



DELIUS

Orchestral Works, Volume 5

Violin Concerto Piano Concerto

**A Song before Sunrise
Summer Evening
Eventyr**

**Jean Pougnet, Violin
Betty Humby Beecham, Piano
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Sir Thomas Beecham**

(Recorded 1946-1951)

Great Conductors: Sir Thomas Beecham Delius

The earliest contact that Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961) had with the music of Frederick 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 Delius's scores and, with his initial impression 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, 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 and 1951 following the second Delius Festival that Beecham organized in London in October-November 1946. The Festival was longer and grander than his previous one in 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 covering the present disc show that both the violin and piano concertos were captured at this time, the other four titles later. (It was also at this period, even though it had not been heard at the festival, that he made his definitive recording of Delius's greatest opera *A Village Romeo and Juliet* after a pair of studio performances for the BBC [available on

Naxos 8.110982-3]).

The earliest Delius music on this disc is *Summer Evening*, the first of three small tone poems dating from 1889-90 that Beecham discovered among Delius's unpublished manuscripts and unearthed specially for inclusion in the 1946 festival. (The others are *Spring Morning* and *Winter Night* - now known as *Sleighride* - giving rise to speculation that, together with a work entitled *Autumn* that was thought to have existed at the time, Delius might have been planning his own 'Four Seasons'). *Summer Evening* is a simple A-B-A structure, with clear-cut melodies typical of Delius's formative style in both the opening and the middle section, after which the leading melody is recalled.

The next music in order of composition is the Piano Concerto. Delius had been toying with such a work since 1897, and by 1904 had completed a score in three movements that was played that year in Elberfeld. Afterwards he completely revised it, dispensing with the original finale and placing the slow largo section [\[9\]](#) between the development and recapitulation of the chief themes, so creating a one-movement work. This is the score that was first heard at a Promenade concert in London in 1907 played by the Hungarian pianist Theodor Szántó, who had developed the piano part to his own virtuoso ideal. Though the Concerto betrays its early origins and owes much to the influence of the composer's friend Edvard Grieg it has retained a place among British works of its kind. Delius quickly tired of it and in later years even tried to avoid hearing it performed; Beecham, on the other hand, spoke warmly of its qualities (in his biography of Delius), though when he wrote that 'the Public likes to listen to it' what he was really saying was that the public liked to listen to it when he was conducting.

The Violin Concerto is music of quite another provenance. Dating from 1916, it is one of a number of formally-constructed works (String Quartet, Violin

Sonata, Concerto for violin and cello) completed at this time. 'Of these,' Beecham thought, 'the only completely successful effort is that for violin and orchestra. It is admirably planned for the solo instrument of which he had an intimate knowledge; it has considerable melodic beauty and is structurally entirely logical and effective. It also bears the stamp of genuine originality, in owning no resemblance to anything of the sort written by anyone before or since.' There are three easily identifiable sections: at its heart is a slower section in 6/4 time **6** in which much is made of a motif with a 'scotch snap'; presently a brief passage for violin alone marks the beginning of what is, in effect, an accompanied cadenza. The recapitulation **7** encloses a completely new *scherzo*-like section before the Concerto's opening is recollected in tranquillity and the work ends quietly.

A few years earlier Delius had completed two more miniature tone poems, *On hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* and *Summer Night on the River*, which were published as *Two Pieces for Small Orchestra* and given their première in Leipzig in 1913. Beecham thought they 'touched perfection', and he conducted them frequently. (His 1946 recording of the *First Cuckoo* is on Naxos 8.110984.) Over *Summer Night on the River*, which he recorded no fewer than four times, he would surely have agreed with Eric Fenby, Delius's amanuensis during the composer's last years, who wrote that 'No orchestral work by Delius demands such deep insight and sensitive skill in performance as this; the balance and shading of woodwind timbres... is imperative to a visionary realisation of the score.' The scene is, as elsewhere in Delius's music (e.g. *In a Summer Garden*), his garden running down to the River Loing at Grez-sur-Loing near Fontainebleau. The listener may perhaps be left to judge for himself whether, in Beecham's performance, 'the gnats and dragonflies dart over the waterlilies, and the faint white mist hovers over the willow-tressed banks and overhanging trees ...'

Delius's 'Ballad for Orchestra', *Eventyr* (1917), is very different music. Norway was in many ways

Delius's spiritual home, and he first encapsulated the grandeur of its mountains and its marvellous solitude in 1911 in his *The Song of the High Hills*. *Eventyr*, on the other hand, is an excursion into the legendary, faëry world of trolls, hob-goblins and the like that people Norwegian folk-lore, and it reflects the influence on him of Scandinavian literature. It was inspired by the traditional folk-tales that Peter Christen Asbjørnsen collected between 1842 and 1871 from peasant folk in remote parts of Norway. Subtitled 'Once upon a time', *Eventyr* is not based on any particular story but attempts to convey in music something of the atmosphere of these traditional tales. Throughout, very clearly defined themes enable the listener to follow the shape of the work with ease; the music is exceptionally vivid in its colours and contrasts and is enlivened at two points by shouts for men's voices. Beecham revelled in its strong rhythms and wild effects and conducted it frequently on his international travels, no doubt partly with the intention of displaying another side of a composer too often thought of as a pastoral dreamer.

A Song before Sunrise, though composed in 1918, was not heard until 1923. This short work for small orchestra has a formal symmetry rare in Delius's mature œuvre, its A-B-A form almost a reversion to *Summer Evening* of almost thirty years before; there is also, in the closing bars, a tiny piece of realism when a 'cock-a-doodle-doo' in the clarinets greets the sunrise. Delius gave the music no tempo marking, merely putting 'Freshly' at the top of his score: the listener may feel that this injunction is especially acutely realised in the hands of Beecham and his orchestra. When these three pieces, *A Song before Sunrise*, *Summer Night on the River* and *Summer Evening*, were first issued they fitted neatly on four 78rpm sides, though this meant the music sometimes ending in mid-side. *The English Record Guide* (1953 supplement) thought that to have made them inextricable 'in the manner of an LP recital does not seem clever', though its authors owned that all three were 'beautifully played' and 'bound to give much pleasure'.

Sir Thomas Beecham's almost single-handed

promotion of the music of Delius to international acceptance through his own personal standing and his conducting genius, besides being among the singular feats of the twentieth century, remains unrivalled in the history of music. Not only did he create a Delius performing style, he became completely identified with all strands of the composer's output, so much so that many people thought that the music would die when Beecham died. That this has proved not to be the case owes an overwhelming debt not only to Beecham's legacy of performances during a half-century in

concert-halls and with different orchestras in many countries but also, and perhaps even more significantly, to a widely disseminated series of recordings spanning the years 1927-57 that has always been recognised as representing the absolute pinnacle of Delius interpretation.

© Lyndon Jenkins

(author of *While Spring and Summer Sang: Thomas Beecham and the Music of Frederick Delius*, [Ashgate, 2005])

Great Conductors: Sir Thomas Beecham
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

- | | | |
|-----------|--|--------------|
| 1 | Eventyr (Once upon a time)
Columbia LX8931-2 mx CAX11003 & 11062/4
Recorded 12th January & 3rd April 1951 | 14:46 |
| 2 | Summer Night on the River | 6:13 |
| 3 | Summer Evening (edited & arranged Beecham) | 5:48 |
| 4 | A Song before Sunrise
HMV DB9757-8 mx 2EA13613/5, 13745
Recorded 18th February & 6th April 1949 | 5:31 |
| | Violin Concerto | 23:35 |
| 5 | With moderate tempo- | 5:32 |
| 6 | Slower- | 8:53 |
| 7 | Tempo 1-Allegretto-Più moderato | 9:10 |
| | Jean Pougnet <i>violin</i>
HMV DB6369-71 mx 2EA11329/33
Recorded 31st October & 1st November 1946 | |
| | Piano Concerto (revised Beecham) | 22:53 |
| 8 | Allegro non troppo- | 9:33 |
| 9 | Largo- | 7:21 |
| 10 | Tempo primo | 5:59 |
| | Betty Humby Beecham <i>piano</i>
HMV DB6428-30 mx 2EA11318/22
Recorded 4th & 16th December 1946 | |

All tracks recorded in No.1 Studio, Abbey Road, London

ADD

Playing
Time
78:47

8.111006

Frederick
DELIUS

Orchestral Works, Vol. 5
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961)

- | | | |
|-----------|---|--------------|
| 1 | Eventyr (Once upon a time) | 14:46 |
| | Recorded 12th January & 3rd April 1951, London | |
| 2 | Summer Night on the River | 6:13 |
| 3 | Summer Evening | 5:48 |
| 4 | A Song before Sunrise | 5:31 |
| | Recorded 18th February & 6th April 1949, London | |
| | Violin Concerto | 23:35 |
| 5 | With moderate tempo- | 5:32 |
| 6 | Slower- | 8:53 |
| 7 | Tempo 1-Allegretto-Più moderato | 9:10 |
| | <i>Jean Pougnet Violin</i> | |
| | Recorded 31st October & 1st November 1946, London | |
| | Piano Concerto | 22:53 |
| 8 | Allegro non troppo- | 9:33 |
| 9 | Largo- | 7:21 |
| 10 | Tempo primo | 5:59 |
| | <i>Betty Humby Beecham Piano</i> | |
| | Recorded 4th & 16th December 1946, London | |

Sir Thomas Beecham's almost single-handed promotion of the music of Delius to international acceptance remains unrivalled in the history of music. An overwhelming debt is owed both to Beecham's legacy of concert performances with different orchestras in many countries, and to a widely disseminated series of recordings spanning the years 1927-57 that has always been recognised as representing the absolute pinnacle of Delius interpretation. The works contained on this disc were all recorded between 1946 and 1951 following the second Delius Festival that Beecham organized in London in October and November 1946.



ALL RIGHTS IN THIS SOUND RECORDING, ARTWORK, TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS RESERVED. UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE, BROADCASTING AND COPYING OF THIS COMPACT DISC PROHIBITED.
© & © 2006 Naxos Rights International Ltd.

MADE IN
THE EU



Transfers & Production: David Lennick
Digital Noise Reduction: Graham Newton
Original recordings from the collections of David Lennick,
Douglas Lloyd, John Rutherford & Claude Arnold

www.naxos.com

A complete track list can be found in the booklet
Cover Image: Beecham at the Delius Festival 1949 (The Tully Potter Collection)

