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PASC 425

REINER CONDUCTS BACH

Brandenburg Concertos - Orchestral Suites

PRISTINE
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Producer's Note

A casual observer looking over Fritz Reiner's pre-Chicago discography might well come to the conclusion that he was as much of a specialist in Bach as he was in the works of Richard Strauss, at least if measured by LP sides. Besides the three discs devoted to the Brandenburg Concertos and the two featuring the Orchestral Suites, Reiner had recorded an earlier version of the B minor suite in Pittsburgh, originally coupled on 78s with Lucien Cailliet's transcription of the "Little" Fugue in G minor (forthcoming on Pristine). Yet, after becoming music director of the Chicago Symphony, he made only one further Bach recording, the F minor piano concerto with André Tchaikowsky, which was not released until years after Reiner's death.

Nevertheless, as Philip Hart relates in his biography of the conductor, "Reiner experimented restlessly with the Baroque." From his days in Dresden onward, he would include a harpsichord continuo in an era when it was not yet fashionable. In his 1946 Pittsburgh Bach B minor suite, "he added a lower octave to the bass to secure a more 'symphonic' nineteenth century sonority." But in the recordings from a few years later presented here, he strove for lighter textures. In this, he was helped by the small forces employed for the Brandenburg Concerto recordings (four violins, two violi, two celli, two basses, with other personnel as needed) and by the spare acoustics of Columbia's 30th Street Studio, which gave a close-up intimacy to the proceedings.

His soloists in the Brandenburgs included the cream of New York instrumentalists. Violinist Hugo Kolberg had been Reiner's concertmaster in Pittsburgh; trumpeter William Vacchiano and violinist William Lincer were playing in the Philharmonic, while oboist Robert Bloom and flutist Julius Baker were at the time teaching and freelancing. Landowska pupil Sylvia Marlowe was harpsichord soloist in the Fifth Brandenburg and Fernando Valenti played continuo elsewhere.

The style, both here and in the later Orchestral Suite recordings, was what Hart called "a modified 'authentic' approach to Bach", played with modern instruments but aiming at Baroque textures and tempi. This was a period of transition for Baroque performance in general, between the monumental Romantic approach heard in, for example, Stokowski's Brandenburg Second (1929) and Furtwängler's Brandenburg Third (1930) and the period instrument revival that would come to the fore in the 1960s. Seen in the context of their time, Reiner's Bach recordings were on the progressive side of Baroque interpretation. Still, he could not resist allowing some string slides in the Third Suite's famous Air; and the Second Suite, while perhaps lighter in texture than the earlier Pittsburgh version, is nonetheless markedly slower in tempo.

While Columbia kept the Brandenburgs in the catalog throughout the 1950s on three successive imprints (full-price Masterworks, then on their budget Entré and Harmony series), they have not seen an "official" reissue in over half a century. French RCA re-released the Suites on LP in the early 1980s, but not subsequently on CD. The present transfers were made from Harmony LPs for the Brandenburgs and the French pressings of the Suites.

Mark Obert-Thorn

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
SARL Pristine Audio, 144 Rue de l'Eglise, 24610 St. Méard de Gurçon, France

Reiner conducts Bach



Six Brandenburg Concertos Four Orchestral Suites

Soloists and Chamber Group
RCA Victor Orchestra

Studio recordings, 1949 - 1953

DISCS 1 & 2

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Obert-Thorn

Disc One

BACH Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F

BWV 1046

- 1 1st mvt. - (Allegro) (4:33)
 - 2 2nd mvt. - Adagio (4:42)
 - 3 3rd mvt. - Allegro (4:19)
 - 4 4th mvt. - Menuetto; Trio I; Menuetto; Polacca; Menuetto; Trio II; Menuetto (9:03)
- Hugo Kolberg (solo violin); Weldon Wilbur (solo horn); Robert Bloom (solo oboe). Recorded 28 October 1949.

BACH Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 in F

BWV 1047

- 5 1st mvt. - (Allegro) (5:25)
 - 6 2nd mvt. - Andante (4:22)
 - 7 3rd mvt. - Allegro assai (3:08)
- William Vacchiano (trumpet); Felix Eyle (solo violin); Julius Baker (flute); Robert Bloom (oboe). Recorded 2 December 1949.

BACH Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G

BWV 1048

- 8 1st mvt. - Allegro moderato (7:10)
 - 9 2nd mvt. - Allegro (3:05)
- Recorded 26 October 1949.

BACH Brandenburg Concerto No. 4 in G

BWV 1049

- 10 1st mvt. - Allegro (6:44)
 - 11 2nd mvt. - Andante (4:21)
 - 12 3rd mvt. - Presto (4:36)
- Hugo Kolberg (solo violin); Julius Baker, Ralph Eichar (Tracks 10 & 12) and Frederick Wilkins (Track 11) (flutes). Recorded 21 October 1949.

Disc Two

BACH Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D

BWV 1050

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro (10:22)
 - 2 2nd mvt. - Affettuoso (5:21)
 - 3 3rd mvt. - Allegro (5:40)
- Sylvia Marlowe (harpichord); Hugo Kolberg (solo violin); Julius Baker (flute). Recorded 3 November 1949.

BACH Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 in B flat

BWV 1051

- 4 1st mvt. - Allegro (7:13)
 - 5 2nd mvt. - Adagio ma non tanto (6:05)
 - 6 3rd mvt. - Allegro (5:41)
- William Lincer and Nicholas Biro (solo violins). Recorded 27 October 1949.

Chamber Group *Fritz Reiner*

BACH Orchestral Suite No. 1 in C

BWV 1066

- 7 1st mvt. - Ouverture (7:21)
 - 8 2nd mvt. - Courante (1:20)
 - 9 3rd mvt. - Gavottes I and II (2:12)
 - 10 4th mvt. - Forlane (1:37)
 - 11 5th mvt. - Minuets I and II (2:44)
 - 12 6th mvt. - Bourées I and II (2:38)
 - 13 7th mvt. - Passepieds I and II (2:50)
- Recorded 14 October 1952.

RCA Victor Orchestra *Fritz Reiner*



Producer and Audio
Restoration Engineer:
Mark Obert-Thorn

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J. S. Bach

Brandenburg Concertos
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Brandenburg Concertos - Orchestral Suites

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By now, Columbia Records has had two full years' experience with making L.P. records, and their product shows a mechanical consistency. Since, too, Columbia has been pressing many of the L.P. discs of the smaller independent companies, those also have the benefit of Columbia engineering. Victor, on the other hand, is experiencing many of the ills that Columbia encountered when it started—lack of bass, occasional tearing-out on the high end, lack of balance. The recent Columbias are superb, as regards pure sound. Take the Reiner recording of the six Bach Brandenburg Concertos, on three L.P. discs: fullness of register, virtually no distortion throughout its wide range, really noiseless surfaces, and clarity to the balance. In this recording Reiner is assisted by a group of excellent soloists and a fine, responsive chamber orchestra. What results is a virtuoso reading, incisive, with sparkle and rhythmic propulsion. German conductors probably would look with horror upon what Reiner does; and it cannot be denied that his tempos occasionally race, and that there generally is a slick, machine-tooled feeling. Reiner, though, keeps the music moving, which is after all the important thing: there is nothing more deadly than Bach mooned over.

Harold C. Schonberg, Letter from America (*excerpt*), The Gramophone, August 1950

At the last minute before going to press the new Reiner set of the Suites has arrived; and it has indeed timed its appearance admirably. For it does to some extent resolve the dilemma apparent at the end of the review above, where Kurt Redel's enterprise had somehow to be weighed against the Philharmonia's efficiency.

Not that on this occasion Reiner is quite as enterprising as Redel, or the R.C.A. Victor Orchestra quite as efficient as the Philharmonia. But both come within striking distance; and the virtues, combined in one set with a very slightly rough-toned but otherwise excellent standard of recording, do add up to a most recommendable compromise.

Reiner appears to use only a few strings, and they play most pointedly throughout—indeed, this is possibly the set's major virtue. Their small number is symptomatic of a rewarding care for balance: the oboes can hold their own for once, where necessary, and accompanying voices will drop to allow the tune through in a most satisfying way. Thus in the Second Suite the bass line comes into its own in both Badinerie and Sarabande; in the former because of the point of the playing, in the latter because it is actually presented as what it is—a canon with the treble, borrowing most of its ornaments as well as its tune. Another happiness is that of now and again reducing the already few strings to actual soloists; this illuminates many movements, but perhaps in particular the Overture to the Third Suite. This same suite gains, too, from an expressive performance of the Aria, with the basses playing pizzicato and the continuo player switched from harpsichord to organ for the occasion. The breakneck performance of the Gigue may not be thought quite so happy; but it does at least pull up at the end—in fact, Reiner ends all movements admirably conclusively, erring if at all on the side of overdoing it.

The set is nevertheless, I believe, the most generally recommendable at present available.

M.M. Review of Orchestral Suites (*HMV UK issue, excerpt*), The Gramophone, October 1956

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DISC 3

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Disc Three

BACH *Orchestral Suite No. 2 in B minor*

BWV 1067

- 1 1st mvt. - Overture (9:27)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Rondeau (1:46)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Sarabande (3:24)
- 4 4th mvt. - Bourées I and II (2:37)
- 5 5th mvt. - Polonaise (4:06)
- 6 6th mvt. - Menuet (1:40)
- 7 7th mvt. - Badinerie (1:34)

Julius Baker (flute)

Recorded 30 April 1953

BACH *Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D*

BWV 1068

- 8 1st mvt. - Overture (7:47)
- 9 2nd mvt. - Air (6:17)
- 10 3rd mvt. - Gavottes I and II (3:40)
- 11 4th mvt. - Bourée (1:13)
- 12 5th mvt. - Gigue (2:16)

Recorded 8 October 1952

BACH *Orchestral Suite No. 4 in D*

BWV 1069

- 13 1st mvt. - Overture (9:55)
- 14 2nd mvt. - Bourées I and II (3:22)
- 15 3rd mvt. - Gavotte (2:11)
- 16 4th mvt. - Menuets I and II (3:45)
- 17 5th mvt. - Réjouissance (2:23)

Recorded 23 October 1952

RCA Victor Orchestra *Fritz Reiner*



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