



Great Conductors • Beecham

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DELIUS

Orchestral Works, Volume 4

North Country Sketches

Marche Caprice

Brigg Fair

Dance Rhapsody No. 1

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Sir Thomas Beecham

(Recorded 1946-1952)

Great Conductors: Sir Thomas Beecham

Delius

The earliest contact that Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961) had with the music of Delius came in 1907, when the conductor first made the composer's acquaintance and then heard his *Appalachia* at a concert in London. Electrified by musical sounds that he considered 'unlike any other', he immediately began his own investigation of the scores and, with his initial impressions substantiated, within a year had performed *Paris, Brigg Fair, Appalachia, Sea Drift* and *Over the Hills and Far Away*. During the next half-century he explored incomparably all the music of Delius's best period (1900-15) as well as other pieces outside it which sufficiently appealed to him, using his personal magnetism and authority to promote it in concert-halls all over the world. He staged three of the six operas, unearthed and edited early and forgotten pieces, arranged others and recorded much of the Delius canon as many as two or three times as recording techniques advanced and were able to do greater justice to its magical sound-world. Towards the end of his life he began editing a model edition of the scores, and he completed a full-scale biography of the composer.

The pieces contained on this disc were all recorded between 1946-52, some at the time of the second Delius Festival that Beecham organized in London in October-November 1946. The Festival was longer and grander than the previous one he had arranged (1929) and it coincided with the founding of his last orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic, which actually made its London debut at the Festival. In parallel with the concerts he began the systematic recording of much of the repertoire that had been heard at them. The recording dates show that *Marche Caprice* and *Brigg Fair* were both captured at this time, and *On hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* begun (though it was not completed until later).

Marche Caprice is the earliest Delius music to be heard on this disc. It dates from 1889-90 and is the third

of a suite of three pieces entitled *Morceaux Caractéristiques*, all typical of the 28-year old Delius's formative style. It had not been performed before Beecham rescued it for inclusion in his 1946 festival. *Over the Hills and Far Away* is another early piece (1897), though a more substantial one, and for this Beecham had a special fondness that extended to recording it altogether three times at various stages of his career. He described it as 'an actively and at times a vigorously happy sort of piece', pointing out that with Delius, whereas serene contentment or lively impulse informed most of his music, the two moods rarely coincided in the same piece.

The next music in order of composition is *Brigg Fair* (An English Rhapsody), completed in 1907. Delius was introduced to the folk-song that gives the work its title by his friend, the Australian composer and pianist Percy Grainger, a hugely enthusiastic and inveterate folk-song collector, who had come across it in the Lincolnshire town of Brigg during his travels and set it himself for unaccompanied male voices. In Delius's score the tune is heard on the oboe, after an atmospheric 'scene-setting' introduction involving flute, clarinet and harp supported by horns and strings, and developed in varied orchestration before giving way to a magical interlude featuring a long slow string melody; then the folk-song is subjected to further harmonic and rhythmic changes, and a huge climax is built up before the music finally dies away into silence.

If the inspiration for *Brigg Fair* came from England, it was to Norway and the music of its greatest composer that Delius turned when conceiving *On hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring*. After they met in 1887, Delius became Edvard Grieg's closest English acquaintance and they enjoyed a friendship of almost twenty years, broken only by Grieg's death in 1907. In 1912 Delius alighted on a Norwegian melody, '*In Ola Valley, in Ola Dale*', which the older composer had

introduced many years earlier in his *Norwegian Folk-Tunes*, Op. 66: Delius acknowledged his own usage in the inscription 'Introducing a Norwegian Folk Song' which appears at the head of his score. A curious feature of Beecham's record is the fact that the two 78rpm sides were recorded two years apart. This came about because, having recorded both parts of it in October 1946, he remade the second side in the December; but then he decided that he also wanted to repeat the first side, and for one reason or another the new attempt was not made until May 1948. By this time several key players in the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra had changed and the orchestral balance in the studio was different: the most obvious aural difference is in the clarinet's 'cuckoo' calls, which are much more prominent as heard from Jack Brymer on side one (before the record turned over at 3'43") than afterwards from Reginald Kell.

The first of Delius's two *Dance Rhapsodies* dates from a little earlier (1908-9). As in *Brigg Fair* there is an orchestral prelude to set the scene, in this case featuring soulful meanderings by the bass oboe. A peremptory gesture from the full orchestra dismisses it, however, and then from the oboe is heard an original tune (labelled 'bewitching' by Arthur Hutchings, one of Delius's biographers) upon which Delius bases a set of variations employing the full orchestra. These culminate in a most glorious rhapsody for solo violin (played by David McCallum, leader of the RPO at the time) over muted string harmonies; the voice of the bass oboe is heard again before the piece whirls to a decisive conclusion.

Mention of the bass oboe in Delius's score recalls the singular occasion of the work's first performance, in 1909, which Delius himself conducted. Though Beecham was not present, he subsequently pieced together the string of unfortunate circumstances that befell the hapless composer, describing them in his autobiography *A Mingled Chime* in a style that has made it a classic of Delian literature. Beginning by suggesting that Delius was perhaps a little unwise to incorporate into his score 'an instrument which, like

Lucy, there were few to praise and very few to love', Beecham described how Delius had further accepted the services of a young lady player of the instrument of semi-amateur status who had volunteered at short notice to see what she could do with it. 'Now the bass oboe', Beecham went on, 'is to be endured only if manipulated with supreme cunning and control ... a perfect breath control is the essential requisite for keeping it well in order, and this alone can obviate the eruption of sounds that would arouse attention even in a circus. As none of these safety-first precautions had been taken, the public, which had assembled ... in anticipation of some pensive and poetical effort from the most discussed composer of the day, was confounded by the frequent audition of noises that resembled nothing so much as the painful endeavour of an anguished mother-duck to effect the speedy evacuation of an abnormally large-sized egg ...'

Though he was born in England, Delius was of German parentage. It was supposed that he would graduate into the family wool business which his father had established in Bradford, but he soon turned to music and went his own way, living virtually the whole of the rest of his life in France. Thirty years after the break with England he was inspired to recall in music the Yorkshire where he had spent his formative years. His *North Country Sketches* consists of four movements, three of which are graphic nature studies depicting autumn, winter and spring in that part of the world, while the fourth is a seemingly unconnected 'dance' (a dance of the spirit, in the opinion of the composer's amanuensis Eric Fenby, 'as if only with thoughts of recurring spring can the heart in winter exult in dance'). Beecham introduced the work in 1915: always the most acutely sensitive interpreter of Delius's music he immediately perceived the change in the composer's direction (which was to be confirmed by the few remaining orchestral works that came from Delius's pen before blindness and paralysis overtook him, notably the orchestral ballad *Eventyr* with its stark imagery of trolls and demons); at the same time, Beecham could not help regretting the loss of the intimate moods of earlier works such as *Brigg Fair* and *In a Summer*

Garden, suspecting that the spirit that had animated them had gone for ever.

When Beecham made his only commercial recording of *North Country Sketches* in 1949 he interchanged the position of the central movements *Winter Landscape* and *Dance*, presumably because the

changed order suited the layout of the 78rpm sides better. The present reissue conforms to all other reissues subsequent to the 78s in following the order of the printed score.

Lyndon Jenkins

Great Conductors: Sir Thomas Beecham
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Frederick DELIUS (1862-1934)

- | | | |
|----------|---|--------------|
| 1 | Marche Caprice | 3:33 |
| | HMV DB 6430, mx 2EA 11521-2
Recorded 19th December 1946 | |
| 2 | Brigg Fair (An English Rhapsody) | 16:11 |
| | HMV DB 6452/3, mx 2EA 11443-1, 11444-1, 11445-2, 11446-1
Recorded 26th November 1946 | |
| | North Country Sketches | 24:17 |
| 3 | i Autumn, the wind sighs in the trees | 7:16 |
| 4 | ii Winter Landscape | 3:59 |
| 5 | iii Dance | 5:41 |
| 6 | iv The March of Spring | 7:20 |
| | Columbia LX 1399/1401; mx CAX 11067-2, 11068-2, 11069-2, 11070-2, 11071-1, 11071-2
Recorded 14th February 1949 | |
| 7 | Over The Hills and Far Away | 13:45 |
| | Columbia 33C 1017, mx CAX 10714-1, 10713-3A, 10715
Recorded 7th February 1950 | |
| 8 | On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring | 6:29 |
| | HMV DB 6923, mx 2EA 13034-1, 11328-3
Recorded 8th May 1948 & 19th December 1946 | |
| 9 | Dance Rhapsody No. 1 | 11:57 |
| | HMV DB 9785/6, mx 2EA 16980-2A, 16981-3A, 16982-3A
Recorded 29th October 1952 | |



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**Frederick
DELIUS**

**Orchestral Works, Vol. 4
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961)**

ADD

**Playing
Time
76:12**

- | | | |
|----------|---|--------------|
| 1 | Marche Caprice (1889-90) | 3:33 |
| | Recorded 19th December 1946 | |
| 2 | Brigg Fair (An English Rhapsody) (1907) | 16:11 |
| | Recorded 26th November 1946 | |
| | North Country Sketches (1914) | 24:17 |
| 3 | Autumn, the wind sighs in the trees | 7:16 |
| 4 | Winter Landscape | 3:59 |
| 5 | Dance | 5:41 |
| 6 | The March of Spring | 7:20 |
| | Recorded 14th February 1949 | |
| 7 | Over The Hills and Far Away (1897) | 13:45 |
| | Recorded 7th February 1950 | |
| 8 | On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring (1912) | 6:29 |
| | Recorded 8th May 1948 & 19th December 1946 | |
| 9 | Dance Rhapsody No. 1 (1908-09) | 11:57 |
| | Recorded 29th October 1952 | |

During the first half of the twentieth century Beecham explored incomparably all the music of Delius's best period (1900-15) as well as other pieces outside it which sufficiently appealed to him. He recorded much of the Delius canon as many as two or three times as recording techniques advanced and were able to do greater justice to its magical sound world. The works contained on this disc were all recorded between 1946-52, some at the time of the second Delius Festival that Beecham organized in London in October-November 1946, and include his only commercial recording of *North Country Sketches*, from 1949.

Transfers & Production: David Lennick
Digital Noise Reduction: K&A Productions Ltd.
Original recordings from the collections of Douglas Lloyd,
John Rutherford & Claude Arnold

www.naxos.com

A complete track list can be found in the booklet
Cover Image: Sir Thomas Beecham (Tully Potter Collection)



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