



Bruno Walter

The Complete Columbia Acoustics



Producer's Note

Although Bruno Walter claimed late in life that he had made his first recordings around 1900, his earliest documented discs date from 1923 when he began a series for Gramophone/Polydor in Berlin, most of which have been reissued on Pristine PASC 142 and PASC 322. In May, 1924, Walter was in London for the first presentation of a German opera season at Covent Garden since the end of the Great War. That month, he conducted Wagner's *Ring* cycle, *Tristan und Isolde*, and Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier* in enthusiastically-received productions featuring Frida Leider in her Covent Garden debut, Lauritz Melchior, Friedrich Schorr, Lotte Lehmann and Elisabeth Schumann.

On May 22, Walter entered the Columbia studios at Petty France to make the first in a series of discs for a label with which, on one side of the Atlantic or the other, he would be associated for much of the rest of his life. A *Siegfried Idyll* was recorded that day, followed by the first three sides of Strauss' *Death and Transfiguration* the following day; however, neither was approved for release.

It would not be until the following December that Walter, who had returned to London to conduct the (old, pre-Beecham) RPO in a performance of Elgar's First Symphony in the presence of the composer, would be back in the Columbia studios. Over the next five days, he would preside over four recording sessions, one of which was devoted to a single title (Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* Overture) which ultimately remained unissued. Four further sides would be recorded the following February before the microphone supplanted the old acoustic method of recording.

The present collection brings together all of Walter's published acoustic Columbians. It includes one recording (Weber's *Freischütz* Overture) which was only released in America, as well as two which were only published in Britain (the "Rhine Journey" and *Siegfried Idyll*). A further recording of "Siegfried's Funeral Music" from *Götterdämmerung* which came out on American Columbia credited to Walter was actually conducted by Hamilton Harty.

The repertoire chosen largely follows the composers and even some of the particular works with which Walter was making a name for himself at Covent Garden at the time – much Wagner, along with Strauss – and includes several works to which Walter would not return again in the studio (the Mendelssohn, Berlioz and the *Tristan* "Liebestod"). The playing of the orchestra is variable, both in ensemble and pitch; and some of the tempi seem a bit speeded up in order to get the music onto a single side (particularly in the Mendelssohn and the *Meistersinger* Prelude). Elsewhere, though, Walter is given the opportunity to take as long as he wants, with the Weber overture spread over three sides, as it would not be in his Paris remake fourteen years later, and the "Liebestod" generously given two 12-inch matrices for its six-minute duration.

The transfers for this release drew wherever possible upon American Columbia "New Process" pressings (for the Weber, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Strauss and Wagner "Liebestod") which featured the most (relatively) quiet surfaces available, and English Columbia discs for the remainder. From its original release onward through all modern discographies I've seen, the Berlioz has always been misidentified as the "Dance of the Sylphs" rather than as the "Minuet of the Will-o'-the-Wisps", to which it has been corrected here.

Mark Obert-Thorn



PASC 482

bruno walter

the complete columbia acoustic recordings



royal philharmonic orchestra
studio recordings · 1924 – 1925

weber
der freischütz
overture

mendelssohn
a midsummer night's dream
nocturne

berlioz
the damnation of faust
minuet of the will-o'-the-wisps

wagner
tristan und isolde
liebestod

die meistersinger
prelude to act 3

götterdämmerung
siegfried's rhine journey
siegfried idyll

r. strauss
death and transfiguration

Obert-Thorn

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BRUNO WALTER THE COMPLETE ACOUSTIC COLUMBIA RECORDINGS
WALTER, ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

walter

columbia acoustics

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
PASC 482

Producer and Audio
Restoration Engineer:
Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Bruno Walter

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for providing source
material

All recordings made in the
Columbia Petty France
Studio, London

Total duration: 76:50

1 **WEBER** Der Freischütz, Op. 77 - Overture (10:14)

Recorded 7 December 1924 · Matrices: AX 795-3, 796-1 & 797-2 (Am. Columbia 67082/3-D)

2 **MENDELSSOHN** A Midsummer Night's Dream, Op. 61 - Nocturne (4:39)

Recorded 11 February 1925 · Matrix: AX 881-2 (Columbia L 1651)

3 **BERLIOZ** The Damnation of Faust, Op. 24 - Minuet of the Will-o'-the-Wisps (4:36)

Recorded 5 December 1924 · Matrix: AX 794-1 (Columbia L 1623)

4 **WAGNER** Tristan und Isolde - Liebestod (6:10)

Recorded 11 February 1925 · Matrices: AX 879-1, 880-2 (Columbia L 1652)

5 **WAGNER** Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg - Prelude to Act 3 (4:49)

Recorded 11 February 1925 · Matrix: AX 878-2 (Columbia L 1651)

6 **WAGNER** Götterdämmerung - Siegfried's Rhine Journey (7:43)

Recorded 7 December 1924 · Matrices: AX 798-2, 799-2 (Columbia L 1636)

7 **WAGNER** Siegfried Idyll (17:44)

Recorded 3 & 5 December 1924 · Matrices: AX 782-1, 783-1, 789-2 & 790-2 (Columbia L 1653/4)

8 **R. STRAUSS** Death and Transfiguration, Op. 24 (20:55)

Recorded 5 December 1924 · Matrices: AX 787-1, 788-2, 791-2, 792-2 & 793-1 (Columbia L 1621/3)

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Bruno Walter, conductor

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