



Leo Blech



150th Anniversary Album · Beethoven & Schubert

This release commemorates the 150th anniversary of the birth of Leo Blech (21 April 1871- 25 August 1958), a conductor perhaps most associated with the operatic works of Richard Wagner, but heard here in a symphonic program devoted to Beethoven and Schubert.

Blech's most well-known Beethoven recording is his December, 1926 accompaniment to Fritz Kreisler in the Violin Concerto. A month later, he began a series of overtures, leading with those to *Egmont* and *Fidelio*, continuing later that year with the *Leonore No. 3* and concluding with *Coriolan* in the following year. Although he never recorded a complete Beethoven symphony, he did set down two movements during the acoustic era: the finale of the Fifth, and the Funeral March from the "*Eroica*" heard here. Pre-dating the earliest complete recording of the work, this was only the second time any music from that symphony had been attempted on disc. Blech's tempi here are rather faster than what listeners are used to; but whether this is due to the performance practice of over a century ago or to the necessity imposed by fitting the music onto four ten-inch sides is unknown.

Opening the Schubert portion of our program are two transcriptions from piano works. The first, an arrangement of six short German dances interspersed by *da capo* repeats of the first dance, was the surprisingly straightforward work of Anton von Webern, which the composer had completed only the year before this première recording. (The violin solo at the beginning of the fifth dance is most likely played by Szymon Goldberg, the Berlin Philharmonic's concertmaster from 1930 to 1934.) The Liszt arrangement which follows is a more flamboyant recasting (including tambourines and cymbals) of the composer's two-piano original, which seems at least as much Liszt as Schubert.

During his long recording career, Blech only set down five complete symphonies: Haydn's 88th (acoustically) and "*Surprise*" (three times); Tchaikovsky's Fifth (on Pristine PASC 181); and the three Schubert works presented here. The Fifth and "*Unfinished*" are fine performances in the solid German tradition; but the Ninth is, to say the least, unlike any other on disc. It was the first complete* recording of the work, beating Harty's version (PASC 282) by two months; and Blech seemed determined to challenge its reputation for "heavenly length". It was appropriate that he should have recorded it with Albert Coates' usual ensemble, the LSO, as they were used to lightning-fast tempi and willful interpretations. Some modern critics have been harsh in their assessment of the performance; but it remains *sui generis*, an exhilarating (if, for purists, maddening) roller coaster ride through Schubert's most expansive symphonic score.

*(Almost complete – there is a cut in the Scherzo's *da capo* repeat to get it to fit on two sides.)

Mark Obert-Thorn



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disc one

1. BEETHOVEN Egmont - *Overture*, Op. 84* (8:05)
Recorded 24 January 1927 in Berlin

2. BEETHOVEN Coriolan - *Overture*, Op. 62* (7:40)
Recorded 15 March 1928 in Berlin

BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 3 in E flat major, Op. 55 '*Eroica*'*
3. 2nd Mvt. - Marcia funebre - Adagio assai (12:02)
Recorded 24 & 27 October 1919

4. BEETHOVEN Fidelio - *Overture*, Op. 72* (6:20)
Recorded 24 January 1927 in Berlin

5. BEETHOVEN Leonore Overture No. 3, Op. 72a* (12:58)
Recorded 6 April & 20 June 1927 in Berlin

6. SCHUBERT (orch. Webern) 6 German Dances, D820** (7:29)
Recorded 18 April 1932 in the Beethoven-Saal, Berlin

7. SCHUBERT (orch. Liszt) Hungarian March
(from *Divertissement à la hongroise*), D818* (4:06)
Recorded 29 November 1927 in Berlin

SCHUBERT Symphony No. 5 in B flat major, D485*
8. 1st Mvt. - Allegro (5:38)
9. 2nd Mvt. - Andante con moto (6:59)
10. 3rd Mvt. - Menuetto: Allegro molto - Trio (3:29)
11. 4th Mvt. - Allegro vivace (4:24)
Recorded 2 October 1930

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Full discographic information is available online
Cover artwork based on a photograph of Leo Blech

Total duration: 2hr 27:17 CD1: 79:10, CD2: 68:05

disc two

SCHUBERT Symphony No. 8 in B minor, D759 '*Unfinished*'*

1. 1st Mvt. - Allegro moderato (11:17)

2. 2nd Mvt. - Andante con moto (12:38)

Recorded 11 March & 15 June 1930

SCHUBERT Symphony No. 9 in C major, D944 '*Great*'***

3. 1st Mvt. - Andante - Allegro ma non troppo (12:34)

4. 2nd Mvt. - Andante con moto (13:38)

5. 3rd Mvt. - Allegro vivace - Trio (7:21)

6. 4th Mvt. - Finale: Allegro vivace (10:37)

Recorded 15 November 1927 in Queen's Hall, London

*Berlin State Opera Orchestra

**Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra

***London Symphony Orchestra

conducted by Leo Blech