

One Piece Of Music That You've Never Heard As It Was Intended

What if there was a piece of music that had been experienced by tens of millions of people over the last 65 years, was readily available today, and is probably owned by a good percentage of people who are reading this article? You might think there's nothing too awfully unusual about that except for this one fact - not a single one of you, no matter how many times you have heard this piece, ever heard it correctly. The piece of music we are referring to is, in fact, a film from Walt Disney - Fantasia. You see, Disney got an idea that film could be used to present music in a far different way that it has been done before. Here's a quote from Walt, "We wanted to reproduce such beautiful masterpieces as Schubert's "Ave Maria" and Beethoven's Sixth Symphony so that audiences would feel as though they were standing on the podium with Stokowski." Wow, most of us have a home theater setup so that we can get a little depth in the audio. But Disney dreamed a little bigger - he wanted to allow you to hear the audio as the conductor heard it. And like most things Disney, if Walt could dream it, he could do it. To create the movie, the entire Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski recorded for 44 days - though with retakes and other musicians coming in for various parts, the entire audio recording process took 18 months. The orchestra had 33 microphones to pick up it's sound and this was routed to 9 recorders in the basement of the symphony hall. 9 operators watched over and adjusted the recorders as dozens of other technicians worked on the production as well.

In total, over 3,000,000 feet of sound track was recorded that led to the final release of 10,778 feet of four track audio. But wait, that's not why you can't hear this. The real reason is that Walt required theaters showing the original movie to have a few minor modifications done. Specifically, 35 large packing crates had to be delivered containing 60 loudspeakers which were carefully placed throughout the theater (including overhead) which were driven by four powerful amplifiers and a special projector for the four channels of audio. As you might guess, not too many theaters could do this and the movie ended up being seen as it had been intended in only 14 theaters. So the next time you put in the 1991 VHS tape of Fantasia, remember, you are hearing the music, but you aren't hearing it as Stokowski did - or as Walt wanted you to.