

**Beethoven 250, Philharmonia 75 and Decca 90: some recent Beulah reissues**  
**By Brian Wilson**

With a large number of recent Beethoven releases and reissues to be considered in my next edition of *Second Thoughts and Short Reviews*, Spring 2020/1, due soon, these worthwhile Beulah Beethoven reissues can serve as a useful prelude. It's convenient, too, to consider the other Beulah projects here.

Mark Zimmer has recently undertaken the massive task of itemising everything on the three recent bumper-size Beethoven boxes from DG, Warner and Naxos. His article has been much perused; I'd call it a best-seller, except that we don't charge for it – [How complete was my Beethoven?](#) In Spring 2020/1 I shall be looking at some of the more manageable downloads from the DG box and several other recent recordings. Meanwhile, before you choose one of those huge sets, you may wish to look especially at the smaller offshoots of the DG: rather than list them here, you can find them on the [Presto website](#). They are available there in lossless flac, which is preferable to the mp3 offered by other dealers.

**Index:** [page numbers in brackets]

**BEETHOVEN** *Creatures of Prometheus* ballet – Beinum (with *Fidelio* Overture, Symphony No.7)

Beethoven 250: 10PS57 [8]

- Piano Concerto No.1 – Backhaus/Schmidt-Isserstedt (with No.3) Beethoven 250: 7PS57 [6]
- Piano Concerto No.3 – Solomon/Menges (with No.1) Beethoven 250: 7PS57 [6]
- Piano Concerto No.4 – Rubinstein/Beecham (with *Coriolan* Overture, Symphony No.8) Beecham conducts Beethoven 12PDR4 [8]
- Piano Concerto No.5 – Moiseiwitsch/Sargent (w *Eroica* Variations) Beethoven 250: 5PS57 [5]
- Violin Concerto – Elman/Solti (with Symphony No.1) Beethoven 250: 4PS57 [4]
- Symphony No.1 – Fricsay (with Violin Concerto) Beethoven 250: 4PS57 [4]
- Symphony No.2 – Beecham (with Mass in C) Beethoven 250: 8PS57 [7]
- Symphony No.3 – Wood (with No.4) Beethoven 250: 1PS57 [2]
- Symphony No.4 – Harty (with No.3) Beethoven 250: 1PS57 [2]
- Symphony No.5 – Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers – Sargent 1PS59 [9]; (also with No.6) Beethoven 250: 3PS57 [3]
- Symphony No.6 – Erich Kleiber (with No.5) Beethoven 250: 3PS57 [3]
- Symphony No.7 – Colin Davis (with *Fidelio* Overture and *Creatures of Prometheus*) Beethoven 250: 10PS57 [8]
- Symphony No.8 – Beecham (with *Coriolan* Overture, Piano Concerto No.4) Beecham conducts Beethoven12PDR4 [8]
- Symphony No.9 – Furtwängler Beethoven 250: 2PS57 [3]
- Piano Trio No.7 (Archduke) – Trio di Trieste (with Violin Sonata Op.30/3 and Piano Sonata No.27) Beethoven 250: 6PS57 [5]
- Violin Sonata, Op.30/3 – Martzy, Antonietti (see Piano Trio No.7) Beethoven 250: 6PS57 [5]
- Piano Sonatas Nos. 14 – Ney; 26 – Solomon; 29 – Gulda Beethoven 250: 9PS57 [7]
- Piano Sonata No.27 – Solomon (see Piano trio No.7) [5]
- 'Eroica' Variations – Gulda (with Piano Concerto No.5) Beethoven 250: 5PS57 [5]
- Mass in C – Beecham (with Symphony No.2) Beethoven 250: 8PS57 [7]
- *Fidelio* Overture – Colin Davis (see Symphony No.7) Beethoven 250: 10PS57 [8]

**BRAHMS** Symphony No.4 – Rankl Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers 3PS59 [10]

**COATES** *The Three Elizabeths* – Coates Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers 2PS59 [10]

**DEBUSSY** *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune* – Beer Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers [10]

**LISZT** *Les Préludes* – Karajan (see **MOZART** Horn Concertos) Philharmonia 75 4PS78 [12]

**MENDELSSOHN** *Ruy Blas* Overture – Unger Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers 2PS59 [10]

- *Capriccio brilliant* Lympny 2PS59 [10]
- *Hebrides Overture* – Unger Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers 3PS59 [10]

**Recommended** **MOZART** Horn Concertos Nos. 3 and 4 – Brain/Karajan (with Humperdinck, Liszt, Vaughan Williams) Philadelphia 75 4PS78 [12]

**SAINT-SAËNS** Introduction and Rondo capriccioso – Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers 3PS59 [10]

**SCHUBERT** Symphony No.8 – Fistoulari Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers 2PS59 [10]

**TCHAIKOVSKY** Symphony No.5 – Beer Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers 1PS59 [9]

- *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture – Coates Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers 4PS59
- *Nutcracker* Suite – Robinson Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers 4PS59
- **Recommended** Violin Concerto – Haendl/Cameron Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers 4PS59

**VAUGHAN WILLIAMS** Tallis Fantasia – Karajan (with Humperdinck, Liszt, Mozart) Philharmonia 75 4PS78 [12]

**Recommended** **WALTON** Partita; Violin Concerto; *Belshazzar's Feast* – Walton Philharmonia 75 3PS78 [11]

**WEBER** *Euryanthe* Overture – Rankl Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers 3PS59 [10]

**WOLF-FERRARI** *Gioielli della Madonna* Intermezzo – Neel Decca at 90: ffr Pioneers 2PS59 [10]

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If you have not yet made their acquaintance, Beulah regularly bring us reissues of historical recordings, from 78s to 1960s stereo, in transfers as good as any that I have heard, removing as much surface noise as is feasible – practically all in the case of LPs, and even for most 78s – without impairing the tonal quality. These are the first ten of twelve planned Beethoven releases for 2020, recordings ranging from 1926 to a 1963 broadcast. Consider them alongside another Beulah release 'The Essence of Beethoven': *Ruins of Athens* Overture and Turkish March (Monte Carlo Opera O, 1951), String Quartet, Op.18/6 (Amadeus Quartet, 1962) and Piano Concerto No.5 'Emperor' (Foldes; BPO/Leitner, 1959), Beulah **1PS41** – see [Winter 2018/19 #1](#). For these historic recordings comparison with more recent versions would not be relevant – they are best considered in their own rights – but that doesn't prevent me from mentioning more recent recordings in some of the reviews.

Earlier Beulah releases have brought us the five piano concertos, paired with the first five symphonies, plus the other symphonies and other Beethoven albums – check them out at [Qobuz](#). Beulah releases are available from other suppliers but Qobuz offer them in lossless sound for the same price that others charge for mp3 – in some cases that's less than full bit-rate mp3. Links for those released at the date of completing this review can found from the Qobuz logo; those yet to appear simply carry the word 'Qobuz'.

### Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Symphony No.3 in E-flat, Op.55 'Eroica' [43:03]

New Queen's Hall Orchestra/Sir Henry Wood

rec. Queen's Hall, London, 28 November, 2 and 5 December 1926.

ADD/mono

Symphony No.4 in B-flat, Op.60 [30:58]

Hallé Orchestra/Sir Hamilton Harty

rec. Free Trade Hall, Manchester, 25-26 November 1926. ADD/mono

Reviewed as lossless (.wav) press preview

**BEULAH 1PS57** [74:02]

**1PS57**: Henry Wood's 1926 *Eroica* is also available on an earlier Beulah release, with Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No.6 and an orchestral

version of the d-minor Toccata and Fugue (**2PD3**). It's gained a different cover since John Sheppard



‘played [the CD] with enjoyment’ – [review](#). The download can be obtained in lossless sound from Qobuz. I found the fizzy 1926 sound off-putting, but the performance is well worth hearing, as I wrote in [Winter 2018/19 #1](#). One to stream, perhaps, from [Qobuz](#), rather than download.

The Pristine CD of these two recordings, [reviewed](#) by Jonathan Woolf, no longer seems to be available. I haven’t heard that transfer, but the Hamilton Harty Fourth on Beulah, apart from the odd unavoidable obtrusive background noise, sounds more amenable than the Woods *Eroica*. As JW notes, this is a romanticised view of what most conductors are content to leave as one of Beethoven’s less intense works. For that reason, I would be more inclined to turn to a smaller-scale account, such as that offered by a more recent Manchester recording, with the Manchester Camerata and Douglas Boyd (**Avie AV2169**, with No.5 – [DL Roundup March 2010](#)). All reservations apart, however, these are two valuable historical documents in any survey of Beethoven on record.

Symphony No.9 in d minor, Op.125 ‘Choral’ [73:47]  
 Tilla Briem (soprano), Elizabeth Höngen (alto), Peter Anders (tenor),  
 Rudolph Watzke (bass)  
 Bruno Kittel Choir  
 Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra/Wilhelm Furtwängler  
 rec. live, Old Philharmonic Hall, Berlin, March 1942. ADD/mono  
 Reviewed as lossless (.wav) press preview  
**BEULAH 2PS57** [73:47]

Equally valuable in many ways is Furtwängler’s 1942 ‘Choral’ Symphony on **2PS57**. With hindsight, it seems ironic that a conductor of alleged Nazi sympathies and an audience, many of whom would also have been at least fellow-travellers, should have sat and enjoyed the work of a composer who hated tyranny and set the words of a poet, Schiller, who shared that hatred. It’s well known that the Ode to Joy which became the finale of the symphony was really a thinly disguised Ode to Freedom: *an die Freiheit* rather than *an die Freude*. Perhaps Furtwängler chose to conduct this symphony as a silent protest against being seen as Hitler’s musical poodle. It’s more ironic still that the music should become the anthem of the European voluntary unity which arose from the ashes of the war, though neither the performers nor the audience could have known that.

The recording is thin, but (just) tolerable for the sake of such a heartfelt and powerful performance. I’ve listened to part of the Pristine transfer which Michael Cookson thought the best he had heard – [review](#) – and it does sound marginally more secure, but there is not a great deal in it – and the price of €9 for 16-bit lossless compares closely with Beulah’s £7.99.

Symphony No.5 in c minor, Op.67 [31:26]  
 National Symphony Orchestra/Sir Malcolm Sargent  
 rec. Kingsway Hall, London, 2 January 1945. ADD/mono  
 Symphony No.6 in F, Op.68 ‘Pastoral’ [39:07]  
 London Philharmonic Orchestra/Erich Kleiber  
 rec. Kingsway Hall, London, 24 and 25 February, 1948. ADD/mono  
 Reviewed as lossless (.wav) press preview  
**BEULAH 3PS57** [70:34]

**3PS57**: Sir Malcom Sargent’s **Fifth Symphony** sounds much as you would expect a good transfer of a 1946 recording to sound, even one with the Decca *ffrr* label attached: perfectly tolerable, but dry and muffled if you have just been listening to something more recent. The question, therefore, is whether

the performance stands up well enough. The opening movement is marked *allegro con brio* and I didn't find much of either in this account. The opening chords of the movement had been used during the war as the BBC call sign and contemporary listeners would have been used to hearing them played rather pompously, but Sargent's tempo for the rest of the movement is just too ponderous. With Carlos Kleiber's multi-award-winning recording available on a super-budget 2-CD DG release **The Very Best of Beethoven**, there's really no contest. The 'vigour and energy' which the 1945 reviewer found throughout, emerges in the *andante con moto* second movement but, by then, I didn't feel that there was enough to convince me. For even more vigour and energy, try Sir John Eliot Gardiner (*DG Beethoven 2020 Period Recordings 4837666* – to be reviewed in Spring 2020/1).

I expected much more – and found it – in Erich Kleiber's **Pastoral**. One of my PGCE students once characterised Sargent as a good all-rounder, who rarely disappointed but equally rarely shone, whereas Kleiber was a Beethoven specialist. Not only is the 1948 recording, first released on LP and 78s simultaneously, much brighter, so is the performance; it's still well worth hearing and enjoying. Perhaps the Vienna Philharmonic would have given Kleiber a securer, more mellifluous sound, but this half of 3PS57 makes the whole worth obtaining. Having listened to it again in comparison with a new recording of the *Pastoral* from the Berlin Akademie (Harmonia Mundi), I'm even more convinced that Kleiber got everything about right.

The only reservation is that the *DG Beethoven 2020 Historical Recordings* collection offers Kleiber's later (Decca, 1953) recording of the *Pastoral* with the Concertgebouw Orchestra. The intervening five years had brought improvements in recording technique and the sound is more tolerable. The extra outlay for the DG – around £45 in lossless sound – should be taken into account before deciding.

Symphony No.1 in C, Op.21 [21:51]

Berlin Philharmonic Hall/Ferenc Fricsay

rec. Jesus Christus Kirche, Berlin, 9 and 10 January 1953. ADD/mono

Violin Concerto in D, Op.61 [46:39]

Micha Elman (violin)

London Philharmonic Orchestra/Sir Georg Solti

rec. Kingsway Hall, London, 22-25 April 1953. ADD/mono

Reviewed as lossless (.wav) press preview

**BEULAH 4PS57** [68:30]

**4PS57** merits a more enthusiastic reception. Both Fricsay's recording of **Symphony No.1** and the Elman/Solti **Violin Concerto** are well worth

considering. Fricsay was always a sympathetic Beethoven (and Mozart) conductor – his Triple Concerto, with Anda, Fournier and Schneiderhan remains very competitive and his 1957 recording of Piano Concerto No.3 with Annie Fischer is one of the highlights of the *DG Beethoven 2020 Historical Recordings*; it's also available from Beulah – see review of 7PS57 below. This 1953 recording of the symphony has come up remarkably well indeed. I'm surprised to see the tempi criticised, in 1957 and again on the Heliodor reissue in 1961, as too fast – they are much more in accord with current expectations as, for example, Riccardo Chailly with the Gewandhaus Orchestra (Decca **4783493**, with No.2)

My first real encounter with the **Violin Concerto** was from a Royal Festival Hall broadcast, with David Oistrakh as soloist. It bowled me over, but I suspect that the Elman recording would have done the same. It, too, has come up sounding very well – Decca give the date on their Eloquence reissue as 1955, rather than 1953, but I think that's the release date rather than that of the recording – and the performance is well worth hearing: once again, I find myself at odds with the 1955 reviewer, Roger Fiske, who was unimpressed. The Eloquence alternative comes with Solti's Fourth Symphony and,



though inexpensive on CD, costs much more as a lossless download – an unfeasible £13.99 from one supplier, twice the price of the Beulah.

15 Variations and Fugue on an Original Theme in E-flat ('Eroica' Variations) [22:09]

Friedrich Gulda (piano)

rec. Victoria Hall, Geneva, November 1950. ADD/mono

Piano Concerto No.5 in E-flat, Op.68 ('Emperor') [36:45]

Benno Moiseiwitsch (piano)

BBC Symphony Orchestra/Sir Malcolm Sargent

rec. live, Royal Festival Hall, London, 6 March 1963. ADD/mono

Reviewed as lossless (.wav) press preview

**BEULAH 5PS57** [58:54]



There are not too many recordings of Moiseiwitsch in the Beethoven concertos, so this 1963 live recording is welcome, despite the fact that the sound requires more tolerance than most recordings of this vintage and, at first, more than some of the other transfers in this Beulah series. It does, however, sound rather better than the version of the same recording on YouTube. Like the earlier Moiseiwitsch recordings of No.3 (with Sargent) and No.5 (with Szell) on Naxos Historic 8.110776 – [review](#) – [review](#) – [review](#) – this is elegant, poetic and lyrical. Not a first choice, but an interesting one – and the recording seems to improve as the music progresses. Gulda's Eroica Variations are a welcome bonus.

Piano Trio No.7 in B-flat, Op.97 'Archduke' [36:54]

Trio di Trieste

rec. Victoria Hall Geneva, April 1952 ADD/mono

Sonata for violin and piano in G, Op.30/3 [17:09]

Jean Antonietti (piano), Johanna Martzy (violin)

rec. Beethoven Saal, Hannover, 7-11 July 1952. ADD/mono

Piano Sonata No.27 in e minor, Op.90 [13:11]

Solomon Cutner (piano)

rec. Studio 3, Abbey Road, London, 21 August 1956. ADD/mono

Reviewed as lossless (.wav) press preview

**BEULAH 6PS57** [67:15]

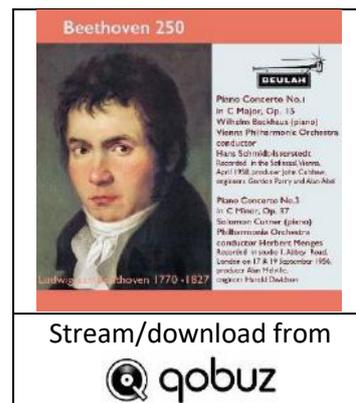


**6PS57:** Archduke Rudolf must have been quite a pianist. It wasn't just because it was the thing to dedicate works to the aristocracy that the most famous of the piano trios is dedicated to him; he was also the soloist at the first performance of the 'Emperor' Concerto. There are seats at all prices for the trio, including, for fans of period performance, a Harmonia Mundi album where it's coupled with Trio No.6 (**HMC902125**: Isabelle Faust, Jean-Guihen Queyras and Alexander Melnikov). I hailed that as a transport of delight and awarded **Recording of the Month** status – [review](#) – but the 1828 Graff fortepiano or the mild decoration won't be to all tastes.

The many fans of the Trio di Trieste may already have their 1960 remake, but that comes as part of a 6½-hour download only collection, costing around £40 in lossless format. The earlier recording on Beulah was hailed on appearance – the sole item on a 12-inch LP – as 'a fully worthy performance of what is probably the best piano trio yet written' and that just about sums it up, except to say that the dry-ish recording is surprisingly good for its age, with the ear very soon adapting to the sound.

By coincidence, a new Alpha release containing all three Op.30 violin sonatas has appeared more or less concurrently with the Beulah reissue of Op.30/3 – for review in Spring 2020/1.

Piano Concerto No.1 in C, Op.15 [31:50]  
 Wilhelm Backhaus (piano)  
 Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra/Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt  
 rec. Sofiensaal, Vienna, April 1958. ADD  
 Piano Concerto No.3 in c minor, Op.37 [35:49]  
 Solomon Cutner (piano)  
 Philharmonia Orchestra/Herbert Menges  
 rec. Studio 1, Abbey Road, London, 17-19 September 1956.  
 ADD/stereo  
 Reviewed as lossless (.wav) press preview  
**BEULAH 7PS57** [67:40]



**Solomon** (as he was usually more simply known) features in the sonata (above) and again on **7PS57** in Piano Concerto No.3. His recording of the concerto appeared around the same time as Annie Fischer's with Ferenc Fricsay, included in DG *Beethoven 2020 Historical*. For me, that's one of the great recordings of the Third of all time: I owned it when it appeared on DG Heliodor and, though my go-to recording on CD has been from Stephen Kovacevich and Colin Davis (Philips **4425772**, Concertos 1-4, Violin Concerto and Romances, budget download twofer only or Presto CD; or **4784027**: Concerto No.3 and Violin Concerto, mid-price), I very much enjoyed hearing Fischer and Fricsay again – that's also available from Beulah differently coupled with two Mozart concertos (**1PD83** – [DL News 2013/11](#)). Yet Solomon challenges it.

Solomon's recording has already appeared on Beulah in tandem with Grieg and Liszt (**1PS16** – [review](#)). It comes from that ideal partnership with Menges, remains one of the best interpretations of this work, and confirms my feeling that, in some moods, this is my favourite concerto of the five. It's not ground-breaking like the Fourth, which introduced the novelty of the soloist opening proceedings, but it's full of Mozartian life, yet it also presages the deeper works which were about to come forth, especially in this sensitive and ethereal account of the slow movement. Though recorded in stereo, there's little directional effect in this transfer but the recording is otherwise beautifully open and tonally very good indeed for its age.

**Wilhelm Backhaus** was already advanced in years when he recorded the Beethoven concertos with Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt and his manner tended to be magisterial rather than poetic, but his account of Concerto No.1, first released on a 10-inch Decca LP, reminds us that he was also regarded as a fine Mozartian. There's a Urania transfer of all five concertos, a rather expensive download at over £30 in lossless sound and Decca have scheduled a box set of all Backhaus's Decca recordings on 39 CDs for over £100. At Beulah's more modest price, this well transferred account of Op.15 is a more attractive proposition. Try it alongside the well-liked recent Naxos recording – [review](#) – it's well worth having both, and if you download the Naxos you can still have change from £13. Some Decca recordings sounded as if they had been made in a zinc tank; this is certainly not one of them, though I think Beulah have had to take a little of the over-brightness off, or their choice of cartridge has done so, which is all to the good. (I think part of my problem was that we were all made to think that the best Shure cartridge one could afford was the one to have. I never quite aspired to the V15, but ended my LP days with the M97 and was constantly annoyed by surface noise.)

Symphony No.2 in D, Op.36 [32:00]

rec. March 1957, Kingsway Hall, London. ADD

Mass in C, Op.86 [42:58]

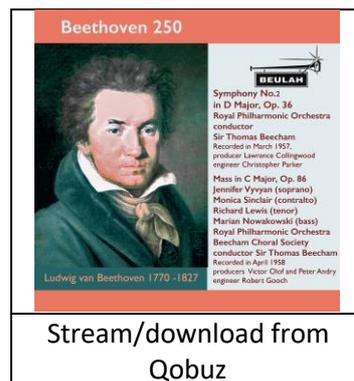
Jennifer Vyvyan (soprano), Monica Sinclair (contralto), Richard Lewis (tenor), Marian Kowalski (bass); Beecham Choral Society

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Sir Thomas Beecham

rec. April 1958. ADD.

Reviewed as lossless (.wav) press preview

**BEULAH 8PS57** [74:58]



Beethoven 250

**BEULAH**

Symphony No.2  
in D Major, Op. 36  
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra  
conductor  
Sir Thomas Beecham  
Recorded in March 1957,  
producer Lawrence Collingwood  
engineer Christopher Parker

Mass in C Major, Op. 86  
Jennifer Vyvyan (soprano)  
Monica Sinclair (contralto)  
Richard Lewis (tenor)  
Marian Nowakowski (bass)  
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra  
Beecham Choral Society  
conductor Sir Thomas Beecham  
Recorded in April 1958  
producers Victor Olof and Peter Andry  
engineer Robert Good

Ludwig van Beethoven 1770 - 1827

Stream/download from  
**Qobuz**

Sir Thomas Beecham knew what he liked and what he didn't. He largely avoided the Brahms symphonies but gave a rip-roaring account of No.2. That applies to the Beethoven symphonies, too: No.8 was his favourite (see **12PDR4** below), but he also recorded this account of No.2, both smaller-scale works than their nearest neighbours. If some of the tempi in No.2 are naughty-but-nice in the Beecham manner, I'm not complaining, though I wouldn't want this to be my only recording.

The Mass in C, with a strong set of soloists, is, if anything, even more worth having. The Warner Gemini twofer containing these two recordings is now download only and, though there's extra material on it, you may well prefer this single-album-size reissue, with the sound in Beulah's usual very worthwhile transfers, the Mass slightly less successful than the symphony.

Piano Sonata No.14 in c-sharp minor, Op.27/2 'Moonlight' [17:26]

Elly Ney – rec. Beethoven Saal, Hannover, 18-22 December 1956. ADD.

Piano Sonata No.26 in E-flat, Op.81a 'Les Adieux' [14:15]

Solomon Cutner – rec. Studio 3, Abbey Road, London, 20-21 November 1952. ADD/mono

Piano Sonata No.29 in B-flat 'Hammerklavier', Op.106 [38:26]

Friedrich Gulda – rec. Große Musikvereinsaal, Vienna, May 1951.

ADD/mono

Reviewed as lossless (.wav) press preview

**BEULAH 9PS57** [70:08]



Beethoven 250

**BEULAH**

Piano Sonatas  
No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 27,  
No. 2, "Moonlight"  
Elly Ney  
Recorded at Beethoven Saal, Hannover  
18-22 December 1956  
Producer Lawrence Collingwood  
Engineer Christopher Parker

No. 26 in E-flat, Op. 81a  
"Les Adieux"  
Solomon Cutner  
Recorded in Studio 3, Abbey Road, London  
20-21 November 1952  
Producer Lawrence Collingwood  
Engineer Christopher Parker

No. 29 in B-flat Major, Op. 106  
"Hammerklavier"  
Friedrich Gulda  
Recorded in Große Musikvereinsaal, Vienna  
May 1951  
Producer Lawrence Collingwood  
Engineer Christopher Parker

Ludwig van Beethoven 1770 - 1827

Stream/download from  
**Qobuz**

Three of Beethoven's named piano sonatas in performances which have stood the test of time. Gulda's *Hammerklavier* is especially worth hearing; indeed, I wish it had been coupled with his 'Moonlight' Sonata and his Op.110, which accompanied its original release on Decca LXT2624 on a second LP (LXT2581), when Alec Robertson wrote of the 'sensitive and unfailingly musical playing' of this young (then) performer.

The recording is dry but tolerable, with no sign of the hum mentioned as afflicting the original release. In fact, I could tell little difference between this transfer and that on Decca's box set of Gulda recordings 1950-1958 (**4756835**, download only).

(NB: Gulda's *Hammerklavier* has already been reissued by Beulah, with Chopin Piano Concerto No.1, Gulda and Boult, 1954).

*Fidelio* Overture [6:42]

Sinfonia of London/Colin Davis – rec. Hammersmith Town Hall, London, November 1960. ADD/stereo

Symphony No.7 in A, Op.92 [37:57]

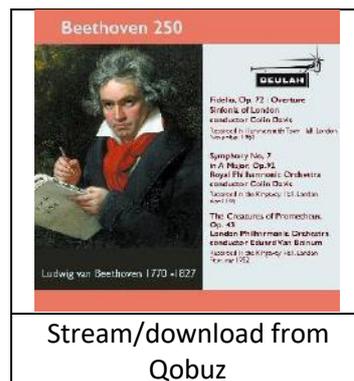
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Colin Davis – rec. Kingsway Hall, London, April 1961. ADD/stereo

*The Creatures of Prometheus*, Op.43 [38:27]

London Philharmonic Orchestra/Eduard van Beinum – rec. Kingsway Hall, London, 1952. ADD/mono

Reviewed as lossless (.wav) press preview

**BEULAH 10PS57** [83:06]



The Seventh was Colin Davis’s first Beethoven symphony recording; I remember the acclaim with which it was greeted on its appearance, and the disappointment produced by his account of the *Pastoral* Symphony and the *Prometheus* Overture for Philips in 1962. That Philips follow-up was at full price, but the Seventh appeared on the mid-price HMV Concert Classics label, initially in mono, but soon followed by a slightly more expensive stereo version (XLP/SXLP20038). His recording of Mozart for World Record Club had already won praise, as had his conducting of the Chelsea Opera Group in Berlioz, but it was this Beethoven Seventh that set the seal on what was to be an illustrious career. Kleiber senior (Erich) had already set a high benchmark for this symphony and his son Carlos was to do even better, but this Davis recording can compete with the very best.

The later Staatskapelle recording is readily available but the RPO Seventh can be found only on a Warner Icons download: *Sir Colin Davis, His Early Recordings*. That also contains his early Mozart recordings and the 7-hour package is very reasonably priced (**4639892**). That contains Davis’ Mozart, too, including the Oboe Concerto with Léon Goossens, but Beulah have also reissued that, with Symphonies Nos. 29, 34 and 39 – from [Qobuz](#). As that runs to 92 minutes, it costs a little more (£11.99).

The complete *Prometheus* ballet music has never received many recordings, though the Overture appears frequently enough; the finale, which employs the same tune as that of the *Eroica* symphony is also fairly well known. This 1952 recording is outshone sound-wise by the recent Naxos release (8.573853 – [review](#)) where the ballet is presented complete, but Eduard van Beinum’s account of substantial excerpts is well worth having and the recording has transferred well for its age. The Seventh symphony is full of the spirit of the dance and, while *Prometheus* may not seem as danceable as most ballets, Beinum makes us wonder if that isn’t too glib a reaction.

**Beecham Conducts Beethoven**

*Coriolan* Overture, Op.62 [7:50]

Piano Concerto No.4 in G, Op.58\* [30:05]

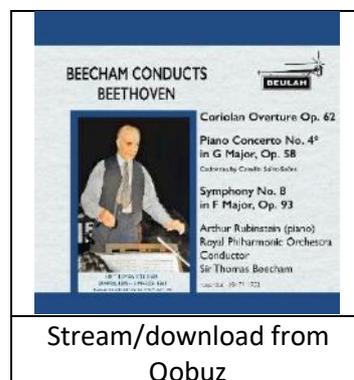
Symphony No.8 in F, Op.93 [26:10]

Arthur Rubinstein (piano)\*

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Sir Thomas Beecham  
rec. 1947\*, 1953. ADD/mono

Reviewed as lossless (.wav) press preview

**BEULAH 12PDR4** [64:06]



This is not strictly part of Beulah’s Beethoven 250 reissues; rather, it’s Volume 12 of their *Beecham conducts* series. I reviewed the two previous releases in Autumn 2017/2, making Beecham’s Berlioz *Te Deum* my **Reissue of the Month (10PDR4)** and liking his Tchaikovsky Symphony No.2 (**11PDR4**).

Rubinstein's clean-cut playing should be no surprise to those who love his Chopin – a composer about whom I tend to be ambiguous until I hear Rubinstein. Beecham was a great fan of the pianist – he once trod on the toes of an opinionated young man who mentioned his tendency to play wrong notes – and they produce together a Beethoven Fourth that can still be enjoyed. There are no Beecham naughty tricks – perhaps Rubinstein's influence – and, though Beecham's naughty can be nice, the comparatively plain interpretation here is by no means uninteresting; it's just that Rubinstein makes the solo part *sound easy*.

The 'little' Eighth Symphony also fares well at Beecham's hands and though the recording of any of these works would hardly pass muster as newly minted – in some ways, the 1947 sounds a little better than the 1954 – in this transfer it all sounds good enough to enjoy the performances.

### Decca at 90: ffr Pioneer

The Decca label celebrated its 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2019. Slightly belatedly, a multi-disc set is due for release by the company in March 2020. Those looking for less *impedimenta* may be more interested in four single releases from Beulah, transfers of recordings from the early development of their *ffrr* logo (full frequency range recording, later *ffss*). These, too, will be released in March 2020 – check out the Beulah website [eavb.co.uk](http://eavb.co.uk) for details and choose the Qobuz link – lossless sound for the same price that other dealers charge for lower quality mp3. The 53-CD Decca box set of *Decca Sound: The Mono Years* – [review](#) – seems no longer to be available.

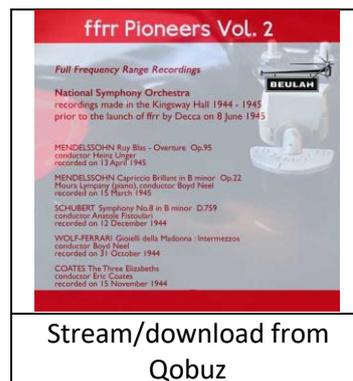
The degree of 78 fizz seems to vary from one player and one DAC to another, but it's never excessive.

**1PS59** features recordings from the National Symphony Orchestra, made in 1944-45 and amongst the first *ffrr* 78s. These two recordings were advertised in November 1945 as 'exactly as you hear it in the concert hall'. Well, that sounds more than a little OTT now, but the sound is very good for its time in these transfers.

**TCHAIKOVSKY** Symphony No.5 in e minor, Op.64: National Symphony Orchestra/Sidney Beer, rec. 8 June 1944, prior to the launch of the label but released with the logo. It receives a comparatively straight performance, albeit one with the traditional large cut in the finale, and the slightly muffled recording will be tolerable for most listeners. This recording was reissued on an earlier Beulah CD, with Symphony No.2 (**1PD11**, no longer available).

**BEETHOVEN** Symphony No.5 in c minor, Op.65, recorded by Sir Malcolm Sargent, again with the NSO, on 2 January 1945, has also appeared on one of Beulah's celebratory Beethoven 250 releases. To repeat what I've written above (**3PS57**) Sir Malcom Sargent's **Fifth Symphony** sounds much as you would expect a good transfer of a 1946 recording to sound, even one with the Decca *ffrr* label attached: perfectly tolerable, but dry and muffled if you have just been listening to something more recent. The question, therefore, is whether the performance stands up well enough. The opening movement is marked *allegro con brio* and I didn't find much of either in this account. The opening chords of the movement had been used during the war as the BBC call sign and contemporary listeners would have been used to hearing them played rather pompously, but Sargent's tempo for the rest of the movement is just too ponderous.

**2PS59: MENDELSSOHN** *Ruy Blas* Overture – National Symphony Orchestra/Heinz Unger, rec. 13 April 1945; *Capriccio brilliant* in b minor, Op.22 – Moura Lympany (piano); NSO/Boyd Neel, rec. 15 March 1945; **SCHUBERT** Symphony No.8 in b minor, D759, ‘Unfinished’ – NSO Anatole Fistoulari, rec. 12 December 1944; **WOLF-FERRARI** *Gioielli della Madonna* Intermezzo – NSO/Boyd Neel, rec. 31 October 1944; **COATES** *The Three Elizabeths* – NSO/Eric Coates, rec. 15 November 1944.



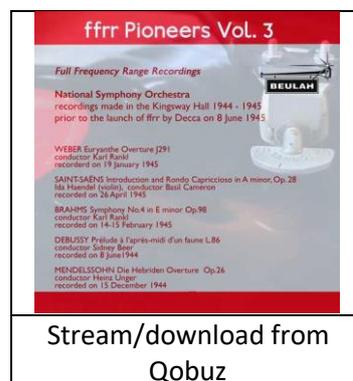
The image shows the cover of the 'ffrr Pioneers Vol. 2' album. It features a red header with the title 'ffrr Pioneers Vol. 2' and a 'BEULAH' logo. Below the header, it lists the recordings: Mendelssohn Ruy Blas Overture, Schubert Capriccio Brillante, Wolf-Ferrari Gioielli della Madonna, and Coates The Three Elizabeths, all recorded in 1944-1945. A 'Stream/download from Qobuz' button is located at the bottom of the image.

With so many more recent recordings of Eric Coates’ music, not least the recent John Wilson recording for Chandos ([Recommended review](#)), it’s interesting to hear the composer’s own accounts of the three movements of *The Three Elizabeths*. There are, in fact, other transfers on Naxos (download only, with *Four Centuries*) and Heritage (**HTGCD22**), also a 7-CD Nimbus collection of all Coates’ commercial recordings (**NI6231** – [review](#) – [review](#) – [review](#) – [review](#) – especially good value as a download in lossless sound for £9.75), but the Beulah reissue is uniquely valuable in placing it in context with the other early ffrr releases.

Fistoulari’s Schubert is very much of its time in giving us, effectively, two slow movements, but even some more recent recordings are guilty of that, too. The recording has come up sounding particularly well for its age; though there is a degree of surface noise, that’s part of the deal for retaining the full sound. Compton Mackenzie was not wrong to think this one of the best of the releases with the ffrr logo – not that anyone would have called it a logo in 1945.

It’s good, too, to be reminded of what a persuasive pianist Moura Lympany was.

**3PS59** [71:34]: **WEBER** *Euryanthe* Overture, J291 – National SO/Karl Rankl, rec. 19 January 1945; **SAINT-SAËNS** Introduction and *Rondo capriccioso*, in a minor, Op.28, Ida Haendel (violin); NSO/Karl Rankl, rec. 14-15 February 1945; **BRAHMS** Symphony No.4 in e minor, Op.98, NSO/Karl Rankl; **DEBUSSY** *Prélude à l’Après-midi d’un Faune*, L86 – NSO/Sidney Beer, rec. 8 June 1944; **MENDELSSOHN** *Hebrides* Overture (Fingal’s Cave), Op.26 – NSO/Heinz Unger, rec. 15 December 1944.



The image shows the cover of the 'ffrr Pioneers Vol. 3' album. It features a red header with the title 'ffrr Pioneers Vol. 3' and a 'BEULAH' logo. Below the header, it lists the recordings: Weber Euryanthe Overture, Saint-Saëns Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso, Brahms Symphony No. 4, Debussy Prelude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune, and Mendelssohn Die Hebriden Overture, all recorded in 1944-1945. A 'Stream/download from Qobuz' button is located at the bottom of the image.

The *Euryanthe* Overture is rather shrill, but tolerable, the performance lively. The young Ida Haendel and Karl Rankl in the Saint-Saëns sound better and the scintillating performance remains one of the best. I don’t recall hearing too many of Rankl’s recordings, but he seems to have been a mainstay of the Decca label in the 1940s.

The real test of this release comes in the form of the Brahms symphony, a work where I have found only a handful of recordings to make sense, especially in the finale. Otto Klemperer and Wolfgang Sawallisch did it to perfection for me, but the 1948 review which suggested that Rankl’s account ‘lacks serenity’ didn’t raise too many hopes. In the event, I enjoyed this performance, but the Debussy suffers from too much surface noise, which even distorts sustained notes at times. A stylish account of the *Hebrides* overture rounds off this recording.

**RECOMMENDED**

**4PS59** [73:25]: **TCHAIKOVSKY** *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture, TH42 – National Symphony Orchestra/Eric Coates, rec. 19 January 1945; *Nutcracker* Suite, Op.71 – NSO/Stanford Robinson, rec. 26 April 1945; Violin Concerto in D, Op.35 – Ida Haendel (violin); NSO/Basil Cameron, rec. 26 April 1945, partly re-recorded 6 February 1946.

This is my pick of the ffr reissues.

Stanford Robinson used to be a staple of the old BBC Light Programme, but this balletic recording of the *Nutcracker* Suite shows him to have been a talented conductor of more than the middle-of-the-road fare that he used to present. The surfaces are pretty clear here and the recording very full-blooded for its age.

Ida Haendel had recorded before she made the Saint-Saëns recording on **3PS59** and the Tchaikovsky here, but these were her first recordings with an orchestra, and they made an understandably very strong impression. Her later Tchaikovsky recording remains available with the Brahms Violin Concerto on Testament **SBT1038**, but the 1945/6 account sits well in the company of the other recordings on this Beulah release. Indeed, I had already praised both the Haendel recordings on earlier, shorter, Beulah offerings – [DL Roundup January 2011](#).

**Philharmonia at 75**

**RECOMMENDED**

**Sir William WALTON (1902-1983)**

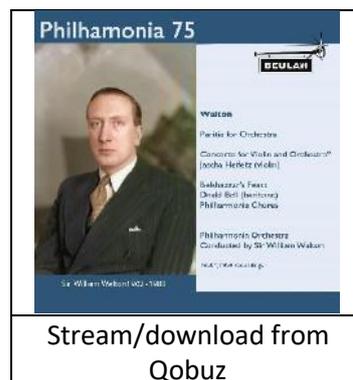
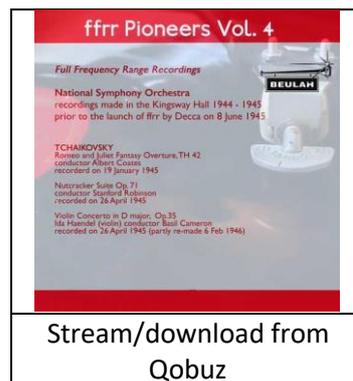
Partita for Orchestra [15:38]  
 Violin Concerto\* [27:01]  
*Belshazzar's Feast*\*\* [35:44]  
 Jascha Heifetz (violin)  
 David Bell (baritone); Philharmonia Chorus\*\*  
 Philharmonia Orchestra/William Walton  
 rec. 1950\*, 1959. ADD/mono, stereo.

**BEULAH 3PS58** [78:24]

Beulah have already released two earlier volumes in this series marking the seventy-fifth birthday of the Philharmonia orchestra (1PS58 and 2PS58 – [Winter 2019-20/#3](#)).

Three classic composer-conducted recordings in Beulah's usual very good transfers. The Violin Concerto, though surprisingly good for its age, sounds a little dated sound-wise alongside more recent recordings such as Tasmin Little's with the BBC SO and Edward Gardner (Chandos **CHSA5136** – [review](#)) but the performance remains the benchmark against which to judge all others. The superb RCA budget-price twofer on which it appeared with the Cello Concerto, Viola Concerto, Symphony No.1 and *Sinfonia Concertante* has gone the way of all flesh – [review](#) – and a download-only release with Vieuxtemps is less logically coupled.

Again, for *Belshazzar's Feast*, while more recent recordings are well worth considering, not least Bryn Terfel and Andrew Davis on a budget-price Apex CD, with Vaughan Williams' *Job*, a superb bargain for around £6 (**0927443942**), Walton's own recording remains extremely valuable. A powerful performance of a powerful work, which has come up sounding well and an excellent alternative to the download-only Warner twofer *Walton conducts Walton* (**9689442: Bargain of the Month** – [review](#)). This is my clear favourite among these Beulah reissues – but bear in mind that this recording of



*Belshazzar* is also available from Beulah with the classic (1954) recording of *Façade* (**1PD60**: [DL News 2013/4](#): from [Qobuz](#)).

## RECOMMENDED

**Engelbert HUMPERDINCK (1854-1921)**

*Hänsel und Gretel* Overture [8:38] – rec July 1953. ADD/mono

**Franz LISZT (1811-1886)**

*Les Préludes*, S97 [16:04] – rec. January 1958. ADD.

**Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)**

Horn Concerto No.3 in E-flat, K447 [24:10]

Horn Concerto No.4 in E-flat, K495 [16:11]

rec. November 1953. ADD/mono.

**Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872-1958)**

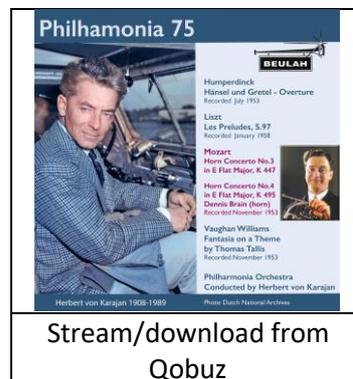
*Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* [14:46] – rec November 1953.

ADD/mono.

Dennis Brain (horn)

Philharmonia Orchestra/Herbert von Karajan

**BEULAH 4PS58** [79:51]



Stream/download from  
Qobuz

The Humperdinck is delightful and *Les Préludes* are impressive, but the highlight of **4PS58** must be the two Mozart Horn Concertos from the complete set recorded shortly before the accident in which Dennis Brain was killed on his way home from the Edinburgh Festival. These classics of the gramophone are worth the modest price of the whole programme. There could be only one thing better – all four, with the Quintet for piano and winds (Warner Masters **9659362**, download only).

I'd almost forgotten the Karajan recording of the *Tallis Fantasia*, though I reviewed the Warner reissue, with Britten, in [August 2015](#). The Philharmonia's playing is spot on and the interpretation falls far less short of the classic Barbirolli recording than I expected. I'd still go for the Barbirolli on my Desert Island, but if you were hearing the work for the first time you'd be just as enthralled by Karajan. Keep the volume at a reasonable level – in louder passages the strings above the stave sound rather shrill; otherwise, this is a good way to round off an attractive release. If anything, the sound is better than on the Warner transfer. As for the Barbirolli, it was recently reissued with his classic Elgar *Introduction and Allegro* and *Serenade for Strings*, outstanding value on Beulah **1PS42** – from [Qobuz](#) – [Spring 2019/2](#).