

**Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)**

**1 'Hamlet' Fantasy Overture, Op.67** 16:49

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Recorded: Royal Festival Hall, London, 30 June 1959

**2 Announcement** 0:55

**Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872-1958)**

**3 Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'** 14:07

CBS RADIO ORCHESTRA

Recorded: New York, 7 February 1954

**Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)**

**Symphony No.5 in D minor, Op.47**

**4 I. Moderato** 15:14

**5 II. Allegretto** 4:42

**6 III. Largo** 13:41

**7 IV. Allegro non troppo** 9:59

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Recorded: Edinburgh Festival, 22 August 1961



**LEOPOLD  
STOKOWSKI**

**TCHAIKOVSKY**

'Hamlet'

**VAUGHAN  
WILLIAMS**

Five Variants of  
'Dives and Lazarus'

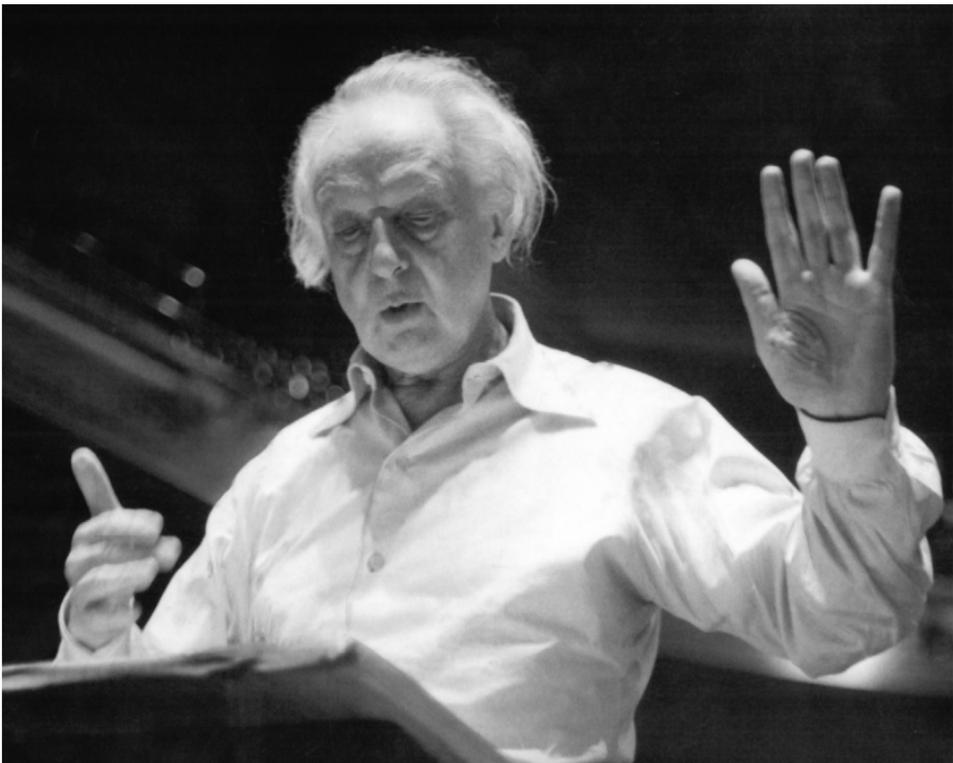
**SHOSTAKOVICH**

Symphony No.5

**LONDON SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA**

**CBS RADIO ORCHESTRA**

Recorded 1954-1961



Stokowski rehearsing the London Symphony Orchestra  
in the Usher Hall, Edinburgh, for the 1961 Edinburgh Festival.

photo: courtesy of Herald & Times Group

#### **A GUILD HISTORICAL RELEASE**

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The work was commissioned by the British Council to form part of a concert by the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York on June 9th 1939 – a concert entitled ‘Great Britain at the New York World’s Fair’. The programme was conducted by Sir Adrian Boult and featured another world premiere – the Piano Concerto by Arthur Bliss, with Solomon as soloist.

Compared with the large scale and dramatic expression of Bliss’s Concerto, the Vaughan Williams work, scored for string orchestra and harp, must have appeared relatively insignificant, but although it is one of the composer’s lesser-known works, it is also one of his greatest – a profound contemplation in varying degrees on the old tune, intimate and self-communing in manner.

Fifteen years later, Stokowski’s choice of this work was clearly not dictated by brilliance or virtuosity, but for the inherent contemplative majesty of the music. Stokowski directs a performance of remarkable penetration and insight, adding to the extensive list of works by Vaughan Williams the conductor programmed over the decades.

The phrase ‘penetration and insight’ can certainly be applied to Stokowski’s ground-breaking Philadelphia Orchestra recording of Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony, made two months before the New York Philharmonic programme which saw the premieres of ‘Dives and Lazarus’ and Bliss’s Concerto.

There can be no doubt that that recording has to be counted as one of the most significant of the 20th-century, not only because of its outstanding qualities of interpretation, insight and splendour of recorded sound, but also for its revelatory qualities in bringing this then-new masterpiece, just eighteen months following its world premiere in Leningrad, to the attention of music-lovers across the world.

Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony was a work Stokowski programmed relatively frequently (it ended the London Symphony Orchestra concert in 1959 which had begun with Tchaikovsky’s ‘Hamlet’). And in 1961, Stokowski again conducted the London Symphony Orchestra, at the Edinburgh Festival, in a programme which contained Tippett’s Concerto for Double String Orchestra (another work from 1939!) before concluding with the Shostakovich Symphony – a performance that demonstrated the conductor’s complete understanding and command of this undoubted masterpiece.

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The long and varied musical life of the conductor Leopold Stokowski (1882-1977) may, for purely mnemonic purposes, be conveniently split into several broad periods – his early years (1882-1905), his main American period (centred upon him being musical director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, 1912-*circa* 1938), his subsequent post-Philadelphia period (*circa* 1938-1951) and the long, final, transcontinental period, beginning with his return to Europe as well as holding the conductorship of the Houston Symphony. This final period was made more possible by the post-war growth in international travel, which ensured that in his final decades he was able to accept many invitations from across the globe making him – now venerable in age – one of the most travelled conductors of his time.

Stokowski may have begun and ended his career in England - the land of his birth in London in 1882 to a father of Polish ancestry and Irish mother, and where he died, peacefully, at the age of 95 in the picturesque Hampshire village of Nether Wallop – but his international career as a conductor, having made his first appearances in London in 1909, was developed in the United States, to where he had travelled in 1905 to take up a post as organist and choirmaster at St Bartholomew’s Church in Manhattan.

His New York appointment was followed by him being appointed conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra from 1909-12, and during his succeeding long period in Philadelphia, Stokowski proved to be one of the most innovative of musicians. He would embrace new technology and was always open to new ways of presenting classical music – several of which he devised – to the point where his fame, within fifteen years of his appointment, and despite being based in Philadelphia, had spread across the globe.

In very many ways, and for many general music-lovers, Stokowski was the personification of classical music in terms of image, a personification that was not confined to the traditional, somewhat closed, confines of art music. That personification brought criticism as well as applause, criticism essentially from those for whom classical music remained the embodiment of refined art, unsullied by more popular, everyday appurtenances – such as were encapsulated, later in Stokowski’s career, by a colourful and well-publicised private life and an appearance in Walt Disney’s *Fantasia*.

But no matter what events conspired to detract from Stokowski’s reputation, his standing – and, indeed, his increasing reputation - as an astonishingly original and inspirational conductor could not have been established, nor, indeed, maintained, had it not been founded upon a number of profound musical qualities that remained with him all his life and which are to be found in the quite extraordinary nature of his legacy as a great interpretative musician and conductor.

Even today, forty years after Stokowski's death, it remains an astonishing fact that he conducted over 2,000 premiere performances of one kind or another. The breadth of his repertoire was equally astonishing – as several of the many CDs of his performances issued on the Guild Historical label verify.

So if, in the case of the three works on this new compilation, at first sight it may appear that Tchaikovsky, Vaughan Williams and Shostakovich form an unusual triumvirate, the resultant performances under Stokowski demonstrate beyond doubt his inherent mastery, such as to convince the most sceptic listener of the validity of his musicianship.

Indeed, the selection of Tchaikovsky – with a work, as it were, from the 'standard' repertoire – alongside a little-known work of Vaughan Williams – a fellow English pupil of Stokowski in the 1890s, both at London's Royal College of Music and the nearby Royal College of Organists – and Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony – of which, in the latter instance, Stokowski's Philadelphia Orchestra recording was the first to be made in the western world – identifies just three strands from Stokowski's myriad career, each composer occupying a special place in the conductor's repertoire.

Despite those misplaced allegations of self-promotion which tended to be levelled at Stokowski by those who manifestly did not grasp the quality of his interpretative genius, the performances on this disc will surely soon disabuse such criticism. Our programme opens with Tchaikovsky's 'Hamlet' Overture. This unique masterpiece was composed in 1889 – when Leopold Stokowski, by the way, was seven years old, and already exhibiting those musical gifts that would take him, in adult life, across the globe, and to make a recording of that self-same work in New York in October 1958 at the age of 76 as an established international conductor with the city's Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra. The recording, for the Everest label, contained two works by Tchaikovsky – the 'Hamlet' Overture and 'Francesca da Rimini'.

For contractual reasons, in 1958 the Philharmonic-Symphony of New York (then exclusively signed to the American Columbia label) was renamed the 'Stadium Symphony Orchestra of New York' on the Everest disc. As an aside, we may note that the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra was renamed 'New York Philharmonic' – dropping the full title, as well as 'Orchestra' – in 1959, soon after Leonard Bernstein took up the appointment as its Music Director.

The result is that Stokowski's Everest disc remains one of the very greatest recordings of the music of Tchaikovsky that has ever been made – as profoundly moving today as it was when first released – but this live recording of 'Hamlet', of a performance in London's Royal Festival Hall, played by the London

Symphony Orchestra in June the following year, is certainly the equal of the Everest recording, and in some material respects may be considered superior.

The sheer intensity, passion and profound musicality that Stokowski obtains from the London Symphony is breathtaking – and this is a continuous, live performance, not one put together from various independent studio takes. It is an astonishing achievement, such as not been equalled, let alone surpassed, on disc in the more than half-century since it was captured on tape.

'It is our usual task', as Sir Donald Francis Tovey once wrote of programme annotators, 'to act as counsel for the defence.' Nor is it customary for CD booklet-note writers to praise the performances their writing accompanies, but in this instance one has to convey, as best as one can, the deeply profound musical experience this Stokowski/LSO performance offers, a justification – if one is sought – for the issue of great recordings of the past. Music is not an empirical science, but at heart is an emotional one; for interpreters it is through their art that the experience passes. Tchaikovsky's 'Hamlet' was dedicated to Edvard Grieg – whose music Tchaikovsky admired – and Grieg's acceptance of the dedication greatly pleased both men.

We mentioned earlier that in the 1890s, Leopold Stokowski was a fellow music student of Ralph Vaughan Williams, a friendship that was entirely mutual. As an established international conductor and recording artist, Stokowski took every opportunity to perform and record his friend's music, but his choice of Vaughan Williams's 'Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus' must have appeared a curious one to the CBS Radio Orchestra for their programme in February 1954, although the music has a definite American connection.



Vaughan Williams and Stokowski, 1957