

Tanglewood 75th Anniversary Celebration

By Anthony Fogg,
BSO Artistic Administrator

From the Audio Archives 1937-2009

In 2012, we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the first concerts given by the Boston Symphony Orchestra on the property called Tanglewood - a graceful, gardened estate and manor house, given by the Tappan family to the BSO in 1937 as a venue for summer concerts. Over the years, Tanglewood has emerged as the preëminent American musical festival—a center for training and nurturing young musicians, and above all a haven where music of all genres is performed for audiences numbering from dozens to many thousands.

To celebrate the rich legacy of Tanglewood, we have delved into the archive of recorded performances, to show the arc of the festival as defined by the major figures who shaped its musical profile. Great conductors, soloists, ensembles, and, above all, the BSO itself have formed the backbone of Tanglewood. It is a place where living composers have occupied a place of prominence, and where the Boston Pops, jazz and contemporary popular artists, as well as music from non-Western traditions, have been presented from time to time alongside the classical masters of the past.

This Selection

This selection of recordings—offered first as a series of free streams then as digital downloads that can be purchased—tells just one of many possible versions of the history of Tanglewood.

Though a large number of performances at Tanglewood has been preserved in some recorded format or other, there is not a definitive and comprehensive list of what exists and where the material is held. By far, most is in the BSO Archives, much of it as part of the so-called Boston Symphony Transcription Trust, and in various private collections which the Archives has acquired over the years.

Finding a starting point and criteria for selection, then deciding how best to organize a broad sampling of 75 years of concerts was, of course, the real challenge.

As a means of sifting through the possibilities, the BSO's Archives team first compiled several volumes of listings of performances, derived from its data-base or from printed program books and season brochures. These volumes were assembled by genre: BSO concerts, concerts by student ensembles, recitals, Boston Pops performances, and popular idioms—including jazz and popular artists.

As a way of doing a first cull of representative performances, we tapped the collective memories of some longtime attendees of Tanglewood, including the broadcaster and writer, Martin Bookspan (who has heard all but two seasons since 1947); writer and critic, Richard Dyer; conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, John Oliver; composer, Oliver Knussen; former BSO manager, Dan Gustin; and retired BSO musicians, Joseph Silverstein and Burton Fine. Each was given several volumes of performance listings and was asked to indicate those which were particularly memorable or significant. And from this process, emerged a long working-list of possibilities which gave hints of how to shape an offering of 75 different recordings.

The next step was to marry the working-list with recordings of those performances.

When a recording was not part of one of the major collections of the BSO Archives, we checked other sources. These include those of former BSO broadcast sound engineer, Kevin Mostyn, whose personal collection provided several sought-after items; the Paley Media Center in New York; and, most importantly, the Library of Congress, which houses a rich selection of broadcasts from the earliest years of the Festival. (Exploration of the Library of Congress's only partly-catalogued collection of BSO recordings reveals tantalizing possibilities for future releases.)

Sources

All but one of the recordings included here (Gershwin's Concerto in F, with Earl Wild) originate from a single performance—not a composite of multiple repetitions of a piece or a set of concerts—and the musical content is completely unedited. In some instances, we retained the pre- and post-performance on-air announcements of works which were broadcast, and there's been occasional light editing of distracting ambient or audience noise. In the case of the earliest material selected, sound engineers have 'stitched together' performances which had originally been spread over several 16-inch acetate transcription discs and have re-mastered others to enhance the quality of outmoded recording techniques. Source material was stored on a variety of formats, including polyester reel-to-reel, Beta, and Digital Audio tapes. While many of the recordings are excellent in terms of sound quality and balance, what is offered is not intended as a final word in audio or in sonic brilliance.

Each recording is singular for some reason or other—whether because of its historical significance or the unique combination of artists and repertoire or the extraordinary quality of the performances—and captures the energy and sense of occasion of a live event.

An Aural History of Tanglewood

Many hours of research and listening have yielded the selection of recordings included in this 75th anniversary offering. During any one-week period from June 20 to September 2 (presented one per day for 75 days as a stream which is thereafter available from an expanding library of downloads), an interested listener can hear seven performances which represent one of the following:

- a large-scale work, such as a complete opera or a major symphonic or chorus-and-orchestra piece;
- a performance conducted by a BSO music director (every music director from Pierre Monteux to James Levine is included) or important guest conductors;
- a concert featuring a renowned guest soloist or several soloists, many of them with career-long associations with Tanglewood (such as Rudolf and Peter Serkin);
- a performance featuring a prominent composer (Copland, Berio, Harbison, and Schuller, among others) as an interpreter;
- a performance by celebrity recitalists or chamber music with Boston Symphony members;
- the work of the many talented young musicians who attend Tanglewood;
- popular musical idioms, including the Boston Pops Orchestra, jazz, and selected popular artists.

The earliest recording included is from 1937; the most recent from 2009. These have not been arranged chronologically by year of performance, or by performers or musical styles. Rather, each week gives a snapshot of Tanglewood over several decades, in works both grand and simple, and in recorded sound of widely contrasting quality.

For each day of this project, Richard Dyer has written introductory notes which give background to the music and the artists—placing the performance in the broader context of Tanglewood—and, when relevant, he has included excerpts from reviews of the concerts. (It should be mentioned that the selection of performances was made on the basis of listening, not on consulting reviews. We thought it would be interesting from the historical point of view to include excerpts from newspaper commentary when they seemed germane or controversial.)

This is just one approach to telling the history of Tanglewood through its recorded legacy. Other selections and grouping would reveal other rich dimensions of the festival over the years. And, of course, we were able to select a finite number of performances. Many of the greatest performing and creative artists of the 20th and 21st centuries have appeared at Tanglewood, including countless whose careers began as Fellows of the Tanglewood Music Center. We are conscious of omissions, which are due only to the dimensions of this particular project or the unavailability of suitable recordings.

Names and Places

While much has remained unchanged at Tanglewood since its founding in 1937, many things have

evolved. The festival itself which began life as the Berkshire Symphonic Festival in 1935, was renamed the Tanglewood Festival in 1985. The beloved Music Shed which was inaugurated in 1938 was rededicated as the Koussevitzky Music Shed in 1988. The Berkshire Music Center—that fertile and vital school for young musicians, founded in 1940 by Serge Koussevitzky—became the Tanglewood Music Center also in 1985.

The facilities and performing venues of Tanglewood increased several-fold in 1994 with the completion of the Bernstein campus and the opening of Seiji Ozawa Hall—the elegant, versatile, and acoustically glamorous ‘room for music’ (as it was described by its architect, William Rawn) which became the successor to the Theater-Concert Hall as the major venue for recitals and performances by the Fellows of the Music Center.

In the interests of clarity and for those who are most familiar with the Tanglewood of today, the Music Center (its personnel and ensembles) and the various venues of Tanglewood are all referred to by their current-day titles and names in the listings and notes in this selection. In other words, whereas the designation ‘Berkshire Music Center’ might be accurate to the date of performance, the more familiar ‘Tanglewood Music Center’ is used. Likewise, we made no differentiation between the ‘Music Shed’ (the name used from 1938-88) and the ‘Koussevitzky Music Shed.’ Occasionally, the radio announcer’s preor post-performance comments will draw attention to an original or former name or designation.

Until the Tanglewood Festival Chorus was formed in 1970 and became the principal performer of works including chorus, a number of different choral ensembles appeared at Tanglewood. These numbered many of the fine choral groups of the time, which gave concerts year-round in the New England area. Others were ensembles which had been assembled for a season or specific piece. Each of these represents a distinctive and differentiated collection of vocal talents, often under the direction of the leading figures in the choral field at the time. As such, we have listed choruses by their individual names.

Thanks and Apologies

The Boston Symphony Orchestra is extremely grateful to the dozens of conductors, instrumentalists, and singers—or the heirs or estates—who have generously and graciously allowed their performances to be included in this project, as a celebration of Tanglewood’s 75th year. Efforts were made to reach every artist whose work is represented and, if any was not found, we offer apologies along with thanks for your assumed support of this undertaking.

Enormous thanks go also to those who have contributed in an advisory role to this project and to the BSO staff members who have worked to bring the many complex strands together.

Anthony Fogg,
BSO Artistic Administrator

Credits

For the BSO -

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Anthony Fogg, Artistic Administrator

Bridget P. Carr, Senior Archivist

Barbara Perkel, Robert L. Miller, and Joannie Lajeunesse, BSO Archives

Claudia Robaina, Manager of Artists Services

Bernadette M. Horgan, Director of Public Relations

Rich Bradway, Associate Director of E-Commerce and NewMedia

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Ellen Highstein, Director of the Tanglewood Music Center

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For Soundmirror -

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Mark Donahue, mastering

George Blood Audio

Library of CongressMotion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division

Rebecca Paller andMaria T. Pagano, The Paley Media Center

John McDermott

Thanks to Deutsche Grammophon for permission to include performances by Leonard Bernstein