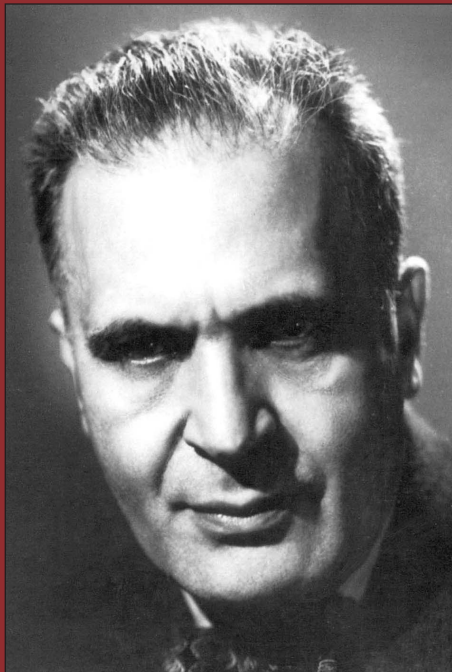




Great Conductors • Walter

8.111032

ADD



BEETHOVEN

**Symphony No. 6
'Pastoral'**

Overtures

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
BBC Symphony Orchestra
London Symphony Orchestra
British Symphony Orchestra

Bruno Walter

Historical Recordings 1930-38

Great Conductors: Bruno Walter (1876-1962)

Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 “Pastoral” • Overtures

The 1930s were years of tremendous upheaval and change for so many artists caught up in the turmoil of Fascism and approaching war. Following years of harassment and the Nazi accession to power in 1933, Bruno Walter and his family were finally forced to leave Germany and move to neighbouring Austria. Given many other artists’ refuge to Switzerland or the United States, this may have seemed a surprisingly dangerous and short-sighted decision on the conductor’s part. He had, however, been a naturalised citizen there for the previous 23 years and Vienna remained a city of long held and deep mutual respect. Despite Vienna being one of the most virulently anti-Semitic environments in pre-Second World War Europe, it was there that Walter’s relationship with Mahler had come to full fruition and he enjoyed the most affable and collaborative of relationships with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Many of the players from his earlier days in the city were still members of the orchestra and unlike the tyrannical Toscanini or cerebral Furtwängler, Walter’s more relaxed creative benevolence always made him part of the family.

Undaunted by attempts at intimidation by local Nazis after his return to Vienna, he soon performed Mahler’s *First Symphony* and *Das Lied von der Erde*, as well as setting about fulfilling the Singverein’s plans for him to conduct the massive *Eighth Symphony*. He also returned to the Staatsoper for the first time since 1912 to conduct *Un ballo in maschera*, *Eugene Onegin* and *Tristan und Isolde*, eventually becoming artistic director there from 1936 to 1938.

October 1934 saw Walter making his first recording with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, setting down Beethoven’s *Emperor Concerto* with Gieseking as soloist. The conductor had embraced recording technology from the very beginning of the century and was quick to realise its documentary and promotional importance. He made several acoustic recordings for Polydor with the Berlin Philharmonic in

the 1920s together with some surprisingly heavyweight repertoire with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London, including Siegfried’s *Rhine Journey* and Strauss’s *Tod und Verklärung*.

Although not especially drawn to the music of Elgar, Walter was on excellent personal terms with the composer and would not have been slow to realise the historic significance of his extensive catalogue of recordings of his own works. Once re-established in Vienna he lost no time in seizing opportunities to make recordings using the electrical improvements in sound quality. His sets of Act 1 and sections of Act 2 of *Die Walküre* with Melchior, Lehmann and List alongside the première recordings of Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde* with Kerstin Thorborg and Charles Kullman and the *Ninth Symphony* on the eve of the Anschluss in 1938 remain vivid testaments to the special humanity and intensity Walter was able to draw from his collaborators in music that was most dear to him.

However much he ventured into other nationalities or more contemporary fields, Walter’s core repertoire remained that of nineteenth-century Germany. Walter’s Beethoven and Brahms are probably best known from performances made towards the end of his life in the early stereo era. Warmly human, mellow and ripe, their occasionally softer centres lack the fibre and dynamism that he brought to the symphony cycles recorded with the New York Philharmonic between 1941 and 1953. This Beethoven collection from the 1930s comes from his prime and in many respects documents an even more satisfying and representative combination of fire and lyricism, almost as a combination of the characteristics of the signal qualities of his two main rivals on the podium at the time, Toscanini and Furtwängler.

The Vienna *Pastoral Symphony* is both flexible and energised. The music never lingers too lovingly or sentimentally as it could do in later years, but remains firmly shaped by symphonic purpose and direction.

Rhythmically, each movement is motivated with a sense of dance verging on the balletic. Even the hailstones in the thunderstorm seem to rebound on points. Alert to all the composer's innovative touches of instrumental colour, the tone-painting compliments the underlying framework rather than obscuring the music's raison d'être. Similarly, the *Leonore Overture No. 3* becomes a microcosm of the ideals of the opera, its fervent spirit uncompromising, gritty and ultimately indomitable.

Before the Second World War and his departure from Europe for the United States, Walter was also a regular visitor to London both for orchestral concerts and at Covent Garden, where he made his début in 1910 with *Tristan und Isolde* and Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers*. His subsequent visits were much feted and he was one of the first conductors of international repute to be invited to conduct the BBC Symphony Orchestra. In January 1934 he conducted them with Sergey Prokofiev as the soloist in the British première of the latter's *Fifth Piano Concerto*, returning in May at Adrian Boult's invitation to conduct Bruckner and Richard Strauss in two concerts at the London Music Festival as well as to record the *Fidelio Overture*, Brahms's *Fourth Symphony* and Mozart's *Symphony No. 39* soon after. It is evident from the superb playing of the *Overture* here that the BBC orchestra had no fear of comparison with its Viennese counterparts at this early stage in its career, with Walter also sounding at his most inspired in an opera that retained a special

significance throughout his life. There were plans for him to record it with the Metropolitan Opera in the early 1960s, but sadly these never came to fruition.

The London Symphony Orchestra of 1938 was a less polished ensemble than it had been. Walter had made several guest appearances with the orchestra when they had no principal conductor between 1922 and 1930 and had also given several opera performances with them at Covent Garden. His warm-hearted encouragement and trust in the players guaranteed inspiration and respect, no more evident than in this imposing *Coriolan* overture, where he galvanises them into something special.

The British Symphony Orchestra was originally constituted from First World War veterans, but by 1930 many of its members were regulars with one or other of the major British orchestras of the time. They made a famously fiery performance of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* with Felix Weingartner in 1932 (available on Naxos 8.110861) and it says much for their enduring prestige that they were able to secure the services of conductors of such international renown.

These recordings are particularly valuable and representative of Bruno Walter's distinctive Beethovenian character and force of spirit at the height of his powers before the break with Europe and the sea-change wrought by his relocation to America.

Ian Julier

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.

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.

GREAT CONDUCTORS

BRUNO WALTER conducts BEETHOVEN

Historical Recordings 1930-38

Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68, "Pastoral"

38:59

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | Allegro ma non troppo (Cheerful impressions awakened by arriving in the country) | 9:21 |
| 2 | Andante molto moto (Scene by the brook) | 12:06 |
| 3 | Allegro (Peasants' merrymaking) | 5:27 |
| 4 | Allegro (Thunderstorm) | 3:25 |
| 5 | Allegretto (Shepherds' Song: Joyous thanksgiving after the storm) | 8:40 |

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

Recorded on 5th December, 1936 in the Musikvereinsaal, Vienna

Matrices: 2VH 224-1A, 225-3A, 226-2A, 227-1, 228-1, 229-2A, 230-2A, 231-1A, 232-2A and 233-1

First issued as HMV DB 3051 through 3055

6 *Leonore Overture No. 3, Op. 72a*

13:07

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

Recorded on 21st May, 1936 in the Musikvereinsaal, Vienna

Matrices: CHAX 109-2, 110-2 and 111-1

First issued as HMV DB 2885 and 2886

7 *Fidelio, Op. 72 – Overture*

6:16

BBC Symphony Orchestra

Recorded on 21st May, 1934 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London

Matrices: 2B 6947-2 and 6948-2

First issued as HMV DB 2261

8 *Coriolan, Op. 62 – Overture*

7:26

London Symphony Orchestra

Recorded on 12th September, 1938 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London

Matrices: 2EA 6766-1 and 6767-2A

First issued as HMV DB 3638

9 *The Creatures of Prometheus, Op. 43 – Overture*

4:46

British Symphony Orchestra

Recorded on 16th May, 1930 in Central Hall, Westminster

Matrix: WAX 5590-1

First issued on Columbia 68091D

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Special thanks to Richard Kaplan and Don Tait for providing source material for this release



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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770-1827)

Playing
Time
70:35

ADD

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra • BBC Symphony Orchestra
 London Symphony Orchestra • British Symphony Orchestra

Bruno Walter (1876-1962)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1 Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68, 'Pastoral' 38:59</p> <p>2 Allegro ma non troppo (Cheerful impressions awakened by arriving in the country) 9:21</p> <p>3 Andante molto moto (Scene by the brook) 12:06</p> <p>4 Allegro (Peasants' merry-making) 5:27</p> <p>5 Allegro (Thunderstorm) 3:25</p> <p>6 Allegretto (Shepherds' Song: Joyous thanksgiving after the storm) 8:40</p> <p>7 Leonore Overture No. 3, Op. 72a 13:07</p> <p>8 Fidelio, Op. 72 – Overture 6:16</p> <p>9 Coriolan, Op. 62 – Overture 7:26</p> <p>10 The Creatures of Prometheus, Op. 43 – Overture 4:46</p> | <p>Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra • Bruno Walter
 Recorded on 5th December, 1936 in the Musikvereinsaal, Vienna</p> <p>Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra • Bruno Walter
 Recorded on 21st May, 1936 in the Musikvereinsaal, Vienna</p> <p>BBC Symphony Orchestra • Bruno Walter
 Recorded on 21st May, 1934 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London</p> <p>London Symphony Orchestra • Bruno Walter
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 Recorded on 16th May, 1930 in Central Hall, Westminster</p> |
|---|--|

Although Bruno Walter's Beethoven and Brahms are probably best known from recordings made towards the end of his life in the early stereo era, this Beethoven collection from the 1930s, made before his break with Europe and relocation to America, shows him at the height of his powers. Combining fire with lyricism, the Vienna Philharmonic's *Pastoral Symphony* is both flexible and energised: the music never lingers too lovingly or sentimentally as it could do in later years, but remains firmly shaped by symphonic purpose and direction.

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Full recording details can be found in the booklet
 Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn
 Special thanks to Richard Kaplan and Don Tait for providing source material for this release

www.naxos.com

Cover Photograph: Bruno Walter (Private Collection)

