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# The Columbia Beethoven Centennial Symphony Series

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## Producer's Note

This volume is the second 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 Harty) while the remainder were given to Weingartner, already generally acknowledged as a Beethoven specialist.

Henry Wood had already set down an abridged acoustic version of the *Eroica* for Columbia on six sides in 1922 when he was approached to record it complete for the microphone. The recording locale is not precisely known; I have seen references to both the Scala Theatre and Columbia's Large Studio in Petty France. We do know, however, that the New Queen's Hall Orchestra did not record it in Queen's Hall, which was under exclusive contract to HMV at the time.

Wood's approach is surprisingly modern for its time – fleet, unmannered, and with hardly any string portamenti to be heard. Apparently, Wood was originally intended to play a greater role in Columbia's Beethoven Centennial series. In March of 1927, he recorded two concerti, the *Emperor* with Ignaz Friedman and the Violin Concerto with Albert Sammons; but neither was ever released, and the original matrices were destroyed.

The Fourth would turn out to be the only Beethoven symphony Harty recorded. His approach here is similar to Wood's, albeit with a bit more portamenti on display, and he benefitted from the almost-too-ample acoustics of Manchester's Free Trade Hall. For the final side (the last half of the fourth movement), the engineers must have told Harty that he was running perilously close to the four-minute maximum Columbia was apparently enforcing at the time for twelve-inch matrices, as he speeds up his already energetic reading to an exhilarating conclusion, the Hallé following him with great precision and virtuosity.

The sources for the transfers were American Columbia "Viva-Tonal" pressings for the *Eroica* and laminated English Columbias for the Fourth. Pitch fluctuations throughout each side, which were particularly severe in the Fourth Symphony, have been corrected in this transfer.

Mark Obert-Thorn

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT [WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM](http://WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM)  
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## Volume 2: Symphonies 3 & 4

Sir Henry J. Wood • Sir Hamilton Harty

Studio recordings, 1926

Obert-Thorn

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THE COLUMBIA BEETHOVEN CENTENNIAL SYMPHONY SERIES, VOLUME 2  
WOOD · HARTY

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

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THE COLUMBIA BEETHOVEN CENTENNIAL SYMPHONY SERIES, VOLUME 2  
WOOD · HARTY

Cover artwork based on  
photographs of **Sir Henry J  
Wood** and **Sir Hamilton Harty**

**Symphony No. 3**

Recorded 18 November and 2 and 5  
December, 1926 in London  
Matrix nos.: WRAX 2212/16, 2249/54,  
and 2262/64 (all Take 1)  
First issued on Columbia L 1868  
through 1874

**Symphony No. 4**

Recorded 26 – 27 November, 1926 in  
the Free Trade Hall, Manchester  
Matrix nos.: WRAX 2233-1, 2234-1,  
2235-1, 2236-2, 2237-2, 2238-2, 2239-2,  
2240-2, 2241-1 and 2242-2  
First issued on Columbia L 1875  
through 1879

Additional pitch stabilisation:  
Andrew Rose

Special thanks to **Richard Kaplan** for  
providing source material

Total duration: **73:45**

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## Beethoven Centennial Vol. 2

### Symphony No. 3 in E flat, Op. 55 "EROICA"

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio (13:06)
- 2 2nd mvt. - *Marcia funebre*: Adagio assai (13:49)
- 3 3rd mvt. - *Scherzo*: Allegro vivace (4:51)
- 4 4th mvt. - Allegro molto (10:49)

**New Queen's Hall Orchestra Sir Henry J. Wood**

### Symphony No. 4 in B flat, Op. 60

- 5 1st mvt. - Adagio - Allegro vivace (10:08)
- 6 2nd mvt. - Adagio (8:52)
- 7 3rd mvt. - Allegro vivace (5:28)
- 8 4th mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo (6:42)

**Hallé Orchestra Sir Hamilton Harty**

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