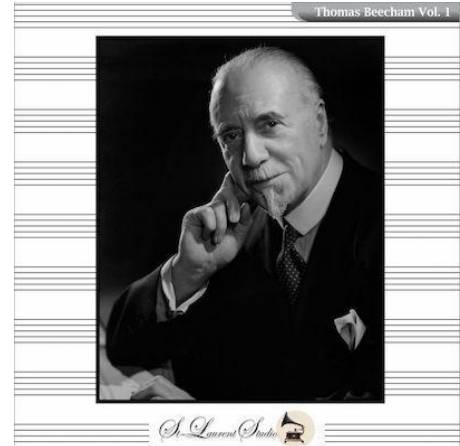


Sir Thomas Beecham, Vol. 1 = Symphonic Works by GRIEG; BRAHMS; BERLIOZ – Symphony of the Air – Yves St-Laurent Studio

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Sir Thomas Beecham, Vol. 1 = GRIEG: The Last Spring, Op. 34, No. 2; BRAHMS: Symphony No. 3 in F Major, Op. 90; BERLIOZ: Marche troyenne – Symphony of the Air/ Sir Thomas Beecham – Yves St-Laurent Studio YSL T-765, 45:00 [78experience] **:**



The entire program for the Symphony of the Air on 23 January 1957 consists of a tribute “to the Memory of Toscanini,” the monumental conductor and musical icon who had first led the orchestra—under its original title, the NBC Symphony—on 25 December 1937 and whose last official concert with the orchestra took place 4 April 1954. Though Beecham and Toscanini respected each other, the relationship always required from Beecham a distinct irony, often referring to “that Italian” or “Arturo who?” when engaged on the subject of their respective talents and repertory. But the atmosphere of this evening, in which the Symphony of the Air—which took up an independent existence in 1954 and gave their first public performance 24 October as part of the United Nations Ninth Anniversary Celebration. Under the guidance of Leopold Stokowski, the ensemble would continue until 1963.

The intensity of the program commands our interest: on vinyl some 40 years ago, the concert had a release via the Sir Thomas Beecham Society in association with the Bruno Walter Society. The expansive *Elegiac Melody* by Grieg bears a particular gravitas and tragic affect. Since Beecham never made a commercial recording the Brahms *Third*, his interpretation contains many points of interpretative interest, not the least of which is his taking the first movement repeat. In the course of the fierce development, Beecham’s vocal enthusiasm registers quite distinctly. In the course of the second movement *Andante*, several distinct string and wind lines emerge too often elided by more glossy performances. The orchestra bass and cello lines carry a particularly potent weight this evening, and virtually every period comes to a thunderous climax. The last movement, too, especially its canonic play on the “Fate” motif, incurs Beecham’s vocal assertions in concert with a manic drive to layer the texture with a radiant, personal anguish. Are we correct to assume that the excellent trumpet work comes to us courtesy of veteran Harry Glantz, no less prominent in the declamations from Berlioz?

The *Marche troyenne* rarely conveys funereal and mortal sentiments, but here its melody soars above the pounding bass figures with a primal urgency, once incurring Beecham’s voiced demands for increased fervor. The galloping as we approach the coda truly assumes a monumental, awful weight, a plea for the sea to give up her dead. The sonority of this heroic effort will resound in your hearts for a long time, as the concert audience was only too well aware.

—Gary Lemco

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