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SIR THOMAS BEECHAM

The ABC Blue Network Concerts, Volume 4

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The concert by Sir Thomas Beecham and the "Blue Network Symphony Orchestra" of 21 April 1945 certainly assumes a more optimistic tone than that which occurred as President Franklin Roosevelt had been laid to rest. The high energy of the occasion bursts forth immediately, with Mozart's 1778 *D Major "Paris" Symphony*, expressly conceived to parody the musical conceits of the day, such as the so-called *premier coup d'archet*, or the Parisian version of unison Mannheim rocket figures at a symphonic opening. The addition of trumpets and tympani – and the clarinets – increases the often ceremonial pomp of the performance. Throughout the performance, Beecham emphasizes the suave grandeur Mozart controls in this, his largest symphonic structure in his oeuvre at the time. The virtuoso syncopations of the last movement move with a lithe suppleness that makes this rendition a worthy companion to Beecham's commercial endeavor with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Beecham himself arranged various Handel melodies and tropes to create the four-movement *Piano Concerto in A*, expressly for his new wife, Betty Humby. Handel emerges as a Romantic, his textures lush and flavored by all sorts of nice touches between the keyboard and the woodwinds, especially in the middle movement *Romanza*. The first movement *Chaconne* exploits a bass pattern we know from Edwin Fischer's early recording. The Menuet movement, staid and galant, embodies the soul of aristocratic elegance. Despite the "popular media" version of Handel proffered by the Beechams, the effect has its moments of intimacy and elated fervor. With the Finale's glad spirits, we have a *concertante* pastiche of Handel pleasantry. Humby performs with a speed and lithe grace that suggest she would have been a natural acolyte of the Mendelssohn concertos.

Beecham called Chabrier's *Espana* "the best of quasi-Spanish music yet written." In one Leonard Bernstein's Harvard lectures, he pointed out the "poetic," architectural and symmetrical features in Chabrier's brilliant scoring for this "Rhapsodie." The Blue Network horns and winds, as they had been in the Mozart, project a brisk, alert sonority, fresh and vivid, as tends to be Chabrier's wont. At the fiery conclusion, the audience roar clearly expresses their recognition of a true "lollipop." The restored sound by Andrew Rose raises the level of sonority well above anything like AM radio.

Gary Lemco, *Audiophile Audition* on Volume 3 (PASC477)

Producer's Note

Information concerning Sir Thomas Beecham's four concerts on the nascent ABC radio network in April 1945 is scant, but a small notice in the New York Times of 15 April suggests that not only had the Saturday concerts been quickly deemed a success, but that plans were already afoot to take the idea forward. Expecting to follow in Sir Thomas's footsteps were Max Goberman, Nikolai Beresowski and Paul Whiteman (for a Gershwin memorial concert on June 30). Furthermore it was stated that "while there has been no official announcement of such a plan, it is reported that the orchestra may become a permanent symphony ensemble for the network". Beecham's final concert was once again centred around a classical symphony - this time from Haydn - coupled with a handful of popular shorter works. Our source this time lacked an introduction or sign-off from Milton Cross, and quality varies somewhat across the sides, but generally we find decent audio quality and, once again, some sterling musicianship from Sir Thomas and his ensemble.

Andrew Rose

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abc blue network concerts vol 4

haydn
symphony no. 102

mozart
the impresario - overture

saint-saëns
omphale's spinning wheel

berlioz
royal hunt and storm
hungarian march

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Blue Network Symphony Orchestra
Sir Thomas Beecham, conductor
ABC Radio broadcast, 28 April 1945

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BEECHAM, BLUE NETWORK SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on
a photograph of
Sir Thomas Beecham

Total duration: 53:37

- 1 MOZART Der Schauspieldirektor, K.486 - Overture (4:14)
- 2 SAINT-SAËNS Le Rouet d'Omphale, Op. 31 (9:25)

HAYDN Symphony No. 102 in B flat major, Hob. I:102

- 3 1st mvt. - Largo - Vivace (7:05)
- 4 2nd mvt. - Adagio (6:07)
- 5 3rd mvt. - Menuet (Allegro) - Trio (6:52)
- 6 4th mvt. - Finale (Presto) (5:07)

- 7 BERLIOZ Les Troyens, H133 - Chasse royale et Orage (10:29)
- 8 BERLIOZ La damnation de Faust, H 111 - Marche Hongroise (4:18)

Blue Network Symphony Orchestra
Sir Thomas Beecham, conductor

Live broadcast on ABC/Blue Network, 4pm, 28 April 1945
Ritz Theater, W. 48th Street, New York City
Announcer: Milton Cross

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