

The present release is drawn from a remarkable set of private tapes recorded in the 1950s, part of the extraordinary collection of Francisco A. M. Joffily B. Mello. He generously donated his archive to the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, who in turn made copies of the recordings available for preservation and study. Among these riches were the performances presented here: Schubert's Overture in E minor, his youthful Sixth Symphony, and Schumann's Piano Concerto with Dame Myra Hess as soloist, all conducted by Eduard van Beinum with the Concertgebouw Orchestra. The tapes capture the orchestra in fine form and in excellent sound for the period — unusually vivid for the mid-1950s, with a natural balance and a striking immediacy of detail.

Eduard van Beinum, who succeeded Willem Mengelberg as principal conductor of the Concertgebouw in 1945, brought to the orchestra a style at once transparent, lyrical, and humane. Where Mengelberg was famous for his imposing personality and heavy interpretative hand, van Beinum cultivated clarity of texture, rhythmic buoyancy, and a strong sense of partnership between orchestra and soloist. His reputation was sealed by admired recordings for Philips, Decca, and Columbia, but the performances here, preserved from concert conditions, show him at his most spontaneous and direct, qualities sometimes smoothed over in the studio.

The programme opens with Schubert's Overture in E minor, D.648. Written in 1819, this relatively obscure work by the 22-year-old composer is less often heard than other mature works, yet is characteristic in its lyricism and deft orchestration. The Concertgebouw's woodwinds, long celebrated as the jewel of the orchestra, make an especially fine showing: alert, clear-toned, and expressive, they lend the music a sparkle and delicacy that van Beinum clearly relishes. The performance, preserved in fine sound, combines precision with warmth, reminding us of Schubert's debt to Mozart while hinting at the individuality already his own.

The centrepiece is Schumann's Piano Concerto in A minor, Op.54, played by Dame Myra Hess. By 1956, when this performance was recorded, Hess was nearing the end of her career. Revered in Britain as a national treasure — not least for her wartime concerts at the National Gallery — she retained an international following. Her playing here is marked less by dazzling technique than by a deeply felt romantic warmth. At times her fingers were not at their most agile, yet the sense of song and humanity in her reading carry all before them. Van Beinum proves a sympathetic partner, shaping Schumann's orchestral fabric with poetry and sensitivity. The result balances intimacy with grandeur, lyrical inwardness with dramatic flair.

This concerto performance was once issued by Tahra, but Francisco Joffily rightly notes that his tape preserves it in superior quality. The sound here has both body and air, allowing the interplay between piano and orchestra to be appreciated afresh.

The selection concludes with Schubert's Symphony No.6 in C major, D.589, composed in 1817–18 when the composer was in his early twenties. Often called the "Little C major" to distinguish it from the monumental Ninth, the symphony stands at the cusp between Classical poise and Romantic expansion. Its opening Allegro brims with Haydnesque wit and energy, while the slow movement reveals Schubert's gift for lyrical line, enriched by subtle harmonic shifts. The finale, with its bustling rhythms and bright orchestration, shows the young composer's joy in instrumental colour.

Van Beinum recorded this symphony commercially for Philips, but the present live account offers a fascinating complement. Where the studio reading is tidy and polished, the concert performance has a freshness heightened by the presence of an audience. There is an added edge to the playing, a vitality that comes only in the heat of performance. The tapes capture this atmosphere with striking fidelity, conveying both the bloom of the orchestra's sound and the electricity of the occasion.

Taken together, these recordings are more than historical curiosities: they are documents of a major conductor and a great orchestra at their height, joined by one of the century's most beloved pianists. They remind us of van Beinum's artistry — his ability to balance clarity with warmth, structure with expressivity — and of Hess's unique voice as a pianist. Thanks to Francisco Joffily's foresight in preserving these tapes, and to the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra's generosity in sharing them, we can now experience these performances anew, in sound quality that does full justice to their artistry.



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van beinum

schubert & schumann

schubert
symphony no. 6
overture in e minor

schumann
piano concerto
myra hess, piano

concertgebouw orchestra
of amsterdam

live recordings, 1950s

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SCHUBERT SYMPHONY NO. 6, OVERTURE IN E MINOR - SCHUMANN PIANO CONCERTO
HESS, CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA OF AMSTERDAM, VAN BEINUM

van beinum

schubert and schumann

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XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Van Beinum

Original source materials from the
private collection of Francisco A.
M. Joffily B. Mello, now held in
the Concertgebouw archive,
Amsterdam. Many thanks to both.

Schumann Concerto
performed 15 November 1956

Other dates unknown

Recorded live at the Grote Zaal,
Concertgebouw, Amsterdam

Total duration: 66:39

1. SCHUBERT Overture in E minor, D.648 (7:07)

SCHUMANN Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54

2. 1st mvt. - Allegro affettuoso (15:56)

3. 2nd mvt. - Intermezzo (5:39)

4. 3rd mvt. - Allegro vivace (11:36)

Dame Myra Hess, piano

SCHUBERT Symphony No. 6 in C major, D589, 'Little C major'

5. 1st mvt. - Adagio - Allegro (7:38)

6. 2nd mvt. - Andante (5:08)

7. 3rd mvt. - Scherzo. Presto (4:39)

8. 4th mvt. - Allegro moderato (8:56)

Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam
conducted by Eduard van Beinum

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HESS, CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA OF AMSTERDAM, VAN BEINUM

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