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The Beecham Collection

RICHARD WAGNER Overture: Rienzi

FREDERICK DELIUS In A Summer Garden

FRANZ SCHUBERT Symphony No.9 in C major, D.944

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Conductor, SIR THOMAS BEECHAM, BART., C.H.



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|---|----------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Wagner Overture: Rienzi | 11:48 |
| 2 | Delius In a Summer Garden | 13:58 |

Schubert Symphony No.9 in C major, D.944

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| 3 | 1. Andante – Allegro ma non troppo – più moto | 14:07 |
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| 4 | Schubert Symphony No.9 (Contd.) | |
| | 2. Andante con moto | 14:35 |
| 5 | 3. Scherzo. Allegro vivace, Trio | 9:32 |
| 6 | 4. Finale. Allegro vivace | 11:39 |

Total duration 75:38

Wagner, Rienzi: Royal Festival Hall, 6 December 1956

Delius, In a Summer Garden: Usher Hall, Edinburgh Festival, 24 August 1956

Schubert, Symphony No.9: Royal Festival Hall, 14 December 1955

Released in collaboration with the Sir Thomas Beecham Trust in support of the Scholarship Fund
Executive Producer and Transfers: Arthur Ridgewell
Digital re-mastering: Gary Moore

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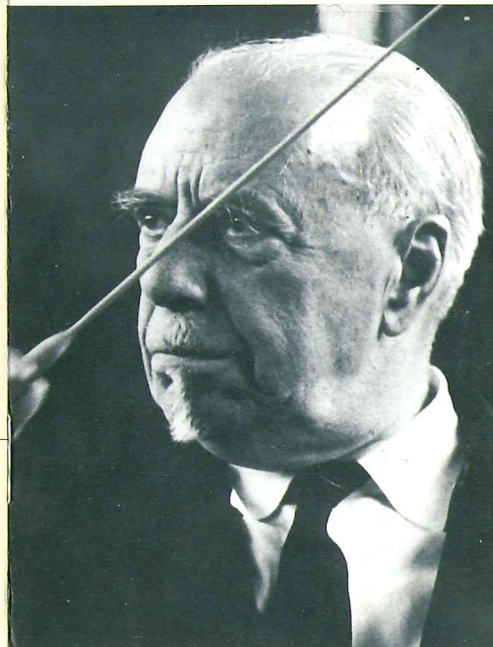
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WAGNER

Overture: Rienzi

DELIUS

In A Summer Garden

SCHUBERT

Symphony No. 9

Royal Philharmonic

Orchestra

Sir Thomas Beecham,
Bart., C.H

THREE BEECHAM "OCCASIONS"

The three works in the performances brought together on this disc each have a special place in the galaxy of Beecham concerts and as such remain important occasions in the memories of those of us lucky enough to have been present, whether player or listener. Wagner's *Overture: Rienzi* was a comparative rarity in Beecham programmes, given how much Wagner he conducted over his long career. He first conducted it on 19th October 1916 with the Hallé Orchestra in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester opening an all Wagner programme, repeating it a year later there with the same forces in another all Wagner evening. He recorded it with his London Philharmonic Orchestra in the Scala Theatre London for broadcast by Radio Luxembourg on 4th August 1939 but the only other concert performance of it that he gave is the one preserved here, opening another all Wagner programme from the Royal Festival Hall on 6th December 1956, now with his Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. While his performances of Wagner in the opera house were legendary, few remain who can recall the "Ring" cycles at the Royal Opera House before the Second World War and a few more of us will have memories of the 1951 *Die Meistersinger* there. Otherwise experience of Sir Thomas's way with Wagner rests on those works included in his orchestral programmes during the last decade of his life, not least in the two full Wagner evenings in 1953 and 1956, plus a half concert in 1958.

Throughout his sixty-one years on the podium, Sir Thomas included some sixty-five different Wagnerian operatic extracts, including overtures, as well as the *Siegfried Idyll* and the *Faust Overture* in his concert programmes, from *Die Meistersinger: Introduction to Act 3* in his very first concert on 8th November 1899 to the *Overture: The Flying Dutchman* on 6th December 1959, less than six months before his final concert. The Wagner programme of 6th December 1956 opened with the *Overture: Rienzi* and included *Tannhäuser: Introduction to Act 3; Lohengrin: Prelude to Act 1; Act 3 scenes 1 and 2* (soloists: Jennifer Vyvyan and Walter Midgley); *Das Rheingold: Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla; Siegfried: Forest Murmurs; Götterdämmerung: Siegfried's Rhine Journey; Parsifal: Good Friday Music; Tannhäuser: March and Chorus Act 2* (Beecham Choral Society, chorus master: Denis Vaughan) and with a stunning performance of *The Ride of the Valkyries* as an encore. Sir Thomas made his customary short address to the audience at the end. The previous test match series had been rather low scoring and he said: *Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, a tough evening, logging all the way – like the test match, not many runs!*

By no stretch of the imagination can *Rienzi*, which opened this 1956 programme, be classified as a Wagnerian masterpiece. Indeed, it was the great Wagnerian critic Ernest Newman, in an exchange of

correspondence with George Bernard Shaw, who referred to *the melodic banalities of Rienzi*. It was a character of Sir Thomas to see the possibilities in weaker music and to conjure the best from such scores, making them sound far better than perhaps they really were. This he does with the *Overture to Rienzi* here, from the solo trumpet A intoned by Philip Jones, through the majesty of the opening pages to the exhilarating conclusion. When Wagner wrote this the bass of the brass was still the ophicleide and the bottom of the woodwind was given to the serpent. Sir Thomas does not embrace historical accuracy for its own sake and replaces these instruments by the later bass tuba and contra bassoon respectively, the latter played by C Walter Harding (uncle of Gilbert). He uses multiple tenor drums to dramatic effect and the fine brass playing was led by section principals: Dennis Brain (horns), Philip Jones (trumpets) Stanley Brown (trombones) and James Powell (tuba). The orchestra was led by Steven Saryk.

Sir Thomas's four visits to the Edinburgh International Festival (1949, 1950, 1952 and 1956) with his Royal Philharmonic Orchestra were all "special occasions" in themselves and each with its own memorable highlight. Who can forget the Strauss: *Ariadne auf Naxos* and his exchanges with Miles Malleson from pit to stage or his direction of the massed bands of the Scottish regiments on the Castle Esplanade in Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* in 1950, the Berlioz: *L'enfance du Christ* in 1952 or the Brahms: *Symphony No. 2*, Strauss: *Don Quixote* and Berlioz: *Harold in Italy* in 1956? In that year, Sir Thomas conducted five concerts with only one day of rest in between, having opened the Festival with Beethoven's *Choral Symphony* before Her Majesty The Queen. His final concert on 24th August included the first performance of Richard Arnell's *Landscapes and Figures*, the sixth symphonies of Schubert and Sibelius and finishing with an appropriate encore of the Berlioz *Overture: Waverley* - but the highlight of the programme was his magical performance of Delius: *In a Summer Garden*. This was another work very close to Beecham's heart, having first conducted it in July 1914 with his Beecham Symphony Orchestra at the Royal Academy of Music in London and on more than thirty occasions up to December 1956. Even for Sir Thomas, so close to the works of this composer, *In a Summer Garden* held special place, as he explained in his biography of Frederick Delius, written in 1975, saying that it is:

...not only one of the most completely characteristic efforts of its composer, but is well-nigh flawless in form and orchestration. The mood has an unimpeachable unity and in it as much as in any other single piece may be found the quintessence of Delius.

The orchestra was led by Arthur Leavins and included Beecham's hand-picked principals with his woodwind sections led by the four players affectionately known as "The Royal Family" – Gerald Jackson (flute), Terence MacDonagh (oboe), Jack Brymer (clarinet) and Gwydion Brooke (bassoon) and familiar with the Beecham way with Delius. The composer dedicated the work to his wife, Jelka Rosen, quoting Rosetti's words:

*All are my blooms and all sweet blooms of love
To thee I gave while Spring and Summer Sang*

The atmosphere Sir Thomas created in the Usher Hall that summer night through this music permeated throughout in a remarkable way, transporting players and audience alike into that summer garden. I have never known an audience sit spellbound for so long through the hushed *diminuendo* of the last twelve bars until well after the last note had died away, not wanting to break the magic of the moment, a feeling equally felt on the platform as instruments were held motionless. It was a performance treasured by many, not least by Sir Thomas's friend Lord Boothby, who specifically recalled it in his broadcast tribute to Beecham in 1961. The creation of such occasions was something of which only Sir Thomas had the secret and which he could so perfectly impart to and through each of his players.

Of the Schubert symphonies, Sir Thomas Beecham worked his inimitable and classically stylish way often with *Symphony No.5 in Bb*, *Symphony No.6 in C* and *Symphony No.8 in b minor*, having played No.8 as early in his conducting career as 1909, with Nos.5 and 6 first joining his repertoire in the 1930s. *Symphony No.4 in c minor* apparently he conducted only once (in 1954) while *Symphony No.1 in D* and *Symphony No.2 in Bb* he conducted on a handful of occasions in the 1950s and developing a warm spot for the charm of *Symphony No.3 in D* which graced his programmes from 1954 to the March of the last year of his conducting life. *Symphony No.5* was the last symphony he was to conduct, at his final concert in Portsmouth on 7th.May 1960. He made commercial recordings of all the Schubert symphonies except Nos.4 and 9.

Symphony No.9 in C made periodic appearances in Beecham programmes between 1928 and 1955, by all accounts always awaited with interest and anticipation, his performances considered special by those who heard them. Of the sixteen occasions that he is known to have conducted the work, one in Liverpool was remembered especially by his old friend, the critic Neville Cardus:

At Liverpool an inordinately heavy programme was goading the orchestra to open rebellion especially as Sir Thomas prolonged

the interval. The concert was taking place on the eve of the world's greatest steeplechase. When Sir Thomas returned to the platform he immediately sensed the temper of his players – and the next work to tackle was "the great C major" symphony of Schubert. Sir Thomas extended his arms, the baton militant. "Now gentlemen", he said, "now for the Grand National". The performance was magnificent. One gust of his humour dispersed all animosities.

His last occasion in which he performed this work was with his Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in the Royal Festival Hall on 14th.December 1955. This was an all Schubert programme for the Royal Philharmonic Society, the other works being the *Overture; Rosamunde* and the *Symphony No.6 in C*. From the beautifully measured opening *Andante* and into the spirited *Allegro ma non troppo*, Sir Thomas as ever kept the music moving forward through each movement, like many conductors in concert omitting the first and last movement repeats, until revelling in Schubert's *vivace* instruction for the final *Allegro* and so bringing another Beecham "occasion" to an exhilaratingly uplifting conclusion.

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Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Sir Thomas Beecham.

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Live recordings. Royal Festival Hall, London, 1955.

G.F. Handel – Concerto Grosso in D minor Op. 3 No. 5. **R. Strauss** -- Till Eulenspiegel,

J.S. Bach – Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G. **R. Strauss** – Don Juan. **Ravel** – Rhapsodie Espagnole
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Sir Thomas Beecham.

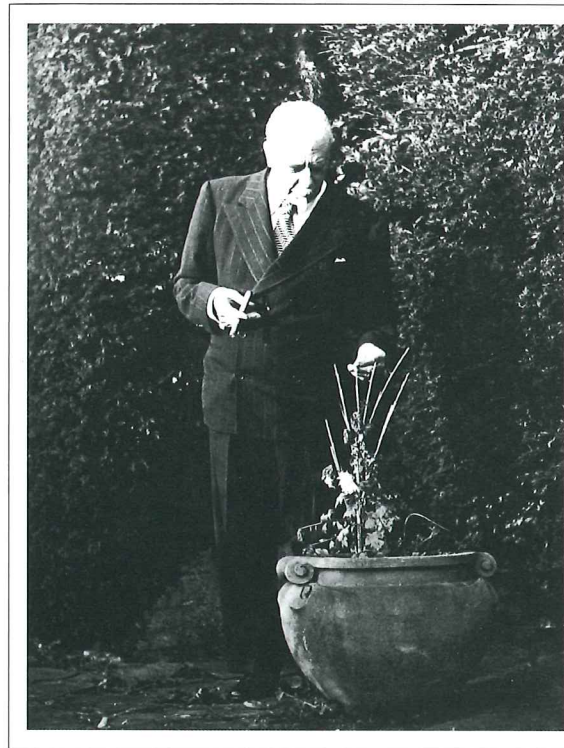
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Berlioz – Overture, Le Corsaire (Royal Albert Hall, 1951) **Grieg** – Old Norwegian Romance with Variations (Royal Festival Hall, 1955). **Vincent d'Indy** – The Enchanted Forest* (BBC Maida Vale, 1951). **St. Saens** – Symphony No. 3 (Royal Festival Hall, 1954).

*BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Sir Thomas Beecham.

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Sir Thomas Beecham