

MENDELBERG

AT THE DAWN OF ELECTRICAL RECORDING

The Dawn of Electrical Recording

- 1 STRAUSS: Death and Transfiguration excerpt 1 (5:37)
 - 2 STRAUSS: Death and Transfiguration excerpt 2 (6:08)
 - 3 WAGNER: Flying Dutchman Overture excerpt (6:40)
 - 4 MENDELSSOHN: Violin Concerto excerpt (6:24)
- Samuel Gardner, violin
- Live electrical test recordings from Carnegie Hall, 2nd April 1924
- Made at Bell Laboratories from a cable feed intended for radio broadcast
- New York Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Willem Mengelberg**

Mengelberg at the BBC

- MENDELSSOHN: A Midsummer Night's Dream
- 5 Overture (10:59)
 - 6 Nocturne (6:23)
 - 7 Scherzo (4:36)
 - 8 BERLIOZ: Symphonie Fantastique, 2nd mvt - Un Bal excerpt (3:25)
- Live broadcast recordings taken from damaged acetate discs, January 18th 1938
- BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Willem Mengelberg**

Transfers from a private collection
XR remastering by Andrew Rose at Pristine Audio, June-September 2009
Cover artwork based on a photograph of Willem Mengelberg

Total duration: 50:12 ©2009 Pristine Audio.

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THE DAWN OF ELECTRICAL RECORDING

RARE FRAGMENTS FROM BELL LABS' 1924 ELECTRICAL TEST RECORDINGS:

R. STRAUSS - DEATH AND TRANSFIGURATION
WAGNER - OVERTURE FROM THE FLYING DUTCHMAN
MENDELSSOHN - VIOLIN CONCERTO (SAMUEL GARDNER, VIOLIN)

MENDELBERG AT THE BBC, 1938

THE ONLY KNOWN RECORDINGS WITH THE BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
UNIQUE MENDELBERG MENDELSSOHN & BERLIOZ

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AT THE DAWN OF ELECTRICAL RECORDING

This collection brings together two fascinating collections of recordings from two concerts given some fourteen years apart. The first four items are taken from a unique set of recordings made by Bell Laboratories on 2nd April 1924, and comprise the only known surviving sides from this concert. Developments in recording technology were urgently needed with the advent of radio, where the use of electric microphones was able to reproduce sound of a quality and frequency range which the acoustic recording process of the day simply could not capture.

Bell were at the forefront of the development of an electrical recording system, capable of cutting disc masters using electronics for the first time in place of the entirely mechanical horn system that had provided all recordings for over a quarter of a century. Knowing that the new system would need to be able to cope with a very wide range of pitch and dynamics, the engineers at Bell realised that the best test of their system could only be a full symphony orchestra.

However, without a suitable studio and the money to experiment in this way with an orchestra, clearly an alternative means of testing their equipment needed to be devised. Fortunately the regular live radio broadcasts from Carnegie Hall could be fed not only to the transmitters, but also directly by wire into Bell's engineering facility. Despite the fragmentary nature of these recordings and their age, they provide us with unique insights not only into a nascent technology still in essence in use today, but they also constitute the only known live recordings of Mengelberg conducting the New York Philharmonic. Furthermore, this is the only known recording of Mengelberg conducting the Mendelssohn *Violin Concerto*, and may also be the only electric recording of the soloist, the violinist and composer Samuel Gardner, who had previously cut three acoustic sides for Victor in 1915.

The BBC recordings are also very special, comprising the only known record of Mengelberg with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Once again the repertoire contains unique recordings - although other recordings exist of the Mendelssohn *Scherzo*, neither the *Overture* nor the *Nocturne* from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* exist in any other known Mengelberg recording. Finally the short surviving fragment from Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* is the only recording of Mengelberg conducting this work.

These transfers, provided by a private collector, have provided me with great technical challenges. Clearly Bell wished to test the full dynamic range of their recording system, and whilst a full-bodied sound is achieved in the louder sections, the very quietest notes often seem almost to disappear into the background noise. Meanwhile it has been suggested that the BBC acetates from which the 1938 recordings were transferred had been rescued from a waste bin - not the ideal storage medium for so delicate an historic document...

NOTES BY ANDREW ROSE - FURTHER NOTES ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM