



Horn Section, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra



# The Beecham Collection *Somm*

*Previously Unissued Recordings*



**BEECHAM, BRAHMS,  
BAX & R. STRAUSS**

Haydn Variations  
The Garden of Fand  
Don Quixote

John Kennedy, Cello  
Frederick Riddle, Viola  
Royal Philharmonic  
Orchestra  
Sir Thomas Beecham,  
Bart., C.H.

THE BEECHAM COLLECTION  
Sir Thomas Beecham, Bart., C.H.

Brahms: Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op. 56a  
Bax: The Garden of Fand  
R. Strauss: Don Quixote

\*John Kennedy, Cello \*Frederick Riddle, Viola  
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

[1] **Introductory Talk by Sir Thomas Beecham** 1:19

**Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op. 56a**

[2] St. Anthony Chorale: Andante 2:03  
[3] Variation I Poco più animato 1:09  
[4] Variation II Più vivace 0:52  
[5] Variation III Con moto 1:18  
[6] Variation IV Andante con moto 2:19  
[7] Variation V Vivace 0:48  
[8] Variation VI Vivace 1:09  
[9] Variation VII Grazioso 2:35  
[10] Variation VIII Presto non troppo 1:11  
[11] Finale: Andante 3:11

[12] **Introductory Talk by Sir Thomas Beecham** 2:11

[13] **Symphonic Poem *The Garden of Fand*** 17:13

**Symphonic Poem *Don Quixote***

[14] Introduction: Don Quixote sinks into madness 6:20  
[15] Theme: Don Quixote 0:58  
[16] Sancho Panza 0:59  
[17] Variation I: The adventure with the windmills 2:31  
[18] Variation II: The battle with the sheep 1:27

[19] Variation III: Discourse between Knight and Squire	7:27
[20] Variation IV: The adventure with the pilgrims	1:59
[21] Variation V: The Knight's vigil	4:30
[22] Variation VI: The meeting with Dulcinea	1:11
[23] Variation VII: The ride through the air	1:03
[24] Variation VIII: The voyage in the enchanted boat	1:41
[25] Variation IX: The combat with the magicians	1:00
[26] Variation X: The defeat of Don Quixote	4:06
[27] Finale: Don Quixote's death	5:27

**Total Duration: 78:24**

Tracks 1 - 13: BBC Studio, 30th March 1949.

Tracks 14 - 27: Edinburgh Festival, Usher Hall, 22nd August 1956.

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Brahms was one of those many composers in whom Sir Thomas Beecham found a kindred spirit, not least in his melody, orchestration and symphonic invention, although not perhaps to the extent he found in say Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Strauss, Delius or Sibelius. In the case of Brahms Sir Thomas was a good deal more selective in the works he chose to embrace. Of the twenty-one Brahms works which appeared in Beecham programmes between 1899 and 1960 only four were scheduled with any degree of frequency – *Symphony No. 2 in D*, *Symphony No. 3 in F*, *Violin Concerto in D* and the *Variations on a Theme of Haydn*. Of these, *Symphony No. 2* was the clear “winner” with more than twice the number of performances than the other three works. It was in these works especially that Sir Thomas could bring his innate sense of the shape of line and phrase in the music and where his feel for the beauty of a tune in all its shades was uppermost, a sense conveyed even in his introductory remarks to the performance preserved here. This performance, recorded on 30th March 1949, was one of a number of studio concerts with his Royal Philharmonic Orchestra for the British Concert Hall series of the General Overseas Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation which he made between April 1947 and March 1953. The concert opened with Mozart: *Symphony No. 29 in A (KV 201) (186a)*, followed by Bax: *The Garden of Fand* (also issued here) and finishing with the Brahms variations. Sir Thomas recorded his spoken introductions at 5.15 pm that day in the talks studio at Maida Vale and the concert was transmitted from the main orchestral studio there at 9.30 pm GMT. The *Variations on a Theme of Haydn* was played by Beecham on at least thirty-four occasions between 1930 and 1954, although he chose never to record it commercially yet considered it highly among Brahms’s works. Critical comment on his performances was invariably favourable. As the chief music critic of *The Times*, Frank Howes, wrote on one occasion: “Sir Thomas treats this work as lovingly as it deserves to be treated”.

Arnold Bax was one of a considerable number of British composers championed by Sir Thomas Beecham who came to the fore in the first half of the twentieth century. His programmes from 1905, in addition to Delius and Elgar, included works of British contemporaries such as Cyril Scott and Charles Wood, Josef Holbrooke, Granville Bantock, Balfour Gardiner, Havergal Brian and Frederic Austin, culminating in 1909 with Arnold Bax, Ethel Smyth and William Wallace. That pattern continued throughout his long conducting career, programme space being found for works by many such composers including Moeran, Vaughan Williams, Bridge, Berners, Walton, Bliss, Arnell, Rawsthorne, Ireland, Berkeley, Salzedo, Rubbra, Alwyn, Addison and Maconchy up to 1959. Bax found a place in Beecham programmes on thirty-two occasions, including the first performances of his *Symphony No. 5* and *The Tale the Pine Trees Knew*, both in 1934 out of eleven Bax works that he conducted. Of these, *The Garden of Fand*,

written between 1913 and 1916 was his favourite, conducting it first in November 1931 and recording it commercially in 1947.

Bax first met Beecham towards the end of 1908 when his mother supported practically a series of concerts of new English music which Beecham was promoting through his orchestra. In the April of the following year Beecham conducted Bax’s *Into the Twilight* which the composer tells us in his autobiography, *Farewell My Youth*, caused him much embarrassment since, in his inexperience, he had failed to check the copyist’s work for errors! Beecham continued to include the occasional Bax works in his programmes, in recognition of which the composer dedicated the 1932 revised version of his *Summer Music* of 1917 to Beecham and which was one of the last works of Bax which he conducted in 1953. Beecham’s way with *The Garden of Fand* appealed specially to Bax. As Lewis Foreman, in the third edition of his biography of the composer, writes: “During the early 1930s Sir Thomas Beecham gave several Bax performances, always enthusing Bax by the sympathy and refinement of the playing he elicited from his orchestra”. He goes on to quote Bax in a letter written to Harriet Cohen after the concert in the Queen’s Hall, London on 23rd November 1931.

...last night’s performance was the most beautiful orchestral experience of my life – as far as my own works are concerned. It seemed to me that the moulding of every phrase in “Fand” could not be surpassed. All the little solos were given time to sing according to the nature of the instrument – and the whole work was pervaded with the most marvellous remoteness and delicacy. I think I was rather emotional when I congratulated Tommy, but all he said was “My dear fellow, I see all the things I can do with this work in the future”. It was clear that it was a “piece” entirely after his own heart ... There was an enormous audience, and... I had rather an ovation.

Sir Thomas Beecham made a decided impact on the four Edinburgh Festivals at which he conducted – 1949, 1950, 1952 and 1956. At the last of these, after the effect of his conducting the opening Sunday concert of Beethoven: *Symphony No. 9 in d minor* in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen, Beecham was in buoyant mood throughout his time at the Festival. At the second concert, the first half of which had been conducted by Sir Arthur Bliss in the premiere of his *Overture: Edinburgh* followed by his *Violin Concerto* with Alfredo Campoli as soloist, Beecham delivered a stunning account of Brahms: *Symphony No. 2 in D*. On that occasion, in his first year as Festival Director, Robert Ponsonby was anxious that Sir Thomas might arrive late, knowing that he was needed only after the interval. In the



event – and to Robert Ponsonby's relief – Sir Thomas arrived early. However, instead of going as expected directly into the conductor's room, he went straight up the stairs to the platform entrance, opened the doors behind the first violins and was clearly heard to say: "Is this thing still going on!" Two days later, on the Wednesday, after his morning rehearsal with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in the Usher Hall, came one of the best, if totally unrehearsed, performances in the whole Festival – Tommy giving a press conference. As one journalist observed, there were so many obviously unjournalistic people crammed into the room that it was obvious that the news of this event had leaked out well beyond the confines of the Festival's Press Bureau. The atmosphere at that conference boded well for the evening's music, Sir Thomas entering with the remark that the assembled company looked like the meeting of the Synod of the Free Church of Scotland and then sparkling in amplification of his remarks about Festivals being "bunk". He held court to everyone's delight while performing a non-stop circus turn with his armchair, doing everything except sit in it for long.

The evening concert, the third of his five in that Festival, consisted of just two works familiar to Beecham, though not so frequently performed by him in later years: Richard Strauss's Symphonic Poem: *Don Quixote* and Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*. On this occasion the more famous soloists that might be expected at an international festival were replaced by two of his own principals from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, opportunities which he often gave with the utmost confidence to his own chosen men. Here it was to be the 'cellist John Kennedy (father of Nigel) and viola Frederick Riddle, both of whom proceeded to give outstanding accounts of their respective solo parts. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra was again in splendid form and Sir Thomas obtained, with the absolute minimum of gesture, every required effect demanded by these two pictorially narrative scores.

A fellow student of mine at Edinburgh University at the time, Owen Swindale, later a lecturer in music at Glasgow University, summed up John Kennedy's rôle as "a most distinguished and soulful 'Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance'" and we agreed that Riddle's account, under Beecham, of the Berlioz work was one which we should use as our yard-stick for future performances for years to come, as well as that of his important part as Sancho Panza in the *Don Quixote*. Strangely enough, when reminding Frederick Riddle of this concert when he was with us in Edinburgh with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the 1972 Festival, he told me that he could recall little of that night. I assured him that there were many members of the orchestra and audience who remembered it very well after sixteen years. It is sad that the BBC did not retain the tape of the broadcast of Strauss's *Don Quixote* under Beecham, when Paul Tortelier was joined by another Beecham RPO principal viola, Albert (Ken) Gayzer, as the Sancho Panza, as this was considered by so many to be the finest rendering of that part ever experienced.

Nevertheless, we are fortunate to have this Edinburgh performance preserved with Sir Thomas putting his faith as ever in the fine quality and musicianship of his selected orchestral principals.

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