



MYRA
HESS

Live recordings
from the
University of
Illinois 1949

DAME MYRA HESS

Live recordings from the University of Illinois 1949

CD 1 *Recorded at the Auditorium of the University of Illinois*

17 March 1949 (69.39)

1. CHOPIN Fantasy in F minor Op 49	(12.48)
SCHUBERT Piano Sonata in B flat major D960	(33.44)
2. Molto moderato	(13.12)
3. Andante sostenuto	(9.04)
4. Scherzo: Allegro vivace con delicatezza	(3.46)
5. Allegro ma non troppo	(7.33)
SCHUBERT Dances for piano	<i>encores 17 & 18 March 1949</i>
6. <i>Spoken introduction</i>	(0.24)
7. Deutsche Tänze D783 <i>No 1 in A major, No 2 in D major, No 3 in B flat major</i>	(4.51)
<i>No 4 in G major, No 5 in B minor</i>	
Ländler D790 <i>No 3 in D major</i>	
Deutsche Tänze D783 <i>No 6 in B flat major, No 7 in B flat major</i>	
Valses sentimentales D779 <i>No 27 in E flat major, No 1 in C major, No 2 in C major</i>	
8. Deutsche Tänze D783 <i>No 10 in A minor</i>	(8.45)
Walzer, Ländler und Ecosaisen D145 <i>No 12 in E major, No 2 in B major</i>	
<i>No 10 in B minor, No 9 in F sharp minor</i>	
Valses nobles D969 <i>No 8 in A major</i>	
Erster Walzer D365 <i>No 36 in F major</i>	
Deutsche Tänze D783 <i>No 14 in F minor, No 15 in A flat major</i>	
Valses nobles D969 <i>No 3 in C major, No 9 in A minor</i>	
Valses sentimentales D779 <i>No 13 in A major</i>	
9. BRAHMS Intermezzo in C major Op 119/3	(1.30)
10. SCARLATTI Sonata in G major Kk14 (L387)	(2.43)
11. CHOPIN Waltz in E flat major Op 18	(4.06)

MOZART Piano Concerto No 21 in C major K467	17 March 1949 (28.12)
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SINFONIETTA / JOHN M KUYPERS	
1. Allegro maestoso	(13.26)
2. Andante	(8.12)
3. Allegro vivace assai	(6.19)
4. <i>Spoken introduction to the repeat of:</i>	(0.17)
5. Allegro vivace assai <i>Cadenzas: Denis Matthews</i>	(6.14)
MOZART Piano Concerto No 9 in E flat major 'Jeunehomme' K271	18 March 1949 (31.30)
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SINFONIETTA / JOHN M KUYPERS	
6. Allegro	(10.00)
7. Andantino	(11.48)
8. Rondeau: Presto <i>Cadenzas: Mozart</i>	(9.27)
9. <i>Closing speech</i>	(0.11)



BACH Partita No 4 in D major BWV828	(28.09)
1. Overture	(5.35)
2. Allemande	(7.44)
3. Courante	(3.24)
4. Aria	(2.22)
5. Sarabande	(3.37)
6. Menuet	(1.25)
7. Gigue	(3.46)
BEETHOVEN Piano Sonata in D minor 'Tempest' Op 31 No 2	(21.26)
8. Largo – Allegro	(8.05)
9. Adagio	(7.17)
10. Allegretto	(5.59)

from the Ford Sunday Evening Hour broadcast

7 March 1937

11. GRIEG Piano Concerto in A minor Op 16 <i>1st movement</i> Allegro molto moderato	(11.39)
DETROIT SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA / VICTOR KOLAR	
CHOPIN Études Op 25	
12. No 1 in A flat major	(2.46)
13. No 3 in F major	(1.55)
14. BACH French Suite No 5 in G major BWV816 <i>7th movement</i> Gigue	(2.17)

Producer's note

These three discs devoted to Myra Hess's live performances feature two complete recitals recorded at Illinois University on 17 and 18 March 1949. Each evening featured solo works followed by a concerto and also included various encores, but as the programmes are each too long to fit on a single CD we have instead coupled the concertos together and arranged the solo works into musical groupings (sadly it proved impossible to locate a copy of the Beethoven 'Tempest' Sonata which was not shorn of the final three bars of the central Adagio or the opening phrase of the finale). As an appendix we include some off-air recordings, in this instance taken from the Ford Sunday Evening Hour which was regularly broadcast coast to coast in the USA during the 1930s and early 1940s via the Columbia Broadcasting System. Significantly, almost all the works included in this programme are further additions to the Myra Hess discography.

The issue of these recordings would not have been possible without the assistance and cooperation of many. The University of Illinois has been generous at every turn and I am consequently indebted to Mr Don V Moses (former Director of the School of Music) who gave permission for the release of the Illinois recordings, and to Ms Leslie Troutman (University Music Library) and Mr Rex Anderson (University Audio Department) both of whom assisted in locating the original acetate discs. I must also thank Mr Donald Manildi (Curator of IPAM, University of Maryland) for making available the 1937 recordings. Finally, APR salutes Mr Marshall Izen of New York. It was he who produced tapes of the Illinois recordings (after the discovery that the original discs had deteriorated to such an extent that they were beyond use), who went to great lengths to secure the precise details of the 1937 broadcast, and who placed his witty caricature at APR's disposal.

Bryan Crimp

Recollections of Myra Hess *Marshall Izen*

I once asked Myra Hess why she made so few recordings. 'I hate them', she replied. 'I feel like I'm going to my own funeral when I hear myself play.' For Dame Myra, music-making was a live, spontaneous act. She thrived on contact with an audience; it sparked her genius. In fact those who knew her playing well were generally disappointed by her commercial recordings, though a few exceptions come to mind, notably Beethoven's Op 109 Piano Sonata, Granados's 'Maiden and the Nightingale', Schumann's *Carnaval* and Brahms's Capriccio in B minor, Op 76 No 2.

Myra Hess's live recordings, however, tell a very different story, as is apparent from this album. Furthermore, this programme, compiled from two concerts Dame Myra gave at the University of Illinois in March 1949, is unique in that it presents the only known live solo recordings of this pianist. Although the sound is less than ideal, it captures her at the peak of her powers: the interpretations are animated and wonderfully realized. The Scarlatti Sonata in G is here played with more abandon – and 18 seconds faster – than her studio recording. She programmed very little Chopin in her mature years but her passionate playing of the Fantasy and the infectious good humour projected in the Waltz demonstrate that she was still on very good terms with the composer. In the 1940s and '50s Schubert sonatas were rarely found in recital programmes but Myra Hess played the posthumous B flat Sonata throughout her career. Schubert dances were included in her very first wartime National Gallery concert in London. From the 439 Dances that are published, Dame Myra made a selection of



Myra Hess with Tobias Matthay in 1922
Photo: Denise Lassimonne

22 'with blood, sweat and tears' as she put it. She clearly had a wonderful time with them at Illinois. I can still see her in my mind's eye, turning her head towards the audience with a smile on her face as if to say, 'Isn't this fun!'. When I heard her play them in New York (at

a recital where she used her music) she announced from the stage, 'I'm not going to use my notes for the Dances because if I did, we would end up with music paper all over the floor'. (That she took great joy in talking to her audiences is apparent from the brief spoken introduction to the dances included in this programme.)

I first heard Myra Hess in October 1946 when she returned to Orchestra Hall in Chicago after an absence of eight years. Hess was unknown to us young music students, except for a recording of the Schumann Concerto and reports of her wartime National Gallery concerts in London. Thus we were unprepared for what happened that evening. The conductor, Désiré Defauw, regally holding her hand high, escorted Dame Myra to the piano, as the cheering sold-out house rose to welcome her back. (The standing ovation was a rarity in those days.) The Chicago Symphony brass sounded a fanfare – a tribute given to a precious few. This all seemed a bit excessive to us but Dame Myra's serene playing of the Beethoven Fourth Concerto's deceptively simple opening measures signalled that we were about to have a rare musical experience. It combined expressiveness and nobility with an other-worldly tone unique to the artist.

A recital several days later, of works by Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, confirmed for us the vast range of the pianist's artistry, one that revealed the music in its essence. At that time my fellow students and I were under the spell of the super-virtuosity of Horowitz and Rubinstein. Myra Hess's pianism was comprehensive but never called attention to itself and her remarkable musicianship changed the way

we listened to piano playing for the rest of our lives.

In 1949 I moved to New York to continue my musical studies at the Juilliard School of Music. Each season I would obtain the Hess itinerary and attend as many of her concerts in and around the city as I could. I considered them an essential part of my musical education. An acquaintance of mine, a close friend of Dame Myra, told the artist of my admiration for her playing. As a result she was quite insistent that I visit her backstage and we struck up a friendship.

Dame Myra's performances are engraved in my memory. She would walk onto the stage with a jaunty little bounce and a presence so radiant you felt like a privileged friend with whom she was about to share her musical insights. On stage her physical appearance never varied. She always wore one of several black gowns designed by her friend Mainbocher. A green jade pendant, a kind of amulet,



Myra Hess with Bruno Walter in 1956



was her only jewellery. She parted her hair in the centre and had it draped and drawn around into a bun. She sat on a special concert chair with a back-rest and travelled with her own Steinway.

Imagine my surprise when, in the late 1950s, she added a red sash to her familiar ensemble! As a result I drew a caricature of her, but it was too exaggerated. 'Oh no', she cried when she saw it. 'Oh no, no, no!' But she greeted my second effort with a deep infectious laugh and thus signed it with an approving exclamation point. It appears on the cover of this booklet.

Myra (she disliked being called 'Dame') had a lively sense of humour. She would entertain at parties playing the Chopin 'Black Keys' Study by rolling an orange on the black keys while wearing a doily on her head à la Queen Victoria. This mischievous humour also came through in her playing. On several occasions I heard her make an audience laugh out loud at the return of the rondo theme in the finale of a Mozart concerto. Occasionally, because everyone was having such a good time, she would repeat the concerto's last movement as an encore.

Myra was a remarkably warm and gracious woman, unaffected by her celebrity. When I told her that my friends Orrin and Shirley Howard in Los Angeles had named their new baby after her she was delighted but added, 'I hope she doesn't become a pianist. There are far too many of us!' (In fact little Myra became an attorney.) She asked me to invite the Howards backstage after a recital in Los Angeles. But the green room was so mobbed they left not wanting to add to her post-concert fatigue. The next morning, much to their surprise, Dame Myra phoned, having done a considerable amount of detective work to find their number, asking why she hadn't seen them after the concert. Orrin explained and they chatted as if old friends. A photograph she subsequently gave the Howards was signed '(Big!) Myra Hess'.

Towards the end of her career Myra reverted to a practice she had begun at her National Gallery concerts during the war: she played with the score on the music rack, although she rarely looked at it. The first time she did this in New York she announced, 'I have

decided to use my notes today because I want to enjoy the concert too! The young man turning the pages for me is a very musical surgeon, and if I don't play well he is liable to chop my head off!' Later in a radio interview she was asked about memorizing. She answered by recalling her teacher, Tobias Matthay: '... the thing he minded most about, always, was the integrity of the performance ... Whether you stood on your head or had your music or didn't have your music was irrelevant – as long as you got somewhere near the spirit of the music.'

On 28 January 1961 Myra gave a recital at Hunter College in New York. Something was wrong. During the intermission I was told she was not feeling well. The second half went as badly as the first. Myra came out for only one encore, fur coat wrapped around her shoulders, and played a Brahms Intermezzo with all her usual magic. It was probably her way of saying, 'I did not play my best tonight and I am sorry'. The next morning Anita Gunn, her secretary, phoned to say Dame Myra was ill and that the rest of her tour was cancelled. (I had been scheduled to turn pages for her Washington recital later that week.) We eventually learned that Myra had suffered a stroke. America had seen her for the last time.

Whenever Myra Hess is mentioned, she is invariably remembered for her legendary recitals comprising the last three Beethoven sonatas. Over a period of ten years she presented this programme in New York three times – on each occasion Carnegie Hall overflowed with stage seats. At these concerts Myra, as a rule, did not play encores. Deeply moved by the ovations, she would quiet the

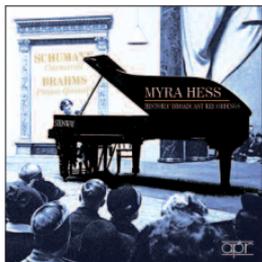


audience by holding up her hands and say, 'What more can one play after such music?' It was on 14 February 1960 that she played this programme for what turned out to be her last appearance in the hall. One critic wrote of her visit: 'It should take its place with the most memorable recitals ever given in this hallowed hall.' As the transcendental moments of Op 111 floated away there was a consecrated silence in the auditorium. Gradually the applause began. Because at that time Carnegie Hall was scheduled for demolition, it was an emotional concert for everyone. Myra spoke to the audience of her hopes that the building could be saved and, reluctant to say good-bye to the hall, she broke her rule and played six encores, ending with her transcription of Bach's 'Jesu, joy of man's desiring'. Many people simply remained in their seats, some with tears in their eyes, still cherishing the glow of this magical occasion.

After that concert she told me, 'It is worth being a pianist just to be able to play Opus 111'.

© Marshall Izen, 1998





Historic Broadcast Recordings

SCHUMANN
Carnaval, Op 9
recorded in 1950

BRAHMS
Piano Quintet in F minor, Op 34
with GRILLER STRING QUARTET
recorded in 1942

APR 5646

MYRA HESS ON APR

The complete solo and concerto studio recordings

THE AMERICAN COLUMBIA RECORDINGS
1928-1931

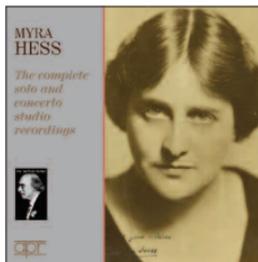
THE ENGLISH COLUMBIA RECORDINGS 1933

THE HMV 78-RPM RECORDINGS 1937-1949

THE HMV LPS 1952-1957

APR 7504

"This set will prompt endless reappraisal as well as ample confirmation of Hess's enduring celebrity" (*Gramophone*)





Compact Disc 1

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Compact Disc 2

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This compilation

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