

**VERDI *Messa da Requiem*** Eugene Ormandy, cond; Philadelphia O; University of Pennsylvania Choral Society; Choral Art Society; Philadelphia Community Choir; Judith Hellwig (sop); Enid Szánthó (alt); Charles Kullman (ten), Alexander Kipnis (bs).

**SCHUMANN *Dichterliebe***, op. 48. Wolfgang Rosé, pf. **BRAHMS *Vier ernste Gesänge***, op. 121. ***Von ewiger Liebe***, op. 43/1. ***Erinnerung***, op. 63/2. ***Die Mainacht***, op. 43/2. ***Ein Sonett***, op. 14/4. ***Sonntag***, op. 47/3. Gerald Moore (pn) • IMMORTAL PERFORMANCES 1168-2 (2 CDs: 149:43) Live: Philadelphia, March 29, 1942

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FANFARE September / October

A new 2-disc release from Immortal Performances (IP) opens with the world premiere release of a March 19, 1942 concert performance of the Verdi *Requiem*, with Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra, vocal soloists, and chorus (actually, a combination of three separate choral groups). One of the vocal soloists is the great Ukraine basso, Alexander Kipnis. Following the complete Verdi *Requiem*, Kipnis is heard in songs by Schumann and Brahms. In 1964, Ormandy led a Columbia studio recording of the Verdi *Requiem* with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Westminster Choir, soprano Lucine Amara, contralto Maureen Forrester, tenor Richard Tucker, and bass-baritone George London. It's a fine performance, captured in stereo sound that wears its more than half a century with grace. The sound of the 1942 performance is far inferior to the 1964 studio release. In fact, it does not measure up to commercial recordings of that period, or even the best-preserved broadcasts of the day. And the 1942 vocal soloists, with the exception of Kipnis, do not rival the 1964 quartet for appropriate Italian operatic weight and color (yes, the Verdi *Requiem* is a liturgical work, but its mode of expression is a culmination of the composer's lifetime in the theater). That said, Ormandy's 1942 Verdi *Requiem* far outshines the 1964 studio recording in terms of intensity and dramatic impact.

Several factors may have contributed to the electric atmosphere that pervades the 1942 performance. The much younger Ormandy was in the early years of his tenure as Music Director of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Ormandy and his musicians perform for a receptive audience, rather than Columbia's microphones. The specter of World War II also cast its shadow. Three of the four soloists—Hellwig, Szánthó, and Kipnis—had been forced to leave Nazi-dominated Europe. Perhaps it's not hyperbolic to suggest that Verdi's setting of the Latin Mass for the Dead held extra significance for everyone in the Academy of Music on March 29, 1942. Despite the fact that the outlines of the 1942 and 1964 renditions are similar (the total times are almost identical), the performances are far different in character. In the 1942 concert version, Ormandy coaxes a galvanizing intensity from the performers. Here, Ormandy emphasizes the grand contrasts of Verdi's musical expression, be they manifested in tempo, dynamics, or vocal/instrumental colors. Ormandy also shapes the music with compelling flexibility, giving it a sense of life and momentum. The singers, both solo and choral, declaim the text with the utmost feeling, and yes, operatic intensity. Of the soloists, all but one acquit themselves in the most admirable fashion. Alexander Kipnis is in excellent form. His rich, dark bass is wonderful to hear in this music, and he sings it with unhesitating vocal and dramatic commitment. It may be true that Judith Hellwig and Charles Kullman lack the ideal vocal weight and color for Verdi. But both sing their music with vocal security, understanding of the appropriate style, and riveting intensity. In comparison to her colleagues, alto Edith Szánthó sounds generic both in voice and

delivery. But the overall quality of the singing, both solo and choral, is admirable. And although the compromised recorded sound does the Philadelphia Orchestra no favors, the ensemble plays in characteristically marvelous fashion. Eugene Ormandy was never particularly associated with operatic repertoire. And for some critics, Ormandy's conducting lacked the individuality and passion of his rivals. For those reasons, this galvanizing Verdi *Requiem* is of great importance, despite problematic sound.

The remainder of the IP release focuses on Alexander Kipnis in German song repertoire. Kipnis's performance of Schumann's song cycle *Dichterliebe*, with pianist Wolfgang Rosé, is from a live broadcast. The Brahms *Four Serious Songs*, and other Brahms lieder, all with Gerald Moore, are studio recordings. Kipnis was as gifted a song recitalist as he was an opera and oratorio performer. And in these recordings, Kipnis is unfailingly sensitive, shaping his dynamics, vocal colors, declamation, phrasing, dynamics, and vocal colors to suit the text and music. Here, the recorded sound allows the glory of Kipnis's voice to shine through. A most apt and enriching companion to the Verdi *Requiem*. The accompanying printed materials include Dewey Faulkner's rich and engaging commentary, Richard Caniell's Recording Notes, and artist bios and photos. A most valuable release. Recommended.

5 Stars: A galvanizing Verdi *Requiem* from Ormandy, and Alexander Kipnis shines in German song