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## The Beecham Collection

BEECHAM AND THE ROYAL  
PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA  
THE EARLY DAYS



### MENDELSSOHN Overture:

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Op. 21 11:44

5

6

### WAGNER: Prelude to Act III

"Die Meistersinger" 7:09

### MOZART: Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K550

1. Molto allegro 5:37

7

8

2. Andante 8:51

9

### MOZART Symphony No. 40 (Contd.)

3. Menuetto 4:47

4. Allegro assai 4:25

### SCHUMANN Concerto for Piano & Orchestra in A minor, Op. 54 Moura Lympany, Piano

1. Allegro affettuoso 13:36

2. Intermezzo (andante grazioso) 4:29

3. Allegro vivace 9:58

Total duration 71:12

Sir Thomas Beecham, Bart., C.H.

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Moura Lympany, Piano

Recorded at the Davis Theatre, Croydon, South London on 10 November 1946. Previously unissued.

Released in collaboration with the Sir Thomas Beecham Trust in support of the Scholarship Fund.

Executive Producer: Arthur Ridgeway

Digital re-mastering: Gary Moore

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Previously Unissued Recordings



### RPO - THE EARLY DAYS

Schumann Piano

Concerto

Mozart Symphony

No. 40, etc.

Moura Lympany

Piano

Royal Philharmonic

Orchestra

Sir Thomas Beecham,

Bart., C.H.

## BEECHAM AND THE ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA – EARLY DAYS

In the summer of 1946 Sir Thomas Beecham set about forming the third and last of his symphony orchestras. As early as 1909 he founded the Beecham Symphony Orchestra and in 1932 gave the British orchestral scene a much-needed raising of standards with the formation of his London Philharmonic Orchestra. In addition he had been both musically and financially responsible to some extent for the survival of the New Symphony Orchestra in 1906, as well as the Hallé Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra, not to mention his input to the Royal Philharmonic Society and the Royal Opera House especially during the First World War. During the Second World War the London Philharmonic Orchestra became a self-governing body and Sir Thomas, not being a board or committee man but always the captain of his own ship, decided on yet another of his own choice and control.

Setting about contacting a number of his former players, including some from the LPO, while consulting others whose opinions he trusted, he soon gathered an impressive body of leading orchestral musicians all too ready to serve under his baton. They met together for the first time on Wednesday, 11th September 1946 at 2.30 pm in St. Pancras Town Hall, there having been first a wind section rehearsal followed by one for the strings and then the whole orchestra. Brian Pollard, second bassoon, recalls that all the rehearsals for the first few weeks were more in the nature of collective auditions, with Sir Thomas clearly carefully listening to each player as much as rehearsing the works in hand, seeking to identify those he wished to retain in a permanent ensemble.

It is significant that the programme for the first concert of the new Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, at 3 pm on Sunday, 15th September 1946 in the Davis Theatre, Croydon, carried no list of players. Indeed, it was two years before Sir Thomas was satisfied with a reasonably regular line-up. However, that first concert and most of those for the first year included a number of his chosen players from LPO days, among which were Gerald Jackson (flute), Reginald Kell (clarinet) and James Bradshaw (timpani) but the strings were to prove a greater problem at the outset. As Gerald Jackson recalled:

*"... a majority of the strings came from the London freelance pool. Some of them I knew but many I didn't, either by sight or repute, and a handful of them should never have been there at all."*

Sir Thomas saw to it that those did not remain long. Even the position of leader presented him with a problem at the outset, importing John Pennington from America. Bournemouth-born Pennington had

been leader of the London String Quartet but had gone to America in 1934, first as leader of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and then led the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra before becoming musical director for Paramount Studios in Hollywood. However, within a short time with the RPO Oscar Lampe took over and then, by the start of the 1948-9 season, Beecham had his favourite first desk of David McCallum and Arthur Leavins in place.

At that first concert Brian Gipps was sub-leader with David Wolfsthal principal second violin and Andrew Ross sharing that first desk. Leonard Rubens led the violas with Alfred Friedlander as sub-principal in a section which also included Albert (Ken) Cayzer later to be Beecham's favourite principal viola, while Raymond Clarke led the violoncellos with Karel Horitz, later himself to be principal 'cello, as his sub-principal. Jack Silvester led the double basses with Edmund Chesterman alongside him. Principal flute was Gerald Jackson, with Clifford Seville as second and the piccolo was Robert Hanlon. Peter Newbury was principal oboe with Leonard Brain as second and cor anglais. Reginald Kell occupied the clarinet chair with his pupil Richard Gibbs as his second, while Archie Camden was first bassoon with his pupil Brian Pollard (later to be principal bassoon of the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam for forty years) as his second. The horn section consisted of Dennis Brain, Norman Del Mar, Roy White and Frank Probyn. Horace Barker led the trumpets, while William Lover led the trombones with William Scannell as tuba. James Bradshaw was timpanist with his brothers Fred (Bonzo) and William as percussionists and John Cockerill was the harpist. The orchestral administrator was Victor Olof, who had assisted Beecham in engaging these first members of the RPO.

Within a year changes were taking place, especially in the strings, while Peter Newbury stood down as principal oboe to admit Terence MacDonagh, Jack Brymer replaced Reginald Kell who left for America, and was joined by Basil (Nick) Tschaikoff as second clarinet, Archie Camden completed his agreed year's contract and was replaced by Gwydion Brooke (then Holbrooke) and Ian Beers became second horn when Norman Del Mar opted for a conducting career. Lewis (Titch) Pocock, later to follow Bradshaw as timpanist, joined the percussion section.

In spite of the teething troubles, after the first concert the press was generally impressed. Richard Capell in *The Daily Telegraph* reported:

*"There is much music in which, under Sir Thomas's spell, an inferior orchestra may sound first rate but yesterday's programme was one in which nothing could have glossed over the lack of brilliant individual talents in every quarter. These*

were present and the beauty of many of the solos was almost as remarkable in the circumstances, as the thrilling quality of the performances as a whole... It was a triumphant launching."

Ernest Newman in *The Sunday Times* was no less enthusiastic:

"Sir Thomas Beecham's new Royal Philharmonic Orchestra... is a first-rate body of players and with Sir Thomas in superlative form we were given readings of a refinement of nuance and an intensity of expression such as it has not been my own lot to meet with for some years."

The music critic of *The Manchester Guardian*, Neville Cardus, a great friend of Sir Thomas Beecham, was in Manchester, that paper's review being written by its London music correspondent, William McNaught, who said:

"Just why the Royal Philharmonic sounded as it did would take a deal of explaining. Skill and experience would not do it alone. The main factor of the case is that Sir Thomas Beecham has the power, now familiar for thirty years, to put every player on his mettle as an orchestral artist. From the collection of individuals he brings out a collective sense that puts everything right and brilliance and beauty sprung from it."

The concert preserved in this recording was the fifteenth that the new orchestra gave in a very busy opening schedule of twenty-eight concerts and eight recording sessions before Christmas. Sir Thomas had ensured plenty of work for his new band with a further thirty-seven concerts and BBC broadcasts plus thirty-six commercial recording sessions before the orchestra had an eight-week break from mid-July 1947. In addition to financial backers at home and in the USA, he had persuaded the Royal Philharmonic Society to take his new orchestra for its concerts instead of the LPO, thus obtaining the "Royal" title without the need for a warrant from Buckingham Palace.

The early programmes were made up largely of Beecham "favourites", the first concert typically consisting of Rossini: *Overture: William Tell*, Mozart: *Symphony No. 36 in C*, Delius: *Over the Hills and Far Away*, Tchaikovsky: *Fantasy Overture: Romeo and Juliet* and Bizet: *Suite: Carmen*. More substantial fare soon appeared, including symphonies of Brahms, Franck and Sibelius plus the first major event with

the six concerts of the Delius Festival in London. Also before the end of the year Sir Thomas had started to include contemporary English works, playing music by Patrick Hadley, Lord Berners and Alan Rawsthorne. The first recording session was of Delius: *Dance Rhapsody No. 2*, made in Studio No. 1 at Abbey Road on October 3rd.

The programme for November 10th preserved in this recording, also included Berners: *The Triumph of Neptune* in which the soloist was Trevor Anthony, a work Beecham played on at least thirty occasions between 1927 and 1952 and recorded twice (1937 and 1952). However, the comparative rarity in a Beecham programme was the Schumann: *Piano Concerto in A minor*, a work he scheduled on just seven occasions in a sixty-one year conducting career, first with Myra Hess in 1916, other soloists being Mischa Levitski, Moriz Rosenthal, Artur Schnabel, Eunice Gardiner and finally Moura Lympany. The thirty-year-old Moura Lympany recalled in her autobiography the occasion and her experience of encountering Sir Thomas. She had studied the work with her teacher, Mathilde Verne, who had been a pupil of Clara Schumann and who insisted that her pupil play the work as it had been taught to her by Clara, which was not quite as most soloists of the day played it. She remembered:

*When around this time I was engaged by the great Lancastrian conductor Sir Thomas Beecham to play the Schumann Piano Concerto at Croydon, I was alarmed by the tales I heard on all sides about him. He had a fearsome reputation. He was said to be an ogre who adored women but hated women pianists, although he had married one: Betty Humby, who had preceded me at the Royal Academy of Music. So, before the rehearsal I approached him with some trepidation. He stood on the podium, baton in hand, a dapper little man in shirt sleeves and braces, gym shoes on his feet.*

*"Sir Thomas," I quavered, not daring to look him in the eye but fastening my gaze on his imperial beard, "I fear I play the concerto a little differently from the usual way."*

*He fixed me with piercing blue eyes and said nothing.*

*"I play the first movement more moderato, the second a little quicker than usual and the third slower than usual."*

*He continued looking at me in silence for a moment, his rubicund features unruffled. "My dear young lady", he suddenly said in a suave purr, "It is your concerto and I will follow everything you do."*

*He was as good as his word.*



The recording of this concert is an historic document in that it is the earliest known of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and shows it with its first set of players. As can be heard, there is some fine playing from men like Jackson, Kell, Camden and Brain, while there are weaker passages especially in some of the string playing, as well as moments of suspect intonation. While perhaps not all-pervading, generally the performances are stamped with the Beecham touch. It was to be nearly two years before Sir Thomas was satisfied with the membership of his new orchestra, including that line-up of wind principals that became known as "The Royal Family" – Jackson, MacDonagh, Brymer and Brooke plus Dennis Brain. By then it was a core membership that was to change little and only very gradually over the next ten years, allowing Sir Thomas an orchestra he trusted and which loved and understood him, with which he could make music while "letting them play".

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NB: The sound quality on this recording is variable due to some deterioration of the source material, caused by age.

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Sir Thomas Beecham with members of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra