



# Great Cellists • Casals

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## Encores and Transcriptions Vol. 1

**BRUCH • DEBUSSY  
FAURÉ • POPPER  
SAINT-SAËNS  
CHOPIN • BACH**

**Pablo Casals**

Historical Recordings 1925 - 1928

## Pablo Casals - Encores and Transcriptions Vol.1

Unlike the ubiquitous violin, the cello was slow to establish itself in the recording studio. The great Polish player Aleksandr Wierzbilowicz, a friend of Tchaikovsky, made a few 78rpm sides as early as 1904, and the distinguished Englishman W.H. Squire followed suit in 1906, going on to have an extremely successful recording career. In general, however, in the early twentieth century, the cello was restricted to providing soulful obbligati for singers; sometimes the cellist's name was not even mentioned on the record label. The greatest cellist of the time, Pau (or Pablo) Casals, was ignored by the record companies – or possibly it was he who did the ignoring – until 1915, when he began a series for American Columbia (he always alleged that he had made discs in Paris about a decade earlier but no trace of them has been found). By now aged 38 and at the peak of his career, Casals was restricted by Columbia to short pieces (except for Bruch's *Kol Nidrei*, which he did twice). He made his final Columbia discs in February 1924 and exactly a year later switched to the Victor Talking Machine Company, making two sides with the pianist Edouard Gendron. All of these discs were recorded by the acoustic process, in which the cellist had to play into a large horn and the piano (usually an upright) was raised off the ground so as to have its sound caught as directly as possible by the horn, but in the spring of 1925 recording companies in both America and Europe began to use the new process in which the sound was captured by an electrical process, using a microphone. For the first time it was possible to record music with some sort of fidelity; and this time Casals was among the pioneers – his initial electrical session was held just six weeks after his last acoustic session. The experiment was not terribly successful but within less than a year Casals was making records which many people consider his best.

This legendary musician was born on 29th December 1876 in Vendrell, a little town where his father was organist and choirmaster. 'I owe nearly all my talent at music to the influence of my father,' he

wrote. 'As soon as I could walk he took me to all the services at the church, so that the Gregorian chant, the chorales and the organ voluntaries became part of myself and of my daily life.' Carlos Casals taught Pau to sing, play the piano and organ and even compose; at six the boy had mastered the violin well enough to play a solo in public. Fascinated by a broom handle strung like a cello, used by an itinerant Catalan musician, he described it to his father, who built him a little cello using a gourd for a sound-box. 'On this home-made contrivance I learnt to play the many songs my father composed, and the popular songs which reached the village from the outside world.' At the age of eleven he heard a real cello, which confirmed that it was the instrument for him. His father bought him a small one and gave him lessons; and soon he began studying at the Municipal School of Music in Barcelona. Cello playing had not greatly advanced since the days of Luigi Boccherini. The invention of the spike or end-pin had freed the body of the instrument from being gripped between the knees, so that it resonated more freely; but some players were still operating in the old way, without a spike. Worst of all, the bowing arm was restricted. 'We were taught to play with a stiff arm and obliged to keep a book under the armpit', recalled Casals. While playing in a café trio to pay for his keep, he was heard by the composer Albéniz. Soon he had an ensemble of seven at a grander café, and it was while he and his father were looking for music for this band to play that he found an edition of the Bach solo *Suites*. He met Sarasate and with Albéniz's help moved to Madrid, found a patron and became Queen Maria Cristina's favourite musician, studying at the Conservatory with Tomas Bretón and Jesus de Monasterio. He made his Madrid orchestral debut with Lalo's *Cello Concerto* and in 1899 played it at the Crystal Palace in London and the Lamoureux Concerts in Paris. In 1901 he toured America and in 1905 he settled in Paris.

Hot-blooded and temperamental, Casals had a high-profile affair with his Portuguese pupil Guilhermina Suggia and a failed marriage to the singer

Susan Metcalfe. In public he was quickly recognised as the greatest cellist. Fritz Kreisler was making an impact with his subtle use of vibrato on the violin and Casals worked on similar lines with the cello, astonishing his peers with the freedom of his bowing, his use of 'expressive intonation' and his technical innovations. After working on the Bach *Suites* for a dozen years, he began playing them in public in the early years of the twentieth century, often programming one alongside a concerto. In 1919 he organised the Orquestra Pau Casals in Barcelona and in 1931 conducted it in Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* to mark the birth of the Spanish Republic. The civil war and the victory of Franco, however, caused a rift in Casals's life and career. A man of deep principle who refused to play in Hitler's Germany, he was implacably opposed to Franco's régime and in 1939, threatened with execution if he returned to Spain, he went into exile in southern France. After World War II, feeling that Britain and America were appeasing Franco, he abruptly stopped playing in public, breaking off a London recording session with Haydn's *D major Concerto* two-thirds done. Nevertheless from 1950 American admirers organized a festival around him at his new home town, Prades, and in his old age Casals had a new lease of life as chamber musician, teacher, conductor and musical guru. In 1956 he moved to his mother's native country, Puerto Rico, and the following year he wed his young pupil Marta Montañez. He played in 1958 at the United Nations and in 1961 at the White House. He died in Puerto Rico on 22nd October 1973.

Pablo Casals was 48 when the first track on the present CD was recorded and 51 at the time of the last session represented here. In those days many string players were past their best at fifty, but few comparisons with Casals's acoustic discs are needed to confirm that he was still in glorious form. As in his

acoustic phase, the repertoire is mainly the 'genre' pieces that he would programme in his celebrity recitals, or as encores in more serious concerts. There are original cello pieces, by Saint-Saëns, Bruch, MacDowell and the great Czech cellist David Popper, who settled in Budapest and became the father of the modern Hungarian cello school. There are vocal pieces by Wagner, Godard and Fauré – the lovely song by the last-named is the best loved of all Casals's own transcriptions, so popular with both cellists and listeners that it is now considered on a par with Fauré's actual cello works. Then there are piano pieces by Schubert, Chopin, Schumann and Rubinstein, and piano duets by Debussy and Schumann – whose *Abendlied* is not to be confused with his song of the same title. The *Intermezzo* from *Goyescas* is an all-Catalan affair, music by Granados transcribed by Casals's favourite pupil Gaspar Cassadó. Other famous string players represented are the German cellist Hugo Becker and his violinist compatriot August Wilhelmj. In these miniatures we catch much of the essence of Pablo Casals's playing: the uninhibited rhythm and lusty, sometimes almost peremptory attack, the natural, breathing *portamento*, the *parlando* quality of some passages in which his bow virtually seems to utter words, the melting combination of tone and phrasing, going hand in hand with a subtly varied vibrato. Most of the transcriptions concentrate on the cello's *cantabile* middle and upper-middle registers but in the Chopin *Nocturne* we get a glimpse of Casals's sovereign command of the darker low register. To those who know the long-lived cellist only from his later recordings, these Victor discs, full of the sunshine of Casals in his heyday, should come as a revelation.

**Tully Potter**

## Producer's Note

The present disc is the first of two volumes devoted to Casals's electrical 78s of encores and transcriptions recorded between 1925 and 1930 for Victor and His Master's Voice. The selections are presented in order by recording session, starting with one of Victor's earliest electrical discs – so early, in fact, that the matrix prefix was still listed as the acoustical "B" rather than the "BVE" it was shortly to become. Several more sides were done at this session, but only this one was released.

Nine months later, Casals returned to the Victor studios with a different accompanist and began to remake the earlier sides and record new selections. Already the progress in recording technology in that short period is audibly evident, with several of these January 1926 selections exhibiting remarkable presence for their time. (Sometimes the fidelity is too great; a 1920s-era automobile horn can be heard outside the studio during the middle of the *Tannhäuser* arrangement, while in the later *Kol Nidrei*, Casals's quiet coda seems to be accompanied by someone hammering elsewhere in the building.)

From these sessions comes the unpublished MacDowell selection, as well as Casals's first electrical version of Schumann's *Träumerei*. Perhaps because the latter's low volume level was almost drowned out by the noisy shellac pressings on which it was originally issued, Casals re-recorded the work in London in 1930. That version, with Otto Schulhof at the piano, replaced the present one as the coupling for Rubinstein's *Melody in F* on the original 78 rpm disc on Victor and HMV, and has been the one reissued ever since. The original 1926 recording here makes its first extended-play appearance.

A further session in February, 1927 yielded only two published sides. Eleven months later, Casals returned for his final recordings for Victor. Our first volume ends in the middle of those sessions with his unpublished Bruch *Kol Nidrei*. The sources for the transfers were pre-war U.S. Victor "Z" and "Gold"-label shellacs as well as vinyl test pressings, except for the *Träumerei*, which was never available on quiet pressings, and was taken here from an Orthophonic Victrola-label disc.

**Mark Obert-Thorn**

## Mark Obert-Thorn

Mark Obert-Thorn is one of the world's most respected transfer artist/engineers. He has worked for a number of specialist labels, including Pearl, Biddulph, Romophone and Music & Arts. Three of his transfers have been nominated for Gramophone Awards. A pianist by training, his passions are music, history and working on projects. He has found a way to combine all three in the transfer of historical recordings. Obert-Thorn describes himself as a "moderate interventionist" rather than a "purist" or "re-processor", unlike those who apply significant additions and make major changes to the acoustical qualities of old recordings. His philosophy is that a good transfer should not call attention to itself, but rather allow the performances to be heard with the greatest clarity.

There is no over-reverberant 'cathedral sound' in an Obert-Thorn restoration, nor is there the tinny bass and piercing mid-range of many 'authorised' commercial issues. He works with the cleanest available 78s, and consistently achieves better results than restoration engineers working with the metal parts from the archives of the modern corporate owners of the original recordings. His transfers preserve the original tone of the old recordings, maximising the details in critical upper mid-range and lower frequencies to achieve a musical integrity that is absent from many other commercially-released restorations.

## Pablo Casals - Encores and Transcriptions Vol.1

### Historical Recordings 1925-1928

- 1 **POPPER: Chanson villageois, Op. 62, No. 2** 2:28  
Recorded 3rd April, 1925 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. B[VE]-31966-8  
First issued as Victor 1083
- 2 **HILLEMACHER: Gavotte tendre** 3:26  
Recorded 4th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. BVE-31967-11  
First issued as Victor 1191
- 3 **MACDOWELL: Romance, Op. 35** 3:26  
Recorded 4th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. BVE-31968-7  
Unpublished on 78 rpm
- 4 **DEBUSSY (arr. Choisnel): Menuet from Petite Suite** 2:43  
Recorded 4th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. BVE-31969-15  
First issued as Victor 1191
- 5 **SCHUBERT (arr. Becker): Moment musical, Op. 94, No. 3/D.780** 3:08  
Recorded 4th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. BVE-31979-8  
First issued as Victor 1143
- 6 **SCHUMANN (arr. Becker): Abendlied, Op. 85, No. 12** 3:55  
Recorded 4th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. CVE-32127-4  
First issued as Victor 6630
- 7 **SCHUMANN: Träumerei** 3:22  
Recorded 5th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. BVE-34075-1  
First issued as Victor 1178
- 8 **FAURÉ (arr. Casals): Après un rêve, Op. 7, No. 1** 3:01  
Recorded 5th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. BVE-31972-12  
First issued as Victor 1083
- 9 **WAGNER: Evening Star from Tannhäuser** 4:14  
Recorded 5th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. CVE-34076-2  
First issued as Victor 6620
- 10 **WAGNER (arr. Wilhelmj): Preislied from Die Meistersinger** 4:22  
Recorded 19th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey  
Matrix no. CVE-34412-1  
First issued as Victor 6620
- 11 **CHOPIN (arr. Sievking): Prélude, Op. 28, No. 15 ('Raindrop')** 4:33  
Recorded 19th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. CVE-34415-1  
First issued as Victor 6589
- 12 **CHOPIN (arr. Popper): Nocturne in E flat major, Op. 9, No. 2** 4:40  
Recorded 20th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. CVE-34419-7  
First issued as Victor 6589
- 13 **GODARD: Berceuse from Jocelyn** 4:38  
Recorded 20th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. CVE-34420-2  
First issued as Victor 6630
- 14 **RUBINSTEIN (arr. Popper): Melody in F major, Op. 3, No. 1** 2:46  
Recorded 20th January, 1926 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. BVE-34421-3  
First issued as Victor 1178

- 15 BACH (arr. Siloti/Casals):**  
**Adagio from Toccata in C major,**  
**BWV 564** **3:52**  
 Recorded 28th February, 1927 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey;  
 Matrix no. CVE-31977-7  
 First issued as Victor 6635
- 16 GRANADOS (arr. Cassadó):**  
**Intermezzo from Goyescas** **4:28**  
 Recorded 28th February, 1927 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. CVE-31978-7  
 First issued as Victor 6635
- 17 POPPER: Vito**  
**(Spanish Dance, Op. 54, No. 5)** **3:15**  
 Recorded 31st January, 1928 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. BVE-31973-5  
 First issued as Victor 1311
- 18 SAINT-SAËNS: The Swan from**  
**Carnival of the Animals** **2:44**  
 Recorded 31st January, 1928 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix no. BVE-34074-6  
 First issued as Victor 1143
- 19 BRUCH: Kol Nidrei** **8:57**  
 Recorded 31st January, 1928 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey; Matrix nos. CVE-40384 and 40385 Unpublished on 78 rpm

*Nikolai Mednikoff, piano (except Track 1: Edouard Gendron, piano)*

The Naxos Historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.

Playing  
Time  
74:00

Encores and Transcriptions Vol. 1

Pablo Casals  
(1876-1973)

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- 13** GODARD: Berceuse from Jocelyn
- 14** RUBINSTEIN (arr. Popper): Melody in F major, Op. 3, No. 1

- 15** BACH (arr. Siloti/Casals): Adagio from Toccata in C major, BWV 564
  - 16** GRANADOS (arr. Cassadó): Intermezzo from Goyescas
  - 17** POPPER: Vito (Spanish Dance, Op. 54, No. 5)
  - 18** SAINT-SAËNS: The Swan from Carnival of the Animals
  - 19** BRUCH: Kol Nidrei
- All tracks recorded at Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey, between 1925 and 1928  
Nikolai Mednikoff, piano  
(except Track 1: Edouard Gendron, piano)

One of the greatest and by far the best known cellist of his generation, Pablo Casals recorded a series of encore pieces between 1925 and 1930, at the height of his powers. In them we catch much of the essence of Casals's playing: the uninhibited rhythm, the melting combination of tone and phrasing, and a subtly varied vibrato. Newly mastered from the original pressings, this disc includes some performances never issued on 78 rpm record (MacDowell and Bruch), and should come as a revelation to those who know the long-lived cellist only from his later recordings.

MADE IN  
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A complete tracklist can be found in the booklet

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover Photograph: Pablo Casals  
(Photo Alban - Paris, 1926ca.) (Private Collection)



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