing the traditional 'Sinfonietta' title) had had its first complete performance in 1941 under Fritz Mahler (second-cousin of Gustav). Stokowski was much taken with the *Guaracha* movement of Gould's Fourth Symphonette; he soon recorded it with his All-American Youth Orchestra and often played it in concert or as an encore, but this Italian premiere was the only time Stokowski conducted the complete work, making a unique addition to his vast discography.

Other works by Gould Stokowski performed include *Two Marches* with the NBC Symphony Orchestra and *Dance Variations*, which he recorded for RCA in 1953 with the San Francisco Symphony. Although Gould himself conducted recordings of major 20th-century symphonic works for RCA in the 1960s, following many earlier recordings of music in lighter vein, his own music – his Symphonettes, ballets on rural American subjects, tv and film scores – was essentially intended to make an immediate appeal, clearly apparent from this brilliant score.