



SOMM-BEECHAM 32

PREMIERE CD RELEASE



MONO ADD

The Beecham Collection BYWAYS OF BEECHAM

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA*
Conductor: Sir Thomas Beecham, Bart., C.H.



Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)
[1] 'Le Corsaire' Overture, Op. 21 8:09

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)
[2] An Old Norwegian Folksong
with Variations, Op. 51 17:53

Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931)
[3] La Forêt Enchantée, symphonic
legend after Uhland, Op. 8* 13:42

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)
Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 78**
[4] Adagio—Allegro moderato—Poco adagio 20:56
[5] Allegro moderato—Presto 7:15
[6] Maestoso—Allegro—Più Allegro 7:56

Total duration: 76:11

** with Denis Vaughan, organ
Tom McCall & Douglas Gamley, pianos

Le Corsaire Overture: Royal Albert Hall, 7th March, 1951.

An Old Norwegian Folksong with Variations: Royal Festival Hall, 27th November, 1955.

La Forêt Enchantée: Studio broadcast performance from BBC Maida Vale Studios,
with BBC Symphony Orchestra, 21st October 1951.

Symphony No. 3 in C minor: Royal Festival Hall, 20th October, 1954.

Executive Producer and Transfers: Arthur Ridgewell

Digital re-mastering and sound restoration: Gary Moore

This compilation and digital re-mastering © Lady Beecham & SOMM Recordings

Photographs are from the private collection of Shirley, Lady Beecham

Front Cover Design: Keith Oke Booklet Design & Layout: Andrew Giles

© & © 2012 SOMM RECORDINGS · THAMES DITTON · SURREY · ENGLAND
Made in the EU



The Beecham Collection



Live Recordings



Berlioz

Le Corsaire Overture

Grieg

Old Norwegian Romance
with Variations

Vincent d'Indy

The Enchanted Forest

Saint-Saens

Symphony No.3

Royal Philharmonic &
BBC Symphony Orchestras
Sir Thomas Beecham,
Bart., C.H

BYWAYS OF BEECHAM

While Berlioz certainly cannot be classed as a Beecham byway, the other three works on this disc were not often visited by him yet do not come as too much of a surprise since, of their composers, the two Frenchmen he knew personally and the other through the mutual friendship of Delius. In addition to the works presented here other works of theirs did find a place in his programmes. Berlioz was, of course, close to Beecham's heart and the overtures – with the curious exceptions of *Benvenuto Cellini*, *Béatrice et Bénédict* and *Rob-Roy* – appeared frequently in his programmes. The overtures *Le carnaval romain* and *Le Corsaire* were his undoubted favourites, the former dominant in the earlier years of his career with some hundred performances between 3rd December 1908 and 16th December 1954, including choosing it as the work to open his first concert that he gave to introduce the first two of his own orchestras officially to the public – the Beecham Symphony Orchestra on 22nd February 1909 and the London Philharmonic Orchestra on 7th October 1932 – both in the Queen's Hall. (He chose Rossini's *Overture: William Tell* to introduce his Royal Philharmonic Orchestra on 15th September 1946 at the Davis Theatre, Croydon). However, from the Royal Philharmonic years, *Le Corsaire* took over as his favourite Berlioz overture, first playing it as late as 27th October 1946 but then giving it on more than sixty occasions until the last time on 19th March 1960 in Chicago, some six weeks before his final concert. He also made three commercial recordings of this work, in 1946, 1954 and 1958. The recording preserved here dates from a concert with his Royal Philharmonic Orchestra for the Royal Philharmonic Society in the Royal Albert Hall on 7th March 1951, one of five performances of the work he gave during that year. The other works in the programme were Brahms: *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*, Franck: *Le Chasseur Maudit* and Tchaikovsky: *Symphony No.6 in b minor*.

In what was to have been the first volume of his unfinished autobiography, *A Mingled Chime* published in 1944, Sir Thomas tells us that the first piece of music that he heard as a six year old at his first concert in 1885 was new piano pieces by Grieg. That recital made such an impression that he immediately demanded piano lessons and he goes on to say that two years later he responded to learning the piano music of Grieg and his contemporaries rather than “the pre-Beethoven classical masters” that his teacher put before him. This early interest in the music of Grieg was continued into his sixty-one years conducting career when he included the *Peer Gynt Suite No.1* in his very first concert on 8th November 1899 with the St. Helens Choral and Orchestral Society. While Grieg was not one of Sir Thomas's favourite composers in the way of Haydn, Mozart, Berlioz or Delius as his podium life developed, nevertheless works of Grieg appeared regularly in his programmes if not frequently. Between 1899 and 1959 (*Symphonic Dance No.2*) he played some two dozen different Grieg works of which the incidental music from *Peer Gynt* appeared most often. Equally, he explored some of the byways of Grieg's music seldom visited by others and which he considered worthy of attention. Among such works was the *Old Norwegian Romance with Variations (Op.51)* of 1890, originally for two pianos and which Grieg orchestrated between 1900 and 1905. This seems to have been a late Grieg discovery for Beecham, since it was 9th November 1955 when he first conducted it at a concert with his Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in Cheam, just over a week before recording it in Studio No.1 at Abbey Road. The work appeared in his concert programmes just twice more, both with the RPO in the Royal Festival Hall. The first of these was in one of his “Beecham Concerts” as part of an all Grieg programme on 27th November 1955, the other works being the *Overture: In Autumn*, *Piano Concerto in a minor* (soloist the Norwegian pianist Robert Riefeling), *Holberg Suite* and the *Symphonic Dances (Op.64)* with the *Homage March* from *Sigurd Jorsalfar* as an encore. It is this performance which is included here.

In his early years Beecham was a centre of attention in social and artistic circles, especially in London and from where he drew influential support from the females of that circle. One of these was the artist Mrs. Maud Christian Foster, a Bohemian character who, among her many artistic acquaintances, knew Vincent d'Indy. Beecham had scheduled the first British performance of d'Indy's symphonic triptych *Jour d'été à la montagne* with his Beecham Symphony Orchestra in the Queen's Hall on 15th March 1909 and Maud Foster offered to go to Paris to arrange a meeting for Beecham with the composer prior to rehearsals. Beecham's most recent biographer, John Lucas, says that Beecham had been introduced to d'Indy in London in 1905 through their mutual friend, Charles Kennedy Scott and their common interest in early choral music. However, Beecham by his own account, in *A Mingled Chime*, writes: *One evening...I met a young man who had not long been back in London from Paris, Vincent d'Indy and the Schola Cantorum.* This was Charles Kennedy Scott who had been studying in Paris and shared d'Indy's interest in plainchant and polyphony. Beecham, for his part, helped Scott to found the Oriana Madrigal Choir in which he also sang bass. Sir Thomas was well-known for his enquiring mind and interest in developments in French music in particular. Following this early contact he explored some of d'Indy's music at the outset of his conducting career and on 14th October 1907 he conducted the symphonic legend *La forêt enchantée* (Op.8) of 1878, having played the Prelude to *Fervaal* already on 4th May of that year. In November 1907 he conducted the *Symphonic Overture: Max et Thecla* from the Wallenstein triptych (Op.12) and in March 1909 he gave the British première of the symphonic triptych *Jour d'été à la montagne* (Op.61), a work he was to play eight more times up to 1954. On 7th December 1910 he conducted the *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français* (Op.25) for piano and orchestra on the first occasion that he conducted a concert for the Royal Philharmonic Society. The first occasion that *La forêt enchantée* was conducted by Beecham was in an afternoon concert programme of the New Symphony Orchestra in the Queen's Hall in which Josef Szigeti was the soloist in

violin concertos by Bach (No.2 in E) and Tchaikovsky with works also by Lalo and Smetana. It was also notable as being the occasion when Delius came to the concert and met Beecham for the first time, so initiating a long, fruitful and very special artistic association and friendship. This work of d'Indy was given eleven times by Sir Thomas, the last occasion being in the Royal Albert Hall on 20th October 1951 with a studio broadcast from Maida Vale for the BBC Third Programme on the following day, the performance preserved here.

Saint-Saëns was another French composer who attracted Beecham's attention from the first occasion that he conducted a work of his on 14th November 1907 with the New Symphony Orchestra in the Queen's Hall and with Myra Hess as the soloist in his *Piano Concerto No. 2 in g minor*. Two years later he conducted the *Violin Concerto No. 3 in b minor* with his new Beecham Symphony Orchestra's leader, Albert Sammons as soloist, establishing a practice which Beecham used throughout his career when often giving his hand-picked orchestral principals solo opportunities rather than always importing "big names". Both of these concertos were to appear in his later programmes among about twenty works of Saint-Saëns he conducted between 1907 and his final concert in Portsmouth on 7th May 1960, that last occasion being a rousing performance of the *Bacchanale* from *Samson et Delilah*, a work (with its attendant *Dance of the Priestesses*) that was to feature often in the last six months of his conducting life. However, it was the descriptive orchestral *Le rouet d'Omphale* (*Omphale's Spinning Wheel*) (Op.31) which was his favourite Saint-Saëns work, appearing more than thirty times in his programmes between 1912 and 1960. The now popular but then quite rare *Symphony No.3 in c minor* (Op.78) of 1886 was first conducted by Sir Thomas on 2nd June 1913 and entered his programmes just eleven times up to the performance recorded here at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert in the Royal Festival Hall on 20th October 1954. That first occasion, in the presence of the composer, had F. B. Kiddle as the organist with Charlton Keith

and Thomas Chapman as pianists, with programme notes including music incipits provided by Saint-Saëns. The final occasion (when the programme also reproduced the composer's original notes) was another where Sir Thomas chose a talented member of his orchestra to play the important organ part, the versatile Australian conductor Denis Vaughan, giving the two piano parts to Tom McCall and Douglas Gamley. Denis Vaughan was a member of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra double bass section as well as the keyboard player (piano, celeste, organ) and the chorus master of the Beecham Choral Society. Denis remembered the great care that was taken on this occasion, from the voicing of the organ throughout the night in the Royal Festival Hall with Ralph Downes, to obtain the required colours and ensure that the sound was not too spread, given the disposition of the pipes right across the back of the orchestra, to the infinite patience that Sir Thomas took particularly in balancing those passages in the slower and quieter sections where the organ has a more accompanying rôle. He also recalled the sense of breathtaking liveliness which Sir Thomas obtained from the orchestra as well as the feeling on the platform and a sensing in the audience, that this was a rare event. As someone also present, I can endorse that, whatever one may think of the work, Sir Thomas had created yet another sense of occasion.

Apropos the subject of tempi and specifically the Saint-Saëns *Symphony No.3*, Sir Thomas tells of his exchange with the composer over dinner after conducting the seventy-fifth anniversary celebratory concert on 2nd June 1913 in the Queen's Hall given in his honour to mark his entry onto the concert platform and organized by the London musical establishment and under the patronage of Queen Alexandra. Saint-Saëns was the soloist on Mozart's *Piano Concerto in Bb (KV 450)* in an otherwise all Saint-Saëns programme (including movements from his *Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 5*). Sir Thomas had had difficulty in generating Mozartian lift and life into the work, given Saint-Saëns's later *penchant* for slow tempi and whenever he tried to speed

things up he was met with an outburst of French expletives from the distinguished soloist. With the *Symphony* he was not so constrained and Sir Thomas's account gives a picture of the event:

On this occasion his presence at rehearsals had an increasingly depressing influence on the players and, convinced of a fiasco unless this could be counteracted, I did all I could at the performance to create the impression of life through purposely exaggerated accentuation without altering too perceptibly the prescribed directions as to speed. Later in the evening at supper I expressed the hope that the execution of the work had been to his satisfaction and beaming benignantly he replied: "You mean, what do I think of your interpretation?" I assured him that nothing would please me so much as to hear his opinion and he continued: "My dear young friend, I have lived a long while and I have known all the chefs d'orchestre. There are two kinds: one takes the music too fast and the other too slow. There is no third!"

A quip worthy of Sir Thomas! Needless to say, he had no such problems in 1954.

© 2012 Graham Melville-Mason

La Forêt Enchantée: sound quality variable with some overload distortion on original acetate.

Our discs are available worldwide from all good record shops. In case of difficulty and for further information please contact us direct: SOMM Recordings, Sales & Marketing Dept., 13 Riversdale Road, Thames Ditton, Surrey, KT7 0QL, UK. Tel: +(0)20-8398 1586. Fax: +(0)20-8339 0981. Email: sales@somm-recording Website: <http://www.somm-recordings.com>

WARNING Copyright subsists in all Somm Recordings. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying, rental or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd., 1 Upper James Street, London W1R 3HG