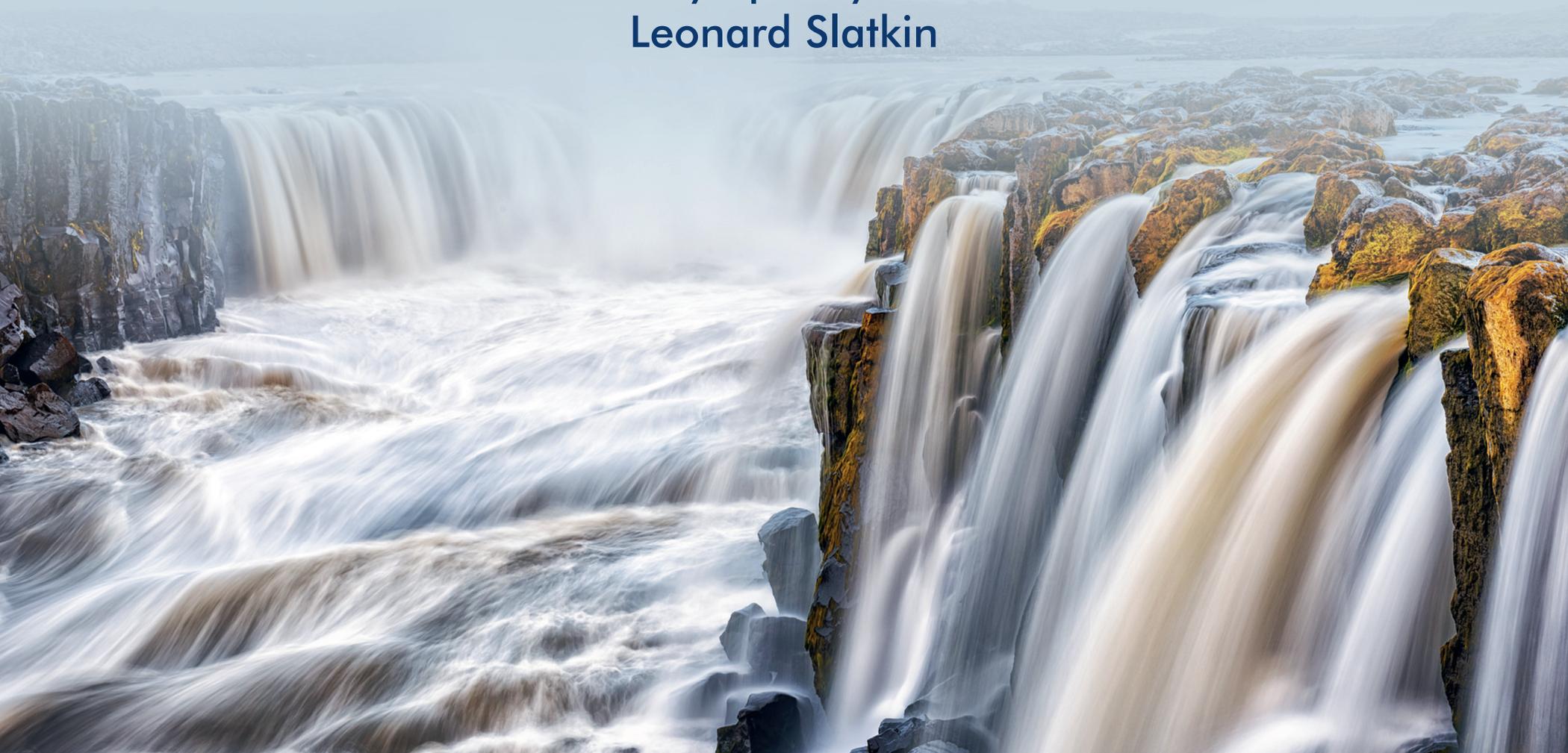




AUDIOPHILE EDITION

RACHMANINOV

Symphony No. 3
'Youth' Symphony • The Rock
St. Louis Symphony Orchestra
Leonard Slatkin



Sergey Rachmaninov (1873–1943)
Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 44
Symphony in D minor ‘Youth’ • The Rock, Op. 7

Tchaikovsky studied law and actually held a minor position in the Ministry of Justice before he embraced music as a full-time career; Borodin was a physician and scientist who composed music in the time allowed by his professional duties; Rimsky-Korsakov, a naval officer in his youth, learned his musical craft while teaching conservatory students, managing, as he modestly recorded, to stay a day or two ahead of them. Unlike those revered musical compatriots, Sergey Vasilyevich Rachmaninov grew up in a musical family and never had any sort of career in mind for himself but a musical one. Alexander Siloti, the pianist, conductor, pedagogue and general activist for Russian music, was a cousin and took an interest in the young Rachmaninov’s training. In his teens Rachmaninov had Siloti as his piano teacher and worked with both Sergey Taneyev and Anton Arensky in composition. Taneyev, a pupil of Tchaikovsky, brought the young composer to that master’s attention. Six months before his own death Tchaikovsky attended the Moscow premiere of Rachmaninov’s opera *Aleko* and saluted him as an equal; Rachmaninov had just turned 20, but had already performed the first version of his *First Piano Concerto* and had composed numerous other works.

Through much of his life and for a decade or more after his death, Rachmaninov was regarded as primarily a pianist – one who happened to compose a few very effective pieces and who sometimes conducted (just as Gustav Mahler was long regarded as a conductor who dabbled in composition). In his thirties he was more widely recognised as a conductor than as a pianist: he presided over some brilliant seasons at the Bolshoi Opera in Moscow, and in the US twice declined the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s invitation to become its music director. He withdrew from his performing commitments as much as possible during the early years of the 20th century in order to devote himself to composing, but his re-emphasised performing activity in the years following the First World War and the Russian Revolution, necessitated by his financial losses at that time, brought about an extended hiatus in his creative work. It was in the mid-1920s that he was again able to give his composing first place among his activities, and his final decade saw the creation of such masterworks as the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, the *Third Symphony*, and the *Symphonic Dances*.

It is definitely as a composer that Rachmaninov is remembered now. Orchestras everywhere not only perform his concertos and symphonies with great frequency, but season after season present programmes made up entirely of his music, in many cases augmenting the familiar favourites with lesser-known or ‘rediscovered’ works which help to fill in the fascinating picture of a major creative artist. Leonard Slatkin, who has given witness to his own belief in the importance of Rachmaninov’s music by performing it with numerous American and European orchestras, has presented several such programmes in St. Louis and has there presented the American premieres of two early works. Having already recorded the four concertos and the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* with pianist Abbey Simon as well as the three symphonies, Leonard Slatkin and the St. Louis Symphony finished by recording the entire works for orchestra (including that for chorus and orchestra).

Rachmaninov was just four days shy of reaching his 70th birthday when he died in Beverly Hills on 28 March 1943. He had enjoyed recognition in the international musical community for more than 50 years. His orchestral works range from 1887, when Rachmaninov was not yet 14, to 1940, when he produced his valedictory work, the *Symphonic Dances*. These alone would be sufficient to illustrate both the validity and the consistency of his frequently quoted self-characterisation:

‘A composer’s music should express the country of his birth, his love affairs, his religion, ... it should be the sum total of the composer’s experiences. I compose music because I must give expression to my feelings, just as I talk because I must give utterance to my thoughts ... I am a Russian composer, and the land of my birth has inevitably influenced my temperament and outlook.’

Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 44

Rachmaninov’s enormously successful *Second Symphony*, Op. 27, was introduced less than nine years after the disastrous premiere of the *First Symphony*, Op. 13. That the *Third Symphony*, Op. 44, is separated from the *Second* by nearly three full decades but only 17 opus numbers, has nothing to do with a lack of confidence of the sort that plagued the composer after the premiere of the *First* in 1897, but rather with his activity as pianist and conductor, which took up most of his time in the years following his departure from Russia after the 1917 Revolution. His *Third Piano Concerto*, Op. 30, written for his first American tour, was introduced in 1909, the *Fourth*, Op. 40, some 18 years later; it was not until 1934 that he produced the brilliant *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* for piano and orchestra (Op. 43), and only after the success of that work that he was encouraged to try his hand once more at writing a symphony, a form in which he had declared he would never write again.

The cantata *The Bells*, Op. 35, composed in 1913 to Konstantin Balmont’s Russian setting of Poe’s poem of that title, was originally regarded by Rachmaninov as his *Third Symphony*, but was given a more fitting designation in the mid-1920s. The *Third Symphony* was begun in the spring of 1935 and completed in August of the following year. The Symphony was intended specifically for The Philadelphia Orchestra, with which Rachmaninov had formed an especially close relationship and which introduced the work on 6 November 1936, under the direction of Leopold Stokowski. Three years later the same orchestra made the premiere recording of the *Third Symphony*, this time under Rachmaninov himself, in the last of his few recordings as a conductor.

In a sense the *Third Symphony* represents a synthesis of the most characteristic traits of both the earliest and the latest periods of Rachmaninov’s creative life – though not yet in the sense of grand summing-up that was to come in the *Symphonic Dances*. The big theme in this movement bears a striking resemblance to an American folk song, and it is understandable that some commentators have interpreted this as a conscious gesture to the composer’s new American habitat. (For nearly 20 years Rachmaninov shuttled between an apartment in New York and the small but comfortable Swiss estate on Lake Lucerne where most of the work on the *Third Symphony* was done; in 1935, while at work on this score, he settled permanently in Beverly Hills.) Actually, the theme appears to be one of the several Rachmaninov derived from old Russian Orthodox religious chants. In any event, the music exhibits a conciseness, brightness, freedom from excess, and straightforward momentum that help to identify it with its own time – with no sacrifice of the melodic abundance or sumptuous colouring Rachmaninov had always exhibited. It may be noted, too, that this is one of the several works in which he cites or alludes to the *Dies irae*, the Latin chant for the dead, which became almost a ‘trademark’ of his; among the earliest such works are the *First Symphony* and symphonic poem *The Isle of the Dead*, and among the later ones the *Paganini Rhapsody* and *Symphonic Dances*, which respectively preceded and followed the *Third Symphony*.

The ‘contemporary’ flavour of the *Third Symphony* struck some of Rachmaninov’s admirers at the time of the premiere as alarmingly ‘modern’, and it is perhaps because it did appear so different from his earlier works that it was

not well received at first. By 1936, of course, Rachmaninov could take disappointment without being discouraged, and he believed in his *Third Symphony* so deeply that, although he had long since given up conducting, he volunteered to conduct this work in concert and to record it. He had to agree to record his *First Concerto* as well in order to persuade RCA Victor to take the symphony, and even that composer-conducted recording failed to sell the work to the public; it is only in the last dozen years or so that the *Third Symphony* has begun to make its way into the general repertory.

Apart from a brilliant use of the orchestra that is more than striking in its own right, what is perhaps the most striking feature of the *Third Symphony* is the music's *radiance*. The music is here lyrical, there dramatic, everywhere extremely colourful (but never garish), but most distinctively *radiant*. The first movement opens (*Lento*) with a figure that is to be the 'motto' of the work, returning in various guises in the succeeding movements. Already the atmosphere is not one of dark brooding, as in the earlier works, but almost bright-eyed with expectancy. The tempo changes almost at once to *Allegro moderato* and we hear a motif in the nature of an ingathering of breath, or a recitative, before the unfolding of the expansive principal theme, so unabashedly warm-hearted, which dominates the movement and defines its character.

Although the *Symphony* is cast in only three movements, the middle one, as in so many three-movement symphonies, is a slow movement wrapped around a scherzo. The *Adagio* opens with a statement of the 'motto' by the solo horn with harp accompaniment; this leads to a theme, lovingly introduced by solo violin, whose relationship to the 'recitative' theme of the first movement is at once apparent, and at length the flute enters with another theme also derived from material in the preceding movement. This exquisite and occasionally voluptuous *Adagio* gives way to *Allegro vivace* that makes for the most stunning contrast: it is big, bold, hearty, but not the least bit earthbound. In its thrust and breadth this brilliantly imaginative scherzo evokes the grand orchestral fantasies of Elgar and Holst, and in its piquant and scintillant colouring it is more than a match for them. The theme itself (again related to the 'motto') is of less interest than the sheer rhythmic activity and marvellous colour. The *Adagio* returns to round off the sequence which contains Rachmaninov's most enchanting slow movement and his most original and effective scherzo – altogether the most remarkable single movement in his symphonic output.

The 'radiance' cited earlier as the most conspicuous element in the *Third Symphony* assumes a different character from one movement to the next, as noted pointedly in the alteration of the 'motto' in the opening of each. If the first movement may be characterised in terms of expansive warmth of heart, and the second noted for its fantasy, the last (*Allegro*) may be described as an outpouring of exultation and jubilation. The allusion to the *Dies irae* in the fugal section is extremely subtle and casts no shadow; the finale with its recollections of earlier sections is a grand summing-up of the idea and moods introduced in the two preceding movements, setting a seal of affirmation on the work as a whole.

Symphony in D minor 'Youth'

Four years after he composed the *Scherzo in F major*, Rachmaninov composed the first version of his *First Piano Concerto*, which he designated his *Op. 1*. He completed the concerto in July 1891, and then turned his thoughts to the creation of a symphony. He reported in correspondence to his friend Mikhail Akimovich Slonov that the effort was sheer torture and that he threw out more than he could use. The first movement is all that was completed; it is dated 28 September 1891.

This movement, which has come to be called Rachmaninov's 'Youth Symphony', is a good deal shorter than the first movement of any of his completed symphonies. It is scored for a full orchestra and its main portion, following a *Grave*

introduction, is marked *Allegro moderato*. It was introduced at the same concert in 1945 as the *Scherzo*, and, because that piece is labelled ‘Second Movement’, there was some speculation as to whether Rachmaninov could have intended to use it as such in his symphony. Pavel Lamm, who edited both scores for publication in 1947, decided to publish them separately because ‘the *Scherzo* was composed significantly earlier ... and is a less mature composition.’ Lamm also points out that although Rachmaninov got no farther than this single movement in his first attempt to compose a symphony, and apparently did not salvage any of its material for use in subsequent efforts, he did return to the same key of D minor when he undertook the composition of his actual *First Symphony* three years later.

The Rock, Op. 7

The Rock (perhaps more aptly called *The Crag*), composed in 1893, was the first of Rachmaninov’s orchestral works to be given a public premiere (20 March 1894, in Moscow, under the direction of Vasily Safonov) and assigned an opus number. The premiere was a bit more successful than that of the opera *Aleko* had been the previous year, and served to introduce Rachmaninov’s highly personal style of programmatic (or descriptive) writing to the public for the first time. This work, in fact, may be said to define the style that would come to maturity in *The Isle of the Dead* some 14 years later.

In 1898, four years after the premiere of *The Rock*, Rachmaninov sent a copy of the score to the much-beloved writer Chekhov, which he inscribed: ‘To the dear and highly esteemed Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, author of the story *Along the Way*, which served as programme for this composition.’ Since the score included a printed statement from Rachmaninov that he had been inspired by Lermontov’s poem *The Rock*, this gesture would appear to represent a glaring contradiction, but in fact it did not. The opening lines of Lermontov’s poem, which Rachmaninov had printed in his score ‘as epigraph for this composition’ had been similarly cited by Chekhov as a heading for his story, which may be described as an expansion of Lermontov’s allegorical poem in human terms. The lines quoted by Rachmaninov and Chekhov are translated as follows:

The little golden cloud spent the night
On the chest of the giant crag.

Chekhov’s story is set in a small roadside inn on a blustery Christmas Eve. The ‘rock’ and the ‘cloud’ are two travellers who meet there while warming themselves from the snowstorm raging outside: the former is a lonely (and ‘craggy’) middle-aged man, depressed by his failure in life; the latter is a sensitive young woman, half his age, who responds with warmth and compassion. The next morning she is the first to resume her journey; the man stands immovable amid the falling snowflakes, watching until her sleigh has passed from sight and the snow that has covered him, gradually blurring his shape, suggests not so much a lifesize statue as – a giant rock.

While the music may in general terms conjure up an impression of a Russian winter night, it would be a mistake to seek literal descriptiveness or specific delineation of action. This is a piece written under the influence of a literary work, but not necessarily an attempt at retelling the story itself. The generalised dramatic nature of the music and the colourful scoring constitute its essence, and also serve to explain Rachmaninov’s dedication of the score to Rimsky-Korsakov, with whom he never studied directly, but by whom he must have been profoundly influenced at this point in his career.

Richard Freed

Booklet notes reprinted from the original LP releases

St. Louis Symphony Orchestra

Founded in 1880, the St. Louis Symphony is the second-oldest orchestra in the United States and is widely considered one of the world's finest. In September 2005, internationally acclaimed conductor David Robertson became the twelfth music director and second American-born conductor in the orchestra's history. The St. Louis Symphony is one of only a handful of major American orchestras invited to perform regularly at the prestigious Carnegie Hall. Recordings by the symphony have been honoured with six GRAMMY Awards and 56 GRAMMY nominations over the years. The orchestra has embraced technological advances in music distribution by offering recordings online. The St. Louis Symphony download initiative includes live recordings of John Adams' *Harmonielehre*, Szymanowski's *Violin Concerto No. 1*, with Christian Tetzlaff, and Scriabin's *The Poem of Ecstasy* available exclusively on iTunes and Amazon.com. In 2009, the symphony's Nonesuch recording of John Adams' *Doctor Atomic* and *Guide to Strange Places* reached No. 2 on the *Billboard* rankings for classical music, and was named 'Best CD of the Decade' by the *The Times* of London. In September 2012, the St. Louis Symphony embarked on its first European tour with music director David Robertson. The symphony visited international festivals in Berlin and Lucerne, with stops in Paris and London as well, performing works by Beethoven, Brahms, Sibelius, Schoenberg, Gershwin and Elliott Carter. Christian Tetzlaff joined the symphony as featured soloist. In June 2008, the St. Louis Symphony launched *Building Our Business*, which takes a proactive, two-pronged approach: build audiences and re-invigorate the St. Louis brand making the symphony and Powell Hall *the place to be*; and build the donor base for enhanced institutional commitment and donations. This is all part of a larger strategic plan adopted in May 2009 that includes new core ideology and a ten-year strategic vision focusing on artistic and institutional excellence, doubling the existing audience, and revenue growth across all key operating areas.

Leonard Slatkin

Internationally acclaimed conductor Leonard Slatkin is Music Director Laureate of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO), Directeur Musical Honoraire of the Orchestre National de Lyon (ONL), and Conductor Laureate of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. He maintains a rigorous schedule of guest conducting throughout the world and is active as a composer, author, and educator. Slatkin has received six GRAMMY Awards and 35 nominations.

One of his recent recordings for Naxos is the world premiere of Alexander Kastalsky's *Requiem for Fallen Brothers* commemorating the 100th anniversary of the armistice ending the First World War. Other recent Naxos releases include works by Saint-Saëns, Ravel, and Berlioz (with the ONL) and music by Copland, Rachmaninov, Borzova, McTee, and John Williams (with the DSO). In addition, he has recorded the complete Brahms, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky symphonies with the DSO (available online as digital downloads).

A recipient of the prestigious National Medal of Arts, Slatkin also holds the rank of Chevalier in the French Legion of Honour. He has received the Prix Charbonnier from the Federation of Alliances Françaises, Austria's Decoration of Honour in Silver, the League of American Orchestras' Gold Baton Award, and the 2013 ASCAP Deems Taylor Special Recognition Award for his debut book, *Conducting Business*. A second volume, *Leading Tones: Reflections on Music, Musicians, and the Music Industry*, was published by Amadeus Press in 2017. His most recent book, *Classical Crossroads: The Path Forward for Music in the 21st Century* (2021), is available through Rowman & Littlefield.

Slatkin has conducted virtually all the leading orchestras in the world. As Music Director, he has held posts in New Orleans; St. Louis; Washington, DC; London (with the BBC Symphony Orchestra); Detroit; and Lyon, France. He has also served as Principal Guest Conductor in Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Cleveland.

www.leonardslatkin.com



First released in 1979 as QSVBX 5152 and in 1982 as 4-VCL 9013X

Rachmaninov's *Symphony No. 3 in A minor* is a radiant synthesis of the composer's early and later periods. Poorly received at the time, its lyricism and colour are pervasive and it has duly taken its place in the repertoire, not least because of its warm-hearted voluptuousness, rhythmic vitality and inventive structure. Written in 1891, a single movement is all that exists of the *Symphony in D minor 'Youth'*, while *The Rock* is an early example of Rachmaninov's powers of descriptive intensity. These acclaimed Vox recordings conducted by Leonard Slatkin were originally issued in 1979 and 1982.

The Elite Recordings for Vox by legendary producers Marc Aubort and Joanna Nickrenz are considered by audiophiles to be amongst the finest sounding examples of orchestral recordings

**Sergey
RACHMANINOV
(1873–1943)**

Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 44 (1936)	39:50
① I. Lento – Allegro moderato – Allegro	15:49
② II. Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro vivace	11:46
③ III. Allegro – Allegro vivace – Allegro (Tempo primo) – Allegretto – Allegro vivace	12:14
④ Symphony in D minor 'Youth' (1891)	11:28
⑤ The Rock, Op. 7 (1893)	13:59

**St. Louis Symphony Orchestra
Leonard Slatkin**

New 192 kHz / 24-bit high definition transfers of the original Elite Recordings analogue master tapes

Recorded: 1–2 October 1977 ①–③, 1979 ⑤ and October 1980 ④ at Powell Hall, St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Producers: Marc Aubort and Joanna Nickrenz • Engineering: Elite Recordings

Tape transfers: Mike Clements • Re-mastering engineer: Andrew Walton

Booklet notes: Richard Freed

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