



Mengelberg



Concertgebouw Columbia Recordings Vol. 1

This release, along with the Tchaikovsky recordings previously reissued on Pristine PASC 511 and another volume to follow, will present Willem Mengelberg's complete recordings with his Concertgebouw Orchestra for the Columbia label. Early versions will be included as well as their remakes, along with alternate takes (one of them in the next volume unpublished on 78 rpm).

Mengelberg's Columbias are significant in several respects: they include his first recordings with the Concertgebouw, an ensemble whose partnership with the conductor dated back to 1895; they feature the works of some contemporary composers with whom Mengelberg had personal friendships and special insights, such as Mahler in our next volume; and they present some classic interpretations, like Liszt's *Les Préludes*, which have never been bettered on disc.

The present volume focuses on works from the Baroque to the early Romantic era. The music of Johann Sebastian Bach was considered a Mengelberg specialty during his career, and he was noted for his annual performances of the *St. Matthew Passion* in Amsterdam. The conductor's big-orchestra Romantic era approach would not pass muster today – flute solos are doubled, one commentator has reported hearing an organ in the background, and I'm sure there's a glockenspiel tinkling away in the *Badinerie* – yet I think we are the poorer for it.

Only two movements of the *Sinfonia* by Bach's youngest son were recorded by Columbia, but Mengelberg was able to complete it in a near-contemporaneous recording with his "other" orchestra, the New York Philharmonic (PASC 378), a reading which is surprisingly similar, not only in overall interpretive approach but also in orchestral execution. Mengelberg was an early champion of the works of Cherubini, and his recording of the *Anacreon Overture* reveals the composer's influence on Beethoven.

Columbia had already recorded Weingartner in the Beethoven Eighth Symphony earlier in the year (PASC 414), so Mengelberg had to make do with only a single movement as a filler side to the Cherubini. (He was later to record it complete for Telefunken.) It is replete with humorous detail, as well as some inadvertent studio noises. The conductor also brings the grandiose humor of the "Turkish March" to the fore in another recording he was later to remake for Telefunken.

The Beethoven overtures taken down during these sessions are classic readings which belie the caricature of the conductor as "Mangleberg". Here, there is no self-indulgent phrase-pulling, but rather finely judged rubato and rhetorical emphases. (And here again, as with the J. C. Bach, one can compare the two Concertgebouw versions of the *Egmont* with a New York recording made between them.)

In the Weber overtures, one can hear Mengelberg's fusion of forward momentum coupled to a sense of magical wonder. Listen, for example, to the bridge between the boisterous opening of the *Euryanthe Overture* and the lyrical second subject. Here, unlike many other interpreters, Mengelberg takes an extremely broad tempo accompanied by tender string portamenti. It's usually a throwaway transitional moment; but Mengelberg elevates it to something sublime.

The Mendelssohn Scherzo appeared in two different takes, the somewhat less tidy earlier one issued only in America. A cut is taken in both for disc timing reasons, although the conductor performed it complete in a 1938 BBC Symphony broadcast (PASC 184). The two Berlioz excerpts were hampered by dim early sound and pitch drift (corrected here), but restoration reveals idiomatic performances. Arguably best of all is Mengelberg's Liszt, with *Les Préludes* blazing in a grandeur only one born with a Romantic-era sensibility could truly grasp and convey. (Or, as Humpty Dumpty observed to Alice, "There's glory for you!") *Mark Obert-Thorn*



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concertgebouw columbia recordings, volume 1

disc one

J. S. BACH Suite No. 2 in B minor for Flutes and Strings
BWV 1067

1. Overture: Grave; Allegro (8:04)
2. Rondeau: Allegro (1:32)
3. Sarabande: Andante (2:08)
4. Bourées I and II (3:09)
5. Polonaise: Moderato (3:26)
6. Menuet: Allegretto (1:21)
7. Badinerie: Allegro (1:39)

J. C. BACH (arr. Stein) Sinfonia in B flat, Op. 18, No. 2
("Lucio Silla" Overture)

8. 1st mvt. - Allegro assai (2:55)
9. 2nd mvt. - Andante (4:11)

10. CHERUBINI Anacreon - Overture (9:39)

11. BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 8 in F, Op. 93
2nd mvt. - Allegretto scherzando (4:03)

12. BEETHOVEN The Ruins of Athens, Op. 113
No. 4 - Turkish March (2:44)

13. BEETHOVEN Coriolan, Op. 62 - Overture (7:47)

14. BEETHOVEN Leonore Overture No. 1, Op. 138 (9:10)

15. BEETHOVEN Leonore Overture No. 3, Op. 72b (13:07)

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: **Mark Obert-Thorn**

Special thanks to Nathan Brown and Charles Niss for providing source material
All recordings made in the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam

Full discographic information available online

Total duration: 2hr 33:24 CD1: 74:55 CD2: 78:29

disc two

1. BEETHOVEN Egmont, Op. 84 - Overture (8:05)

2. WEBER Der Freischütz - Overture (8:58)

3. WEBER Euryanthe - Overture (8:26)

4. WEBER Oberon - Overture (9:08)

5. MENDELSSOHN A Midsummer Night's Dream (Incidental Music),
Op. 61: No. 1 - Scherzo (3:46)

BERLIOZ The Damnation of Faust, Op. 24

6. Dance of the Sylphs (2:22)

7. Hungarian March (3:21)

8. LISZT Les Préludes, G97 (15:26)

Early Versions and Alternate Takes

9. BEETHOVEN Coriolan, Op. 62 - Overture (7:34)

10. BEETHOVEN Egmont, Op. 84 - Overture (7:34)

11. MENDELSSOHN A Midsummer Night's Dream (Incidental Music),
Op. 61: No. 1 - Scherzo (3:50)

Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam

conducted by Willem Mengelberg