

The Story behind the release of the Toscanini Bruckner Symphony No. 7

By John F. Berky

For many years, one of the most elusive recordings of a Bruckner Symphony was the 1935 radio transcription of Arturo Toscanini's performance at Carnegie Hall of the Symphony No. 7.

The recording was made in concert during a live broadcast on January 27, 1935 using acetate discs. Since there was only one working recorder in the booth, there are missing segments during the first, second and fourth movements when the disc had to be changed. Since the recording was not complete, the Toscanini Family never gave permission for the recording to be commercially released. The original transcription acetates have long been one of the prized possessions of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound at the Lincoln Center branch of the New York Public Library.



The Ansfelden CDR Cover

For many years, the only way to hear this recording was to visit the archive at the library, fill out the necessary paperwork and then be assigned to a listening booth where the recording (in this case a tape recording of the acetates) would be played from equipment housed in the library's basement. The listening booth is carefully monitored.

For many years, several recordings were offered as the Toscanini, but those who had listened to the R&H Archive tape would discredit them as fakes.

Sometime around 2006, a limited edition CDR recording appeared in Japan. It was on the Ansfelden label (# ANS-027). It was quickly determined that the recording was genuine and the 100 copies quickly sold out. It was never re-issued. The only things different from the R&H transcription was that the first 28 seconds of the transcription - containing the radio announcer's words, "...the Symphony Number Seven," followed by room noise - was omitted. There was also some attempt at cleaning up the noisy surfaces.

A few months later, Andrew Rose of Pristine Classics received a copy of the Ansfelden recording and it was that recording which was the basis for his release (Pristine Audio PASC 082).

Since this release, some collectors have wondered about the quick disappearance of the original Ansfelden recording. I have been informed by sources that the intent of this initial release in Japan was simply a way for the recording to be "liberated." Clearly commercial gain was not a major factor since many more copies could have been produced and sold. Instead, that windfall fell into the lap of Andrew Rose. From what I have been told, the Ansfelden release did what it was intended to do and quickly went away.