

Beecham conducts Arnell Delius Berners



There seems to a revival of interest at present in **Lord Berners** so that the appearance of this account of his chief oeuvre, the ballet suite, *The Triumph of Neptune* is as timely as it is welcome. I should perhaps stress that this is not the familiar 78 rpm version that Beecham made with the LPO (Columbia LX697-8, 2/38) but one new to this country, recorded with the Philadelphia Orchestra and that it includes two movements omitted from the English set, "Jouhaud" and "The Frozen Forest". Commissioned by Dugleifer for his second visit to London made at Beecham's invitation in 1926, *The Triumph of Neptune* had the benefit of a libretto by Siegfried Strelow and choreography by Blanche, Danilova, Lifar and Petroya directed the leading roles. Berners has been compared with Stravinsky though with scant justification; their eccentricity is perhaps their only point of contact. In general Berners cannot be said to possess a strongly defined personality; he was a pasticheur of great accomplishment and an artist of versatile talent (he was also a painter and novelist). He certainly succeeded in this delightful score in capturing the fragile period flavour of the twenties; the musical invention is sustained and his wit and cleverness are telling. It would perhaps be a little too much to expect the Philadelphia Orchestra to fully penetrate the highly dissonant world the score evokes and those who know the LPO version will find accents heavier and rhythms less fleet of foot. Robert Groeters, who briefly appears as the singer practising *The Last Rose of Summer* in "The Sailor's Return", is more heavily handed than Robert Alva in the pre-war 78 rpm version.

Richard Arnell's music is neglected these days though his *Fifth Symphony* was recently broadcast. What little music of his that I have heard is often distinctive in utterance. In some respects he seems to me not unlike Rawsthorne though there is little of the darker, character. *The Record Guide* spoke of it as "agreeable music but hardly strong enough to hold the interest on repeated hearing" without the stage action. Hubert Foss in these pages wrote: "Idea after picturesque idea succeed each other in bewildering succession. First impressions were: restlessness and excitability; a marked Pachelbel flavour; a plethora of undeveloped notions; a diatonic basis with a generous sprinkling of wrong notes to keep it up to date". Some of this undoubtedly holds good today though speaking personally, I have an affection for this score short-recalled though its invention may be. Some of its ideas are highly memorable and fresh, there are moments of poetry and the score is full of vitality. Yet ideas are never really sustained long enough to satisfy the listener. I have periodically returned to the 78 rpm originals ever the years but shall do so no more since this new transfer is of quite outstanding quality; indeed one would scarcely suspect its origins so well focused is its sound. Everything is lively, fresh, and truthful in timbre; it is, I would have thought, exceptionally vivid for its period. (A friend guessed its date at 1962 or 63). It derives from tape rather than 78 rpm masters, I am sure, since there is no trace of surface noise. The recording of the Berners is less distinguished but this does not inhibit a warm recommendation for this most welcome and desirable reissue.

R.L. - The Gramophone, July 1974 (*review of Elgar's Berners and Arnell*)

Transfer notes

I was happy to have excellent pressings for all three of these works - two from a near-mint American Columbia Masterworks LP (Arnell and Berners) and the third from a similarly well-preserved Philips LP (*Idyll*). Unsurprisingly the overall findings I had also prepared Beecham's 1952 Delius *Appalachia* recording, but this proved to be a minute or so too long for the present release. It was interesting to discover that both London recordings were of significantly higher quality than the US recording, but that's only really to say that the Berners was well-recorded and the Delius and Arnell even better. Given such promising material I was able to try out a new addition to the SX repertoire of remastering techniques - a means of compensating for the lack of very deep, resonant bass in recordings of this era, such as one might feel shaking the floor slightly in a modern recording of similar material. This proved more successful than I'd hoped and the results can be heard especially well in the Arnell which, apart from its mono centre, could surely pass for something several decades more recent than 1950! All in all it was an astonishing result that exceeded all my expectations. **AR**

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Beecham



ARNELL Punch and the Child DELIUS An Arabesque BERNERS The Triumph of Neptune



Royal Philharmonic Orchestra The Philadelphia Orchestra
Studio recordings 1950 - 1955



Beecham Arnell, Berners, Delius

- 1 ARNELL Punch and the Child - *Ballet Music* (21:21)
2 DELIUS An Arabesque (13:14)

Einar Nørby baritone

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra & Chorus Sir Thomas Beecham

BERNERS The Triumph of Neptune - Suite

1. Harlequinade (1:25)
2. Dance of the Fairy Princess (2:06)
3. Schottische (2:27)
4. Cloudland (3:44)
5. Sunday Morning (Intermezzo) (2:00)
6. The Sailor's Return (3:21)
7. Hornpipe (1:43)
8. The Frozen Frost (5:08)
9. Apotheosis of Neptune (2:47)

Robert Grooters baritone

The Philadelphia Orchestra Sir Thomas Beecham