



**London
Philharmonic Orchestra
Sir Adrian Boult**

The 1956 Nixa-Westminster
stereo recordings, Vol. 2

SCHUMANN
The Four Symphonies

BERLIOZ
Overtures

3 CD

London Philharmonic Orchestra • Sir Adrian Boult The 1956 Nixa-Westminster stereo recordings, Vol. 2

The doyen of British conductors Adrian (Cedric) Boult was born in Chester (England) on 8 April 1889. He died on 22 February 1983 at the age of 93 after a long and distinguished career. He studied music at both Christ Church, Oxford and, during 1912 and 1913, the Leipzig Conservatory, and was able to observe there the legendary conductor Arthur Nikisch in rehearsals and at concerts. Between 1919 (during which year he conducted for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes season in London) and 1930 Boult was a member of the teaching staff of the Royal College of Music (returning there in the 1960s) and in 1924 he was appointed Conductor of the City of Birmingham Orchestra (as it was known then: 'Symphony' was added to the ensemble's designation in 1948). In 1930 Boult was invited to become Director of Music at the recently formed British Broadcasting Corporation (with a knighthood following in 1937), a rôle that required him to establish the BBC Symphony Orchestra, which he led as Chief Conductor until 1950. Following enforced retirement from the Corporation – a traumatic time for Boult – he then became Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, until 1957, although he would continue to conduct the orchestra regularly until he officially retired in 1979. His final recording, for his regular but not exclusive company, EMI, was of music by Sir Hubert Parry (including *Symphony No. 5* and *Symphonic Variations*). His last public engagement was to conduct a run of performances of *The Sanguine Fan* – with music by Elgar – for English National Ballet at the London Coliseum, the latter carried out with typical self-effacement. It is said that even at the end of his final concert Boult merely put down his baton, collected his overcoat and went home!

It is for his conducting of British music that we probably first and foremost think of Boult. He was a great champion of such repertoire and counted Holst, Elgar and Vaughan Williams among his closest friends.

He was often in charge of important premières, such as Holst's *The Planets* and several of Vaughan Williams's Symphonies. Although Boult conducted and recorded much British music, his repertoire was large and diverse and involved numerous other premières. These included the first performances in the UK of Berg's *Wozzeck* (much praised by its composer in a letter to Boult), Busoni's *Doktor Faust* (both operas were given as concert performances), Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra* and Mahler's *Symphony No. 3* (which is now commercially available). Boult was interested enough in Mahler's music to travel to Amsterdam when Mengelberg undertook a Mahler festival in 1920 (the composer had died in 1911). As well as having an open mind to the latest music, Boult was a master of the conductor's technical craft. In 1920 he wrote *A Handbook on the Technique of Conducting*, which he subtitled *The Point of the Stick*; originally designed as something for colleagues, this slim tome was made a general publication in the late-1960s. Boult's discography is sizeable. It includes not only much British fare but also copious examples of core repertoire, including Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*, Brahms's four Symphonies, Schumann's four Symphonies, Mahler's *Symphonies Nos. 1, 3 and 8* (Nos. 3 and 8 as posthumous releases), music by Beethoven and Mozart (wonderful 'late' accounts of their respective *Pastoral* and *Jupiter* symphonies, for example), as well as Berlioz, Rachmaninov, Schubert, Schumann, Sibelius, Tchaikovsky and Wagner. Late in his life, Boult expressed a wish to record music by Fauré, which sadly would not be realised.

If one thinks of Boult as masterly (musically and technically), unassuming, and dedicated to the composer at hand, this is not to say that he was without emotional temperament and, indeed, not without a temper either. Yet Boult always served music rather than himself, and recording upon recording shows his cohesive and appreciative

approach to the numerous and varied scores that he conducted, whether a great classic or something fresh from the pen of a composer who may not have been a household word.

At a stroke it is heartening to have restored Sir Adrian Boult's recordings of Robert Schumann's four symphonies and all eight of Hector Berlioz's overtures, a mix of music written for concert performance or to launch an opera. In every case, this is music that Boult did not return to in the recording studio. Yet his conviction in conducting these composers suggests nothing 'one-off' about the enterprise.

Of the Berlioz, *Le Carnaval romain* (Berlioz rescuing music from his then-failed opera, *Benvenuto Cellini*) receives a swinging performance, even in the opening slow music, but with ardour, and the faster sections are animated without becoming crude or inarticulate. *Les Francs-juges* is both solemn and mysterious in its opening, the brass summonses sinister. Boult is a master of its atmosphere and its slowly implacable tread, a surreptitiousness retained in the faster music, and how beautifully (and ideally) turned is the lyrical theme that then appears, music that once introduced the BBC Television series *Face to Face* (1959 to 1962) in which John Freeman would probe his guests with searching questions, sometimes making the interviewees very uncomfortable, such as the often-screened episodes with Gilbert Harding and Tony Hancock demonstrate. This was television ahead of its time, with Berlioz's equally forward-looking music an appropriate signature-tune. In the *Overture to Benvenuto Cellini*, Boult stresses the love and impishness within the music. *Waverley*, an unaccountably overlooked piece, one full of individuality, imagination and memorable invention, receives affectionate and rumbustious treatment.

There are more swashbuckling versions of *Le Corsaire* around, but Boult's measure does bring out turns (especially in the violins) that can be glossed over in

more gung-ho accounts; an opportunity for the thoughtful listener to appreciate certain pleasing details and to savour the string-players not sweating over getting all the notes in at speed but given time to articulate with meaning; typical of Boult's long-sight of music, the coda of *Le Corsaire* is the true apotheosis, where the piece has been always been heading. Boult brings *Rob Roy* to life, the most discursive of Berlioz's overtures, its most distinctive music being shared with *Harold in Italy*, that masterly symphony with viola obbligato. Conversely, *Le Roi Lear* hails as one of Berlioz's greatest achievements, more a symphonic poem than an overture, lofty in its ambition, passionate in its declamation, and so rich in its ideas, Boult alive to the music's largesse, intensity and pictorial vividness. The *Overture to Béatrice and Bénédicte* is another classic within Berlioz's oeuvre, brimful of wit and humanity, Boult stressing its mercurial aspects without sacrificing pathos.

Boult's conducting of Schumann's symphonies, however one reviews it, has the authority of a man who admired the music enormously and with it the direct contact with Fanny Davies (a pupil of Clara Schumann, Robert's wife and widow) and such anecdotal reference to Arthur Nikisch (as revealed in Boult's own essay on Schumann's symphonies, invariably reproduced here). These are great scores that, rather strangely, have been more the preserve of recordings than the concert hall.

The *Spring Symphony* begins with a call to attention, the music simmers and blossoms; this is indeed a work from a happy time in Schumann's life, the symphony energised with glad-to-be-alive feelings and shot-through with tender contrasts, all of which Boult brings out, with point, vivacity and warmth within a rigorous symphonic ground-plan. Yet he is alive to flexibility within the whole (if nowhere as interventionist as, say, Max Fiedler's conducting of this work, a 1936 broadcast survives, another sort of

authenticity altogether; Fiedler, 1859-1939, a friend of Brahms, was born just three years after Schumann's early death). Boulton stresses the volatility of the *Second Symphony*; it's a thrillingly combative account, gripping, and exuding a drive that continues into the *Scherzo*, Boulton cannily saving something for its still-faster coda. It's all too easy to sentimentalise the glorious slow movement; Boulton gives it both radiance and dignity before bringing out the stoical flourishes of the finale.

With the *Rhenish* (Schumann's last completed symphony but not the last to be published – hence the numbering discrepancies), Boulton indeed is true to his word, that the first movement is "brisker and busier" than the corresponding movement of the *Eroica* (Tovey's comparison). Honesty compels though to say that it is simply too fast, not even exultant at this speed, yet Sir Adrian is a dab hand at integrating lyrical episodes and avoiding charges of impatience. Matters improve with the middle movements, relaxed and gracious, and a judicious ceremonial solemnity informs the fourth movement's association to Cologne

Cathedral and the elevation of its Archbishop, a sight that moved Schumann enough to set it to music. With the finale, Boulton is once again no-nonsense, although detail is vivid. To Schumann's 1851 revision of the *D minor Symphony*, Boulton brings gravitas to the introduction and a measured sense of purpose to the exposition, which is rightly repeated. Boulton's account of *Symphony No. 4* bristles with greatness, a patrician unfolding of this remarkable work across its whole, a sense of release granted in the ultimate coda to crown music aflame with romance and eagerness, as well as structural magnificence.

These may not be the most pristine set of Schumann's symphonies ever set down, but they exude, for the most part, an understanding and admiration of the music that transcends the occasion frailty of execution, Boulton's conducting of the *Second* and *Fourth Symphonies* standing high in discographies of these works.

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Westminster Records production team, Control Room, Walthamstow Assembly Hall, 1956

Kurt List, Producer (seated); **Herbert Zeithammer**, Principal Balance Engineer (right);
Ursula Franz (née Stenz), Producer's Assistant and Tape Editor (bottom); unknown assistant (standing).
Not in shot was the Second Balance Engineer, **Mario Mizzaro**, who was the photographer.

(Photo courtesy of Ursula Franz and Mario Mizzaro)

Notes by Sir Adrian Boult originally reproduced on the sleeves of the Schumann LP releases

I am very glad to have had the opportunity of recording all the Schumann Symphonies, because, as a young man, I had some special opportunities to learn them and to enjoy them. Clara Schumann, the composer's widow, who long survived him, was a frequent visitor to England, and many of her pupils and friends were in London when I first went there. The most famous of those was Fanny Davies, who carried the Clara Schumann tradition on for many years and handed it to many pupils at the Royal College of Music, where I was her colleague in the early 'twenties'. The Director of the College, Sir Hugh Allen, sent me one evening to discuss some matters with her, and after we had done business I took the opportunity of asking her some questions, notably about the right treatment of the last movement of the *C major Symphony*, and how far one should add dynamic marks to the rather scanty directions left by Schumann. 'Come on, we'll play it as a duet!' was her answer, and before we were much older we had played all four Symphonies, and I had had a wonderful lesson in interpretation. After this, at 1:30 a.m., she produced a modern Czech symphony, but I felt I couldn't break the spell of Schumann which she had so magically called up, and escaped to bed!

There were devoted Schumann-ites in London at that time who felt that Arthur Nikisch took unwarrantable liberties with his music, but though Nikisch's performances were always highly personal, many of us could feel quite happy when the composer was Schumann. Nikisch himself told how in the Leipzig Gewandhaus when he was conducting the *Fourth Symphony* with Frau Schumann in the audience, he came to the point in the development of the first movement where he usually allowed himself to coax a big *largamente* from the trombones as they lifted the orchestra over a series of beautiful modulations. This had aroused some adverse criticism from the conservatives of Leipzig, and so he ventured a glance

to the front row where the old lady was sitting, and was delighted to see her smiling with pleasure.

This Symphony was not Schumann's last, and as great a critic as Tovey considers that the scoring of the final revision is not satisfactory, and an earlier version (which was published fifty years later) is in many ways to be preferred. I myself find the whole work lovely, and intensely exciting. It follows the usual plan, with a slow introduction to the first movement, an unusual partnership of oboe and solo 'cello in the *Romanze* (with a beautiful violin solo as trio), a vigorous scherzo, and a noble bridge passage leading into the finale, which is built on a major version of the main first movement figure. It is notable that Schumann does not close any movement finally, but carries the signature on to the next movement, indicating that there should be no break in the performance of the Symphony as a whole.

The *First Symphony* is sometimes called *Spring*. It comes from the happiest time of his life when he was married to the ideally sympathetic and musical lady who, as we have seen, was an artist and teacher whose influence helped hundreds of later interpreters. In each movement he pours out a stream of lovely lyricism, and even Tovey (whose impatience with Schumann's scoring is only matched by his delight in his sense of beauty) felt that the orchestration here is generally adequate.

The *Second Symphony* in C major is a bright and dramatic work, and it was its last movement, which looks, on paper, like a rather soulless procession of a somewhat aggravating one-bar figure with no particular rhyme or reason about it, about which I questioned Miss Fanny Davies. Her answer was gloriously convincing: she played no two bars alike; the figure sprang to life, and above all became part of a sweeping line with a wealth of rhyme and reason urging it on. The other movements play themselves more easily, the first throwing a strong accent on to the second beat of many of its 3/4 bars, the second a real scherzo in 2/4 time racing on with its ceaseless

semi-quavers until it exhausts the performer even if it exhilarates the listener, and the third, one of Schumann's finest lyrics.

The *Third Symphony* is in E flat, with five movements. The first, in 3/4, was thought by Sir Donald Tovey to owe some allegiance to the *Eroica*. I feel it, somehow, brisker and busier than Beethoven's great *Allegro*, though full of life and high spirits; it is followed by a charming *Ländler*, no doubt given the unofficial title of *Rhenish*, to the whole Symphony. It certainly seems right that we should look on this so-called fourth movement as a slow introduction to the lively finale, at the exciting end of which its material finally reappears to give it a most convincing peroration.

Those who buy these records may perhaps be interested by a word or two on Schumann's scoring. Authorities always underline his weakness in this respect, but Tovey considered his early works show a better orchestral sense than later, when he had the experience of holding the position of conductor at Düsseldorf. His diffidence, and one or two early shocks, started him playing for safety, especially in the woodwind department. Where he formerly would have entrusted a tune to one soloist, he later became frightened, and for safety would give it to three or four, resulting in a thick and colourless unison. Several great conductors have issued amended editions; in my opinion they go unnecessarily far, and the present performances preserve, in general, Schumann's own scoring. Where Schumann's safety measures have produced a disagreeable thickness, we have sometimes cut out these doublings, of course without losing any of the harmony notes, and in other places we have reduced the dynamic markings of Schumann's accompaniments in order that his exquisite tunes may be fully enjoyed. By their occasional amendments we hope that the full beauty of these lovely works can be realised.

Sir Adrian Boult

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Issue note

These recordings were set down by the American label, Westminster, in conjunction with its British partner, Nixa Records (owned by the electronics company, Pye), at Walthamstow Assembly Hall between August 15 and 31, 1956. With the London Philharmonic Orchestra recording as the Philharmonic Promenade Orchestra – its *nom de disque* for 'out-of-contract' engagements – the sessions comprised not only the symphonies and overtures on this FHR reissue, but works by Britten, Elgar and Walton (released on FHR06). They were produced by Kurt List, Vice President and Music Director of Westminster Records, and, most unusually for the period, engineered only in stereo by Herbert Zeithammer, assisted by Mario Mizzaro, using a two-track Ampex recorder and a simple set-up of 'two Altec microphones with the left-hand microphone placed half-way along the first violin section and the right-hand microphone similarly placed by the cello section' (John Snashall, 'The Nixa/Pye story Part Two', *International Classical Record Collector*, September 1995, pp.57-58).¹ These sessions constituted not only Sir Adrian Boult's first stereo recordings for the Nixa-Westminster partnership,² but the first stereo tapings of Schumann's *Symphonies Nos. 1, 3 and 4*, as well as of two of the Berlioz Overtures, *Rob Roy* and *Waverley*. Mixed down mono versions of the recordings were derived from the stereo masters at the Nixa and Westminster editing suites in London and New York.³

Utilising its own edited masters,⁴ Westminster issued all of the recordings on stereo LP in the USA in September 1958, the record sleeves and labels bearing the legend 'Nixa licence – A Westminster recording made for the Nixa Company of London'. Nixa limited itself, however, to a partial release of mono versions only. Both companies used the pseudonymous title Philharmonic Promenade Orchestra. It was not until March 1967 that stereo

versions of the Schumann Symphonies were first released in the UK, with the Berlioz Overtures following in June, in Pye's Golden Guinea series, the orchestra now correctly called the London Philharmonic Orchestra. The Schumann Symphonies were first released on compact disc in 1989 by PRT-Nixa. With the exception of *Rob Roy*, issued in 2002 by EMI on CZS5 75459.2 (this Great Conductors of the 20th Century set also included Schumann's *Symphony No. 4*), the Berlioz Overtures have only previously been available on compact disc as 'private' issues transferred from LP.

For this second and final volume of the LPO/Boult August 1956 Nixa-Westminster stereo recordings, the Westminster master tapes for Berlioz's overtures to *Le Roi Lear*, *Le Corsaire*, *Béatrice et Bénédicte* and *Rob Roy* have been made available courtesy of the Universal Music Westminster archive⁵ at Gütersloh, Germany. The remaining Berlioz Overtures and the Schumann Symphonies have been newly transferred from the Pye Nixa tapes held by EMI as the corresponding Westminster master tapes appear not to have survived.

¹ For a fuller account of the chequered history of Nixa/Pye, as well as an informative and, at times, amusing account of Boult's 1956 Walthamstow sessions see 'The Nixa/Pye Story', John Snashall, (*International Classical Record Collector*, May, September, November 1995).

² Boult's first studio recordings with the LPO were made for HMV in 1949, while his first Decca sessions early in 1952 followed his appointment as the orchestra's Principal Conductor. Both companies evidently regarded him as a safe accompanist and reliable advocate for British music, but seemed hesitant about offering him core symphonic repertoire. Nixa-Westminster began similarly in 1953

by confining Boult to Holst, Walton and Vaughan Williams. But the next year they allowed him a Brahms cycle, with Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Berlioz to follow. In the late 1950s, Vanguard engaged him for some Sibelius plus four of Beethoven's Symphonies and Everest for Mahler, Hindemith and Shostakovich. After his retirement Boult recorded with the LPO for another two decades, HMV eventually letting him range from Bach to Wagner, while Lyrita recorded much more of his British repertoire. Even today his LPO recordings far outnumber those with any other conductor, a worthy legacy from their first President (1965-83).

³ Mario Mizzaro, who was second engineer on the sessions, has confirmed that separate mono recordings were not made.

⁴ Ursula Franz (née Stenz), who joined Westminster as a Music Editor from 1955 and can be seen in the photograph reproduced on page 5, was married to Kurt List, who died in 1970. Affectionately known as 'Golden Ears', she was present at the sessions in the rôle of assistant to the producer and has confirmed that Westminster edited its own versions of the master tapes. She also recalls an amusing exchange between her husband and Sir Adrian, when the former asked for a section with horns to be repeated as the instruments were out of tune. "Sir Adrian responded gently: 'Shocking, isn't it!'"

⁵ Founded in New York in 1949, Westminster Records, ceased regular operation in 1965, having been acquired by ABC-Paramount Records in 1961. In 1979 MCA Records acquired ABC Records together with its Westminster subsidiary. Ownership of the Westminster catalogue passed to Universal Music in 2000.

Peter Bromley

*With thanks to Philip Stuart
for LPO discographic information*



Control Room, Walthamstow Assembly Hall, 1956

(Unknown assistant; **Herbert Zeithammer**, Principal Balance Engineer;
Mario Mizzaro, Second Balance Engineer)

CD 1**59:37**

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

**Symphony No. 1 in B flat major,
'Spring', Op. 38****30:55**

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| ① | I Andante un poco maestoso –
Allegro molto vivace | 11:23 |
| ② | II Larghetto – | 6:10 |
| ③ | III Scherzo: Molto vivace – Trio I/II | 5:00 |
| ④ | IV Allegro animato e grazioso | 8:22 |

Recorded 21-24 August 1956
First issued on Westminster WST 14013
(stereo LP)
Stereo source: Pye production master

Symphony No. 4 in D minor, Op. 120**28:42**

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------|
| ⑤ | I Ziemlich langsam – Lebhaft – | 10:39 |
| ⑥ | II Romanze: Ziemlich langsam – | 4:50 |
| ⑦ | III Scherzo: Lebhaft – | 5:08 |
| ⑧ | IV Langsam – Lebhaft | 8:04 |

Recorded 21-24 August 1956
First issued on Westminster WST 14016
(stereo LP)
Stereo source: Pye production master

CD 2**70:18**

Robert SCHUMANN

Symphony No. 2 in C major, Op. 61**30:33**

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| ① | I Sostenuto assai – Allegro ma non troppo | 9:02 |
| ② | II Scherzo: Allegro vivace | 6:28 |
| ③ | III Adagio espressivo | 7:04 |
| ④ | IV Allegro molto vivace | 7:59 |

Recorded 21-24 August 1956
First issued on Westminster WST 14014
(stereo LP)
Stereo source: Pye production master

**Symphony No. 3 in E flat major,
'Rhenish', Op. 97****29:21**

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|------|
| ⑤ | I Lebhaft | 7:39 |
| ⑥ | II Scherzo: Sehr massig | 5:58 |
| ⑦ | III Nicht schnell | 5:17 |
| ⑧ | IV Feierlich | 5:27 |
| ⑨ | V Lebhaft | 5:00 |

Recorded 21-24 August 1956
First issued on Westminster WST 14015
(stereo LP)
Stereo source: Pye production master

Hector BERLIOZ (1803-1869)

Waverley – Overture, Op. 1**10:24**

Recorded 28-29 August 1956
First issued on Westminster WST 14008
(stereo LP)
Stereo source: Pye production master

CD 3**76:51**

Hector BERLIOZ

Overtures

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|--------------|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | Le Corsaire, Op. 21 * | 8:37 | 5 | Benvenuto Cellini, Act I: Overture † | 10:46 |
| 2 | Le Roi Lear, Op. 4 † | 15:48 | 6 | Les Francs-juges, Op. 3 | 13:19 |
| 3 | Béatrice et Bénédicte, Act I: Overture † | 7:38 | 7 | Le Carnaval romain, Op. 9 | 8:37 |
| 4 | Rob Roy * | 12:05 | | | |

Recorded 28-29 August 1956

First issued on Westminster WST 14009 (stereo LP)

Stereo source: Westminster XSV 27628 * & XSV 27629 †

Recorded 24 † & 28-29 August 1956

First issued on Westminster WST 14008 (stereo LP)

Stereo source: Pye production master

Producer: **Kurt List**
 Principal Balance Engineer:
Herbert Zeithammer
 Second Balance Engineer:
Mario Mizzaro

First release on CD of the original Westminster source masters: CD 3, 1-4
 First stereo release on CD:
 CD 2, Track 10, CD 3, Tracks 1-3, 5-7
 First stereo recordings: CD 1, CD 2, Tracks 5-10, CD 3, Track 4



Sir Adrian Boult and Kurt List, Walthamstow Assembly Hall, 1956 †

Special thanks to Peter Bromley.

Thanks also to Colin Anderson, Ursula Franz, Michael Gray, Phil Hateley (Launch Music International), Ian Jones, Mario Mizzaro, Duncan Moore (EMI Classics), Alan Newcombe (Universal Classics), Nick Staines, Philip Stuart and Malcolm Walker.

FHR07

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