

Subject: [NEWS] PRISTINE CLASSICAL 22th October 2010: Kempe's 1956 Meistersinger, Dohnányi in London

From: Pristine Classical <music@pristineclassical.com>

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Pristine News: Friday 22nd October, 2010



Ernő Dohnányi

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Glazunov Piano Concertos - Audiophile Audition

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Editorial - If the writing's on the wall for the CD, what about...?

An editorial in the October 2010 issue of the French music magazine 'Diapason' asks whether the CD has come to the end of its natural life and is shortly to die. It corresponds with a favourable review of a wi-fi-based digital music system from HD Audio-Micromega, the AirStream, which you can read more about [here](#). Clearly the judgment is that the writing is on the wall for the CD in the face of the new technological possibilities a device like the AirStream offers, along with ultra-high-resolution digital audio downloads and the like.

Editor-in-chief Emmanuel Dupuy notes the typical commercial life-span of many audio reproduction products has been around 30 years - the cylinder, the 78 (I'd say he's pushing it a bit there - the 78rpm disc was in mass production for nearer to 60 years), the LP and now, apparently the CD. He refers to the shortcomings of the CD in terms of its rigidly-fixed audio specification, and though he refers only to the sampling rate of 44.1kHz, limiting the frequency range to around 20kHz, one could

add to this the bit depth fixed at 16-bit and no more than stereo audio channels. In a week when we issue a 4CD *Meistersinger*, I would also raise the question of duration - if we had just another 45 seconds to play with I could have put the entire first act onto the first CD instead of splitting it across two discs, though we are still up against a third act which lasts very nearly two hours...

None of these are problems for the download generation, where a set of 54 FLACs play seamlessly through for the full 4 hours 21 minutes and 32 seconds of the Kempe recording, and whilst opinions may differ on the merits of sampling rates which may allow your pet bat to hear the highest overtones of a well-struck triangle, or the offering of bit depths which offer theoretical digital noise floors which are beyond the physics of electronics and always will be, if you want super-high resolutions the FLAC format can handle them where a CD cannot.

And it's perhaps here that Dupuy gets a bit stuck in the conclusion of his piece. In what may be a certain nostalgia for the well-stocked record store (I assume he's in Paris, which might be almost the only place in France where one might be found these days - certainly there's nothing remotely like it within striking distance of my little village in the south west of the country), he also expresses a well-reasoned desire for the artistic integrity of the whole product - notes, pictures, texts, artwork and so on. But where I think he's asking for something which isn't about to appear is for some physical replacement which will take us through the next 30 years just as the physical products of the last 120 years have done so.

I may be wrong here, but having toyed with the idea of issuing parts of our catalogue on SD-RAM cards, or USB memory sticks, or some other popular digital memory format which doesn't involve moving parts, lasers, difficult-to-read silver discs and so on, I don't really see it happening. Yes we can put more music on a smaller object at higher quality, but it doesn't mean we should. How many of us preferred the 12-inch-square artwork and box-set booklets of the LP era over fiddly CD booklets crammed into easily-snapped plastic cases? Smaller-than-CD gets to be too small, yet bigger-than-CD seems highly unlikely.

Either way, the market is likely to be largely driven by the mass consumers who are currently happy to abandon physical media in favour of the instant pop gratification of iTunes. But those of us with slightly more cerebral approaches to music than where the latest boy-band MP3 ring-tone can be found do need to take into serious consideration what we may be losing as we head, apparently inexorably, into a world of purely online music. This week's Wagner release, for Pristine Classical downloaders, includes in the package not just the music and the CD box artwork, but also the complete libretto and, in what may be a first for a Wagner opera release, the complete, full orchestral score of the entire work. Try fitting that into a jewel case!

As I've written before, we're currently in what is for many a rather uncomfortable period of change. We have people wrestling with the problem of putting their collection of 5,500 CDs onto a hard disk, as discussed here last week (a number of people have written referring to copyright in this context, to which my suggested answer is that as long as the original discs go into the owner's attic and not onto eBay then he should be legally OK in most countries). We have the beginnings, for me at least, of regularly consuming literature on a screen rather than on a printed page. We have finally the ability to transmit ultra high quality audio and video signals wirelessly to any room in the house, something none of us had dreamt possible a decade ago.

Where all this leads appears tantalizingly close yet the ultimate solution is perhaps just beyond our reach right now. Nobody's quite nailed all the questions and problems raised by this move to digital and intangible products, and there are plenty of vested interests in maintaining various aspects of the status quo, be they multinational media giants or specialist high-end audio component manufacturers eager to sell us their newest disc player. To look backwards is surely to invite failure - there's no real future in Edison cylinder production, for sure - but to discard everything of the past is equally short-sighted. The question is what do we bring with us and how, and what must we say goodbye to?

And there's one further question to which I have no answer. The last week or two has seen significant sales patterns which indicate that Christmas is getting close again. When someone buys three or four copies of the same CD we can be reasonably sure they're not all for personal consumption! Online gift vouchers are an alternative and have proved quite popular, but the recipient has also to be online, and they don't exactly come wrapped in fancy paper and ribbons when they arrive in your e-mail. If and when the physical media of music reproduction is a thing of the past, how can you put a wonderful Wagner opera under the tree for a favourite relative?

Methinks the CD has a bit more life left in it just yet...

Andrew Rose

New release today:

[WAGNER Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg](#)

Pristine Audio PACO 052



Featuring:

Ferdinand Frantz - Hans Sachs
Gottlob Frick - Veit Pagner
Elisabeth Grümmer - Eva
Gerhard Unger - Davis
Hermann Prey - Ein Nachtwächter

Full list of soloists below

Choirs of the Municipal Opera and German State Opera, Berlin

(chorus master: Hermann Lüddecke)



Choir of St. Hedwin's Cathedral, Berlin
 (chorus-master: Karl Forster)
Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra
 Conducted by **Rudolf Kempe**
 Studio recording from 1956

XR remastering by Andrew Rose at Pristine Audio, August-October 2010
 Cover artwork based on a photograph of Rudolf Kempe

Total duration: 4hr 21:32
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The FLAC downloads:



For many, Kempe's is the greatest Meistersinger recording ever

Last of the golden-era mono studio recordings now in superb XR remastering

- **WAGNER** - Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, WWV 96 [[notes](#) / [score](#) / [libretto](#)]

Hans Sachs: **Ferdinand Frantz**
 Veit Pogner: **Gottlob Frick**
 Kunz Vogelgesang: **Horst Wilhelm**
 Konrad Nachtigall: **Walter Stoll**
 Sixtus Beckmesser: **Benno Kusche**
 Fritz Kothner: **Gustav Neidlinger**
 Balthasar Zorn: **Manfred Schmidt**
 Ulrich Eisslinger: **Leopold Clam**
 Augustin Moser: **Herold Kraus**
 Hermann Ortel: **Robert Koffmane**
 Hans Schwarz: **Anton Metternich**
 Hans Foltz: **Hanns Pick**
 Walther von Stolzing: **Rudolf Schock**
 Eva: **Elisabeth Grümmer**
 Magdalene: **Marga Höffgen**
 David: **Gerhard Unger**
 Ein Nachtwächter: **Hermann Prey**

Berliner Philharmoniker
Chöre der Deutschen Oper Berlin, der Berliner Staatsoper und St. Hedwigs-Kathedrale, Berlin
 Conducted by **Rudolf Kempe**

Source information:

Recorded 4-20 April, 1956, Wintergarten, Berlin
Transfers from Angel box set 3572 E/L

"The first choice

However, what is in my opinion the greatest Meistersinger recording of all was made five years later: Rudolf Kempe's studio recording with the Berlin Philharmonic. The BPO produces a gorgeous, idiomatic sound, and the cast has no weak link. Ferdinand Frantz, although not the most beautiful singer, portrays Sachs movingly. The remaining singers are flawless. Schock's Walther, barring the odd touch of leather in his voice, is ardent and poetic, rock-solid of voice and interpretation. The supporting cast boasts tremendous performances from Unger, Höffgen, Kusche, Frick, Neidlinger and Prey. However, this recording is distinguished above all by both the greatest vocal performance, the Eva of Elisabeth Grümmer, and the greatest conducting, from Rudolf Kempe, in the entire Meistersinger discography. Grümmer's voice is radiantly beautiful, silvery and pure, and her interpretation is peerless in its passion, lyricism and spontaneity. Her legato singing in the great climaxes of Act III is meltingly beautiful, and continuously brings a tug at the heart. Kempe is every bit as wonderful. His unexaggerated tempi are ideal, his ear for balances is unsurpassed, and he communicates more winningly than anyone else his love for the opera and the music. His interpretation is astoundingly moving and warm-hearted throughout, with passion and beauty in generous supply. His Act I prelude is exhilarating, his Act III prelude exceptionally noble and tender. Walther's Act II entrance quickens the pulse, and Kempe's ardent support to the big climaxes is peerless.

It is the performances of Kempe and Grümmer, more affectionate and heartrending than Karajan and Schwarzkopf, that push me over the edge. I recommend this recording, captured in superb mono sound, as the top recommendation for this endlessly satisfying and moving work. "

From Amazon.com [article](#) "**So you'd like to... Buy the best 'Die Meistersinger'**"

WAGNER Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg

One of the greatest of Wagner recordings, Kempe's 1956 EMI issue of Die Meistersinger comes top of many lists of the best of the best of this opera. The last of the great mono recordings from what many describe as a golden age of music, it's a must for both lovers of Wagner and those for whom the epic Wagner of the Ring cycle and Norse myth and legend is not perhaps to their taste.

This new transfer, from immaculate US Angel vinyl pressings, and XR remastered to bring even greater depth, clarity, transparency and atmosphere to the recording, puts this essential but otherwise out-of-print recording back into the catalogue where

it belongs.



Act 3, Scene 4:

Die selige Morgentraumdeut-Wiese
(Ambient Stereo version)

Technical notes:

I regularly receive e-mails and calls with suggestions of recordings deemed necessary of a Pristine Audio XR and Ambient Stereo makeover. Occasionally these are accompanied with a CD-R transfer of the recording in question. In this case, the collector, Dr. John Philips (to whom we are extremely grateful) arrived in person, bearing an armful of LPs for my consideration and a huge amount of enthusiasm and knowledge.

Above all he was insistent that I at least consider strongly the present recording of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, in his opinion not only the best recording ever made of it, but also in its US Angel pressing, the very best vinyl LP versions to be had. I was astonished to discover that, despite a reissue by EMI on CD some years ago, this masterpiece of the recording studio was now out of print and difficult to obtain. But I was still somewhat concerned that the LP transfers might not live up to the quality of the EMI CD transfers.

I need not have worried. Towards the end of the LP transfer and remastering process I finally managed to track down a copy of the CD issue for comparison. Despite this being a very good 1950s recording, the XR remastering had found a greater depth and clarity in the recording than was ever to be heard from the CDs. The LPs were so clean and clear to begin with that, after applying the same XR processing to a section of the CD issue that had been applied to the LP transfers, the two were entirely indistinguishable by even the closest listening tests.

This is certainly a recording where I would recommend the Ambient Stereo issue. As with all our Ambient Stereo releases, the central mono sound remains perfectly intact - this isn't the "fake stereo" of years gone by. What you do hear though is a real sense of the space around the singers and orchestra. In the original recording one can detect what is a rather primitive use of studio reverberation at times - by allow this some spread and using advanced digital signal processing it has been possible to enhance and significantly reduce the artificiality of the effect.

The end result is a supremely listenable, crystal clear sound, with real depth in the bass, fabulous transparency in the treble - all in all a most worthwhile improvement on the now unobtainable EMI CD set of this superlative recording.

Technical notes by Andrew Rose

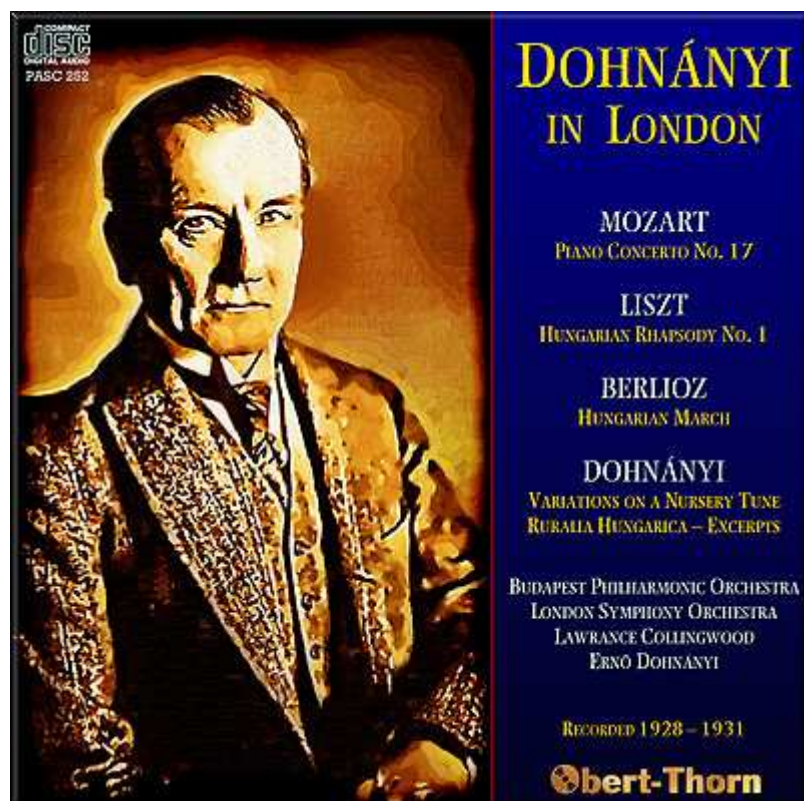
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New release today:

[DOHNÁNYI In London](#)

Pristine Audio PASC 252



Ernő Dohnányi, pianist & conductor
Budapest Symphony Orchestra
London Symphony Orchestra
Lawrance Collingwood, conductor
Recorded 1928 and 1931

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn
Cover artwork based on a photograph of Ernő Dohnányi

Total duration: 79:37
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The downloads:



Dohnányi as composer, conductor and pianist

A fascinating, often brilliant set of recordings in transfers by Mark Obert-Thorn

- **MOZART:** Piano Concerto No. 17 in G major, K. 453 (Cadenzas: Dohnányi)* [[notes](#) / [score](#)]
Recorded 17th June, 1928 in London
Matrix nos.: WAX 3790 through 3797
First issued on Columbia L 2215 through 2218
- **LISZT:** Hungarian Rhapsody No. 1 [[notes](#) / [score](#)]
Recorded 16th June, 1928 in London
Matrix nos.: WAX 3786 through 3788
First issued on Columbia 9550 and 9551
- **BERLIOZ:** Hungarian March from The Damnation of Faust [[notes](#) / [score](#)]
Recorded 16th June, 1928 in London
Matrix no.: WAX 3789
First issued on Columbia 9551

- **BERLIOZ: Hungarian March from The Damnation of Faust** [\[notes / score\]](#)

Recorded 18th June, 1928 in Queen's Hall, London
Matrix no.: CR 2092-1 T1
First issued on HMV AN 149

- **EGRESSY: Szózat (Summons)** [\[notes\]](#)

- **DOHNÁNYI: Hiszekegy (I Believe)** [\[notes\]](#)

Recorded 18th June, 1928 in Queen's Hall, London
Matrix no.: CR 2088-1A
First issued on HMV AN 149

- **DOHNÁNYI: Rurália Hungarica, Op. 32B, No. 5 – Molto vivace** [\[notes\]](#)

Recorded 18th June, 1928 in Queen's Hall, London
Matrix no.: BR 2093-1
First issued on HMV AM 1284

Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra

Ernö Dohnányi, conductor and *pianist

- **DOHNÁNYI: Rurália Hungarica, Op. 32B No. 2 – Presto ma non tanto** [\[notes\]](#)

Recorded 23rd February, 1931 in Kingsway Hall, London
Matrix no.: 2B 474-2
First issued on HMV D 2056

London Symphony Orchestra

Ernö Dohnányi, conductor

- **DOHNÁNYI: Variations on a Nursery Tune, Op. 25** [\[notes / score\]](#)

Recorded 21st and 23rd February, 1931 in Kingsway Hall, London
Matrix nos.: 2B 469-1, 470-1, 471-3, 472 and 473-2
First issued on HMV D 2054 through 2056

Ernö Dohnányi, piano

London Symphony Orchestra

Lawrance Collingwood, conductor

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

DOHNANYI in London

Mark Obert-Thorn has assembled a wonderful collection of recordings by the multi-talented Hungarian composer Dohnányi, made in London in 1928 and 1931.

Featuring his best-known work, Variations on a Nursery Tune, in a superbly-made 1931 recording with the London Symphony Orchestra, we also have a wide range of material Dohnányi recorded with his own Budapest Philharmonic, including a complete performance of Mozart's 17th Piano Concerto, which Dohnányi directs from the piano keyboard.

Fascinating, surprising and enchanting!



SCHUBERT - String Quintet in C, D.956
4th mvt. - *Allegretto*
(*Ambient Stereo version*)

Notes on the recordings:

The present program brings together examples of Ernő Dohnányi's abilities as pianist, conductor and composer. Most of the recordings were made during a three-day period in June, 1928 when Dohnányi was on tour in London with the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra, of which he had been music director since 1919.

The first two recording sessions were done for Columbia in one of their smaller London studios, possibly the Portman Rooms. The day after these sessions ended, Dohnányi and the orchestra moved to the more expansive acoustic of Queen's Hall for an HMV session. It is interesting to compare the Columbia version of the Berlioz march, with its unforgiving dead studio acoustic to the HMV version, even with the latter's handicap of having been released from a dubbed matrix. (HMV recorded three other sides at this time, all of Hungarian nationalist hymns, one of them being a 10-inch version of the same Dohnányi *Hiszkegy* presented here.)

Three years later, Dohnányi returned to London to record his *Variations*. Even though the sessions were held in a large venue (Kingsway Hall), the composer was again unlucky in that the matrices were over-recorded and distort during loud passages. He was to remake this recording in stereo in 1956, but this earlier version has its charms, not least in the humor which HMV producer/conductor Lawrance Collingwood finds in the orchestral accompaniment.

The sources for the transfers were American Columbia "Viva-Tonal" pressings for the Mozart; laminated English Columbias for the Liszt and Berlioz; black-label American Victor "Orthophonic" pressings for the Queen's Hall items; and Victor "Z" and Gold pressings for the 1931 sessions.

Mark Obert-Thorn, reissue producer

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by **Dr. John Duffy**
in Ambient Stereo

Virtuoso 1926 recording of Debussy's Quartet



Virtuoso Quartet

Debussy

String Quartet No. 6
in G minor, Op. 10

Virtuoso Quartet:
Marjorie Haywood, violin
Edwin Virgo, violin
Raymond Jeremy, viola
Cedric Sharpe, cello

Recorded November 12, 1926

First issued as HMV D1058-61

Virtuoso Quartet: [wiki](#)

This transfer is presented with Ambient Stereo remastering by Dr. John Duffy.

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Dr John Duffy
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Pick of the reviews

Audiophile Audition

'For authenticity of performance, we cannot surpass the Elena Glazunov renditions of the two piano concertos by her esteemed step-father.'



GLAZUNOV:

Piano Concerto No. 1 in F Minor, Op. 92

Piano Concerto No. 2 in B Major, Op. 100

Elena Glazunov, piano

Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra/Alois Melichar

Pristine Audio [PASC 249](#), 51:00

[avail. in various formats incl. CD-R from www.pristineclassical.com] - Four Stars

Alexandre Glazunov came to the keyboard concerto relatively late in his career, given pupil Rachmaninov's precocious excursions in the form as early as his Op. 1. The Glazunov First Concerto dates from 1911, and he dedicated the composition to Leopold Godowsky, whom Glazunov heard in St. Petersburg in 1905. A superstition about working on his Ninth Symphony diverted Glazunov to labor on the F Minor Concerto. The Second Concerto dates from the time of the Russian Revolution, 1917. Elena Glazunov, the performer in these 1956 inscriptions originally from Telefunken, was the composer's step-daughter, though Glazunov later moved to adopt her legally as his daughter. Conductor Alois Melichar (1896-1976) made a reputation as a conductor, but perhaps even more so as an acerbic critic of his contemporaries, especially Arnold Schoenberg.

The F Minor Concerto (31 October 1956) opens with an Allegro moderato of lyrical lushness, moody and melancholy. The predominance of dreamy arpeggios places the work solidly in the nostalgic-sentimental school of Rachmaninov, albeit colored by Glazunov's innate balletic impulses and capacity for glittery detail, even at the expense of the grand bravura that piano concertos typically demand. The melodic tissue more than once recalls the slow movement of Rachmaninov's E Minor Symphony. The second movement offers a theme and ten variations in various characters, mostly andante and andantino in a style resembling that of Reger, but assuming quicker speed and more Slavic definition in the later variants. Elena Glazunov moves quite comfortably through this concerto, which she had premiered so many years prior. Variation V (Intermezzo) moves as an Allegro, and its colors well point to Rachmaninov's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini. The ensuing Lento (quasi una fantasia) incorporates lovely riffs in the cello and woodwinds. A playful Mazurka follows, chromatic and spirited, with choppy rhythms and cymbals crashing. The busy Scherzo moves briskly, the color quite French in the manner of Faure. The last variation takes its cue from the pomp and ceremony Tchaikovsky lavishes on his theme and variations, as in the Suite No. 3 in G.

The B Major Concerto (29 November 1956) spins out--in one unbroken movement--a melodic series of gestures much in the manner of Rimsky-Korsakov's brief Piano Concerto, Op. 30. The rhapsodic ethos of the piece seems a cross between Tchaikovsky and Litolff or Saint-Saens in an expansive mood. The brilliant arpeggios seem to transpose the harp riffs in many

Tchaikovsky ballets to the keyboard, cross-fertilized by Chopin's roulades. The middle section projects the same lyrical allure that energizes the composer's Violin Concerto, suavely conservative. When the arpeggios tumble downwards, they imitate the Chopin Andante spianato or Debussy's E Major Arabesque. The last movement bears many of the rhythmic earmarks of the D Minor MacDowell Concerto. The sheer eclecticism of the style testifies to Glazunov's successful fusion of Russian and European impulses. In its pomposo moments, Glazunov takes his hat off to both Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov's flamboyant pageantry. For those who dwell on "authentic" performances of a musical style, this family portrait of the two Glazunov concertos will come highly recommended.

-- **Gary Lemco**

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Andrew Rose
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