

This release spotlights Sir Henry Wood (1869-1944) in the works of two Baroque composers with whom he was particularly associated, Bach and Handel. Wood was known as a popularizer of Classical music in his time, creating and leading the Proms for many years; and to that end, he was also an inveterate orchestrator of works written for other instruments. We hear some of those here (at least one version of all of his Bach transcription recordings), although our program starts with *echt*-Bach in the form of two Brandenburg Concertos in which Wood's tempi are faster than the norm for the time, anticipating later performance practice.

During an era in which Bach's orchestral music was so little known that Gustav Mahler could assemble and re-orchestrate a suite with movements cherry-picked from Bach's Second and Third Orchestral Suites, it was not surprising that Wood would seek to extend Bach's four suites by two more, arranging a fifth drawn from three movements of Bach's Trio Sonatas for Organ, and a sixth comprised of works originally written for solo violin or keyboard. Wood only inscribed one version of the latter during the final days of acoustic recording, a set which did not last long in the catalog and has not previously been reissued. Also presented here is an electrical re-recording of the final movement (the *Preludio* from the Third Violin Partita) made four years later, which vividly demonstrates the difference the microphone made to recordings.

Listeners to the Bach-Wood Suite might notice that some of the original keys have been changed in order to better link the movements. What seems stranger at first glance is Wood's decision to pitch the famous Air from the Third Orchestral Suite in C rather than the original D. The answer is found on the original record label, where the credit is given as 'Bach-Wilhelmj', showing that Wood used Wilhelmj's famous violin-piano arrangement of the 'Air on the G String', written in C, as the basis for his orchestration.

Wood, who began his career as an organist, wrote his transcription of Bach's *Toccat and Fugue in D minor* in 1929 (perhaps not coincidentally two years after Stokowski's first recording of his own transcription appeared) as a rebuke to critics and musicologists who took a dim view of his reworkings of Bach's originals. Initially, he published it as the work of 'Paul Klenovsky', a non-existent Russian composer, as a joke on his detractors. As Wood expected, the arrangement received more enthusiastic reviews than those which had been credited to himself. In 1934, he revealed his authorship, which was taken in good stride by some of the reviewers who had been tricked, but reassessed downward by others. Interestingly, the labels of the Decca recording Wood made the following year still credit Klenovsky.

The final selections on this release document a lost era of Handel choral performance. During the 19th Century, a tradition of employing huge choruses to perform Handel's oratorios had arisen in Britain, centered on the Triennial Handel Festival performances held in the Crystal Palace, the huge, glass-covered hall originally erected for the Great Exhibition of 1851 and ultimately destroyed by fire in 1936. The festivals began in 1862, with the final one held in 1926.

By coincidence, the adoption of electrical recording the previous year had enabled 'live' recordings to be made in large venues. For the 1926 festival, Columbia recorded nine sides of choruses from the *Messiah*, of which six were released. The balances are not ideal, and the recordings start and stop abruptly at times. Moreover, it seems that even Wood's trademark long baton could not keep all of the sections of the chorus synchronized at all times (particularly apparent during 'He trusted in God' and 'Let us break their bonds asunder'). Noteworthy too are the slow tempi (compared to contemporary, HIP-influenced practice) that were needed in order to avoid utter chaos with such a large assemblage.

Some individual choruses have been reissued on previous LPs and CDs; but as far as could be determined, not all have previously been re-released. They are being presented together for the first time, with the progressively dropping pitch of the original records corrected through computerized pitch stabilization.

Mark Obert-Thorn



J. S. BACH Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G, BWV 1048

1. 1st Mvt. - [Allegro] (5:57)  
2. 2nd Mvt. - Adagio (0:11)  
3. 3rd Mvt. - Allegro (2:35)

Recorded 16 June 1932 in Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London · Matrices: CAX 6439-2 & 6440-1 · First issued on Columbia LX 173

J. S. BACH Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 in B flat, BWV 1051

4. 1st Mvt. - [Allegro] (5:25)  
5. 2nd Mvt. - Adagio ma non tanto (3:59)  
6. 3rd Mvt. - Allegro (5:22)

Recorded 12 June 1930 in Central Hall, Westminster · Matrices: WAX 5617-2, 5618-2, 5619-1 & 5620-1 · First issued on Columbia LX 41/2

J. S. BACH (arr. Wood) Suite No. 6 for Orchestra

- 7.1st Mvt. - Prelude (Prelude No. 3 in C sharp from Well-Tempered Clavier Book I, BWV 848) (1:19)  
8.2nd Mvt. - Lament (Capriccio on the departure of a beloved brother, BWV 992) (2:50)  
9.3rd Mvt. - Scherzo (Scherzo from Partita No. 3 in A minor, BWV 827) (1:00)  
10.4th Mvt. - Gavotte & Musette (Gavottes I & II from English Suite No. 6 in D minor, BWV 811) (2:59)  
11.5th Mvt. - Andante mistico (Prelude No. 22 in B flat minor, BWV 867) (3:32)  
12.6th Mvt. - Finale (Prelude from Partita for Violin solo No. 3 in E, BWV 1006) (3:23)  
Recorded 5 February 1925 in the Clerkenwell Road Studios, London · Matrices: AX 909-2, 910-2, 911-1 & 912-1  
First issued on Columbia L 1684/5

13. J. S. BACH (arr. Wood) Gavotte (from Partita No. 3 in E, BWV 1006) (4:01)

Recorded 16 June 1932 in Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London · Matrix: CAX 6442-2 · First issued on Columbia LX 173

14. J. S. BACH (arr. Wilhelmj-Wood) Air (from Suite No. 3 in D, BWV 1068) (4:21)

Recorded 16 June 1932 in Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London · Matrix: CAX 6441-1 · First issued on Columbia LX 173

15. J. S. BACH (arr. Wood) Preludio (from Partita No. 3 in E, BWV 1006) (3:28)

Recorded 19 June 1929 in Central Hall, Westminster · Matrix: WAX 5031-4 · First issued on Columbia L 2335

16. J. S. BACH (arr. Wood) Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565 (8:31)

Recorded 2 May 1935 in the Thames Street Studio, London · Matrices: TA 1781-2 & 1782-3 · First issued on Decca K 768

HANDEL Messiah, HWV 56

17. No. 4, 'And the glory of the Lord' (3:46)  
18. No. 22, 'Behold the Lamb of God' (3:38)  
19. No. 28, 'He trusted in God that he would deliver him' (3:00)  
20. No. 33, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates' (4:11)  
21. No. 41, 'Let us break their bonds asunder' (2:54)

Recorded 12 June 1926 in the Crystal Palace, London · Matrices: WAX 1595 (Track 17), 1597 (18), 1599 (19); WA 3413/4 (20); and WAX 1600 (21), all Take 1 · First issued on Columbia L 1768/9 (17-19, 21) & D 1550 (20)



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Mark Obert-Thorn

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photograph of  
Sir Henry Wood

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Sir Henry J. Wood, conductor

- 1-3, 13-14: British Symphony Orchestra  
4-6: Symphony Orchestra  
7-12, 15: New Queen's Hall Orchestra  
16: Queen's Hall Orchestra  
17-21: Handel Festival Choir and Orchestra

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