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The Columbia Beethoven Centennial Symphony Series

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Producer's Note

This volume is the first of five which will reissue, for the first time in one series, the complete symphony cycle which English Columbia commissioned to commemorate the centennial of Beethoven's death in 1927. It was a bold move for the label, perennially in the shadow of its larger competitor, HMV, to embark on such a project at a time when no other company had recorded all nine symphonies using the relatively new electrical process. Indeed, HMV and Polydor would not complete their cycles until several years after the centennial had passed.

The first four symphonies were assigned to British conductors (Henschel, Beecham, Wood and the Northern Irish Harry) while the remainder were given to Weingartner, already generally acknowledged as a Beethoven specialist. The German-born Sir George Henschel (1850–1934) was equally noted for his appearances as a baritone recitalist as he was for his conducting. He was the first music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and this Beethoven First Symphony is his only recording as a conductor.

Beecham's recording of the Second Symphony was the first of three he would make (the others were in 1936 with the LPO and 1956/7 with "his" RPO). While all share an exuberant approach to the main theme of the first movement, the present performance threatens to go off the rails with tempi that are just short of humanly impossible to play. The Luripausen just before and after the Trio in the Scherzo were an interpretive indulgence Beecham did not repeat in his later versions. It has never been reissued on CD before, perhaps in part due to the unusually high playback speed required (84.4 rpm at A4 = 440Hz, quite the fastest speed I've ever encountered for an electrical recording). Henry Wood's contemporaneously-recorded Leonore Overture, although not part of the Centennial Symphonies series, has been included to fill out the short program, as a sort of preview for his Eroica on Volume 2.

The sources for the transfers were first edition American Columbia "Vya-Tonal" pressings. Multiple copies of each were assembled, and the best sides were chosen for transfer, although it must be kept in mind that these early electrics are inherently rather noisy. The Henschel set was plagued by pitch fluctuation throughout each side, which has been corrected in this transfer.

Mark Ober-Thorn

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
SARL Pristine Audio, Le Bourg, 24610 St. Médard de Gurçon, France - Tel. (00) 33 553 821 857
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Studio recordings, 1926-27

Volume 1: Symphonies 1 & 2, Leonore Overture No. 3
Sir George Henschel • Sir Thomas Beecham • Sir Henry J. Wood

 **bert-Thorn**

Producer & Audio Restoration Engineer:
Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover artwork based on photographs of **Sir Thomas
Beecham** and **Sir George Henschel**

Beethoven Centennial Vol. 1

Symphony No. 1 in C, Op. 21

- 1 1st mvt. - Adagio molto - Allegro con brio (9:47)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Andante cantabile con moto (6:42)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Menuetto (3:41)
- 4 4th mvt. - Adagio - Allegro molto e vivace (6:23)

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Sir George Henschel

Symphony No. 2 in D, Op. 36

- 5 1st mvt. - Adagio molto - Allegro con brio (7:35)
- 6 2nd mvt. - Larghetto (10:14)
- 7 3rd mvt. - Scherzo (Allegro) (3:29)
- 8 4th mvt. - Allegro molto (6:04)

London Symphony Orchestra
Sir Thomas Beecham

- 9 Leonore Overture No. 3, Op. 72b (13:01)

New Queen's Hall Orchestra
Sir Henry J. Wood

Symphony No. 1

Recorded 14 and 21 December 1926 and 4 February 1927 in
the Scala Theatre, London
Matrix nos.: WRAX 2284-1, 2285-1, 2286-2, 2287-6, 2303-6,
2304-2, 2305-1 and 2306-2
First issued on Columbia L 1889 through 1892

Symphony No. 2

Recorded 9 - 10 November 1926 in the Scala Theatre, London
Matrix nos.: WRAX 2142-2, 2143-2, 2144-2, 2145-2, 2149-3,
2150-2, 2151-2 and 2152-2
First issued on Columbia L 1864 through 1867
Additional pitch stabilisation: Andrew Rose

Leonore Overture No. 3

Recorded 28 February 1927 in London
Matrix nos.: WRAX 2467-2, 2468-1, 2469-1 and 2470-1
First issued on Columbia L 1978 and 1979

Total duration: **66:56**

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