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**Johann STRAUSS II Artist's Life – Waltz, Op.316**

Recorded: May 1961 (HMV SXLP 20041 – stereo)

**CHOPIN arr. Sargent**

Les Sylphides – Ballet Music

**ROSSINI**

William Tell – Ballet Music – Passo a tre e Coro Tirolese<sup>†</sup>

Recorded: December 1962 (HMV SXLP 20049 – stereo)

**ROSSINI-RESPIGHI arr. Sargent**

La Boutique Fantasque – Concert Suite from the Ballet<sup>†</sup>

Recorded: October 1961 (HMV ASD 497 – stereo)

**SCHUBERT**

Rosamunde – Incidental Music, Op.26 Ballet No. 2 in G major

Recorded: October 1960 (HMV SXLP 20029 – stereo)

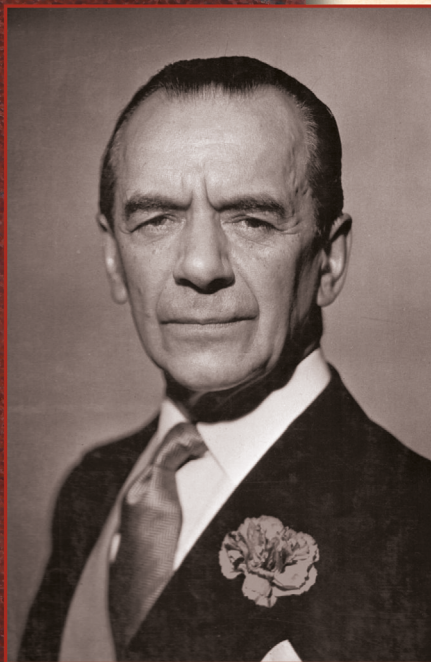
**Johann STRAUSS II**

Wine, Women and Song – Waltz, Op.333

Recorded: May 1961 (HMV SXLP 20041 – stereo)

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

<sup>†</sup>ROYAL OPERA HOUSE ORCHESTRA, COVENT GARDEN



**Guild**  
HISTORICAL

**SIR  
MALCOLM  
SARGENT**

**'On with the Dance!'**

**CHOPIN**

Les Sylphides

**ROSSINI-RESPIGHI**

La Boutique Fantasque

**JOHANN STRAUSS II**

Artist's Life

Wine, Women and Song

**SCHUBERT**

Rosamunde – Ballet No.2

**ROSSINI**

William Tell – Ballet Music

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Royal Opera House Orchestra,  
Covent Garden

Stereo Recordings 1960-1962

**Johann STRAUSS II** (1825-1899)

1 **Artist's Life – Waltz, Op.316** 9:46

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA  
Recorded: May 1961 (HMV SXLP 20041 – stereo)

**Frédéric CHOPIN** (1810-1849) **arr. Sargent**

**Les Sylphides – Ballet Music**

- 2 Prelude in A major, Op.28, No.7 1:51  
3 Nocturne in A flat major, Op.32, No.2 6:22  
4 Valse in G flat major, Op.70, No.1 2:26  
5 Mazurka in D major, Op.33, No.2 3:05  
6 Mazurka in C major, Op.67, No.3 1:50  
7 Prelude in A major, Op.28, No.7 2:41  
8 Valse in C sharp minor, Op.64, No.2 4:11  
9 Finale – Grande Valse Brillante in E flat major, Op.18 5:58

**Gioachino ROSSINI** (1792-1868)

10 **William Tell – Ballet Music – Passo a tre e Coro Tirolese** 8:14

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE ORCHESTRA, COVENT GARDEN  
Recorded: December 1962 (HMV SXLP 20049 – stereo)

**Gioachino ROSSINI - Ottorino RESPIGHI** (1879-1936) **arr. Sargent**

**La Boutique Fantasque – Concert Suite from the Ballet**

- 11 Overture (Tempo di marcia) 2:28  
12 Tarantella (Allegro con brio) 1:37  
13 Mazurka 2:16  
14 Danse Cosaque (Allegretto marcato) 2:05  
15 Can Can (Allegretto grottesco) 1:42

**A GUILD HISTORICAL RELEASE**

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- Executive co-ordination: Guild GmbH

- **Guild GmbH, Bärenholzstrasse 8, 8537 Nussbaumen/TG, Switzerland**  
Tel: +41 (0) 52 742 85 00 Fax: +41 (0) 52 742 85 09 (Head Office)
- **Guild GmbH, PO Box 5092, Colchester, Essex CO1 1FN, Great Britain**
- **e-mail: [info@guildmusic.com](mailto:info@guildmusic.com) World WideWeb-Site: <http://www.guildmusic.com>**

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*Les Sylphides* is, therefore, not a narrative ballet in any respect, but one which displays aspects of a single scene, the locale and background of which is left to the choreographer. Thus it is that the ballet – less than half-an-hour in duration – affords the dancers the opportunity of being choreographed to music which is itself in stylised dance form, as the sylphs (*Les Sylphides*) dance in turn with a male partner, in whichever setting the choreographer feels is most appropriate.

It is the orchestration of Chopin's music that has made this ballet: and consequently it is the one 'classical' ballet (although being conceived towards the very end of that era, in Russia) wherein the instrumental demands can be adjusted to whatever sized orchestra is available. The first orchestration was by the Russian composer Alexander Glazunov, his suite not being intended originally as a ballet at all, but as a concert piece. As the appeal of the ballet adaptation of his score widened, it fell to a number of British composers to produce the most often performed versions. In that regard, the orchestrations by Roy Douglas (especially) and Benjamin Britten (in the USA for the American Ballet Theatre) gained wide popularity – not least with conductors. Sargent's edition of the score was the first to be made by a British conductor and was premiered by him at Covent Garden in 1962. The present recording, made shortly afterwards, was a memento of the occasion.

The result is that Sargent's experienced inside knowledge of the orchestra resulted in an orchestration that slightly varied the original sequence – the short Prelude in A major is heard twice, at the beginning and later on, initially replacing the famous Polonaise – but which was cleverly designed to appeal to those orchestras of medium-size and to those audiences who responded to the overall mood (that of the inherently gentle sylphs) without any single movement seeming to stand apart from the initial balletic concept.

The historical connotations of ballet stem from two great European countries – France and Russia – so much so, in fact, that in the 19th-century in Paris, especially during the Second Empire, an opera could hardly be expected to be produced on stage if it did not contain a ballet sequence. The history of 19th-century opera in Paris is full of stories of those 'Paris versions' of various operas to which a ballet sequence has been added: without it, the opera stood little chance of success. Rossini certainly knew this, as early as 1829, when he composed what is surely his large-scale operatic masterpiece, *William Tell*, shot full of the most fascinating and original orchestral touches – Berlioz, who attended the first production, was mightily impressed. But Rossini cleverly judged the mood of any likely audience by making his ballet music entirely self-sufficient, capable of standing by itself as a separate concert item. The result, in Sargent's hands is quite brilliantly expressive, as is his account of the single ballet music piece from the music Schubert supplied for the production of the play *Rosamunde*, in Vienna, six years before *William Tell* was first heard.

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|----|----------------------------------|------|
| 16 | Valse lente (Andantino moderato) | 2:33 |
| 17 | Allegretto moderato              | 1:13 |
| 18 | Nocturne (Andantino)             | 3:55 |
| 19 | Galop (Vivacissimo)              | 1:57 |

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA  
Recorded: October 1961 (HMV ASD 497 – stereo)

**Franz SCHUBERT** (1797-1828)  
**Rosamunde – Incidental Music, Op.26**

- |    |                         |      |
|----|-------------------------|------|
| 20 | Ballet No. 2 in G major | 4:44 |
|----|-------------------------|------|
- ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA  
Recorded: October 1960 (HMV SXL P 20029 – stereo)

**Johann STRAUSS II**

- |    |                                      |      |
|----|--------------------------------------|------|
| 21 | Wine, Women and Song – Waltz, Op.333 | 6:26 |
|----|--------------------------------------|------|
- ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA  
Recorded: May 1961 (HMV SXL P 20041 – stereo)

When Sir Malcolm Sargent died in October 1967 his reputation as arguably the most popular conductor of his generation was assured, but the very popularity that he epitomised carried with it criticism of his interpretative approach. Using the language of a later generation, Sargent was at times accused of what might be termed the 'dumbing down' of great art, and the rather unkind appellation 'Flash Harry' with which his critics dubbed him may have been a fashionable and unwarranted reaction to the care he took over his personal appearance.

It is true that, as chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra – at a time when that Orchestra gave many more concerts than it does now – the wide range of repertoire he was called upon to conduct was such as would have stretched to the utmost the interpretative skills of any conductor, and from time to time Sargent could be accused of giving rather thoughtless performances, but such occasions were indeed rare in the history of his programmes.

One only has to consider the range of his musicianship – he was more than an accomplished pianist and a fine organist; he was also a composer himself, albeit of few works, and mainly from his earliest years – but he knew at first-hand what it was like to compose and conduct original music. Sargent was also a superb arranger and orchestrator of other composers' music, but it was as a conductor of the main symphonic repertoire that his reputation was founded, and in quite recent years music-lovers have had a number of chances, with the reissue of some of his best recordings, to re-evaluate a most remarkable all-round British musician.

The Guild Historic series of reissued recordings conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent has played a significant role in Sargent's rehabilitation, not least in that it has concentrated upon several areas in which he excelled as an interpreter – particularly Russian music, from Tchaikovsky to Rachmaninoff. In that regard, we have had various of Sargent's magnificent orchestrations of music by those and other masters. In particular, his 1930 arrangement for full orchestra of Rachmaninoff's *Prelude in C sharp minor* has come as a revelation to later generations, and his outstanding orchestration of Brahms's *Four Serious Songs* (the *Vier Erste Gesänge* Opus 121) revealed further of the range of his musical depths. Nor should we overlook his superb skill as a concerto accompanist – for it was Sargent who, in the 1930s, was selected by His Master's Voice to partner Artur Schnabel in the first integral recording of the piano concertos of Beethoven, and the conductor's electrifying account of the orchestral part of Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* with Cyril Smith (also to be heard within the Guild Historical Series) has to be counted as amongst the very finest ever captured on disc.

Sargent was less often engaged to conduct opera, although he did appear in the opera house occasionally, and amongst his recorded legacy is a virtually complete excellent series of Gilbert and Sullivan operas, as well as occasional single excerpts from more avowedly serious operatic scores. Where Sargent was wholly without peer was in his inspiring ability to conduct and direct a large choir, as his outstanding recordings of such as Handel's *Messiah*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* continue to demonstrate, and we ought not to overlook his masterly series of ballet recordings, from a very wide repertoire – some of which form part of our collection, 'On with the dance!' – a title of which Sargent would have thoroughly approved.

Not only does this very well-filled collection show part of Sargent's abilities in music which has the dance at its heart, but also reveals further his qualities as an arranger of other composers' music – for it is Sargent's own orchestrations of *Les Sylphides* and of the ballet *Ottorino* Respighi fashioned in 1919 from the late piano pieces of Rossini, making a concert suite somewhat shorter than the original and for a slightly less full orchestra, which show him as ever the practical and experienced musician.

Our programme begins and ends with two of the Waltzes by Johann Strauss II that formed part of an all-

Strauss LP with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. We should note that this was, at the time, a wholly remarkable pairing on disc, for the RPO had been founded immediately after the end of World War II by Sir Thomas Beecham, who was waspishly one of Sargent's most noted critics. Whether one should take Beecham's criticisms of Sargent entirely seriously is another matter, or whether they were genuine expressions of the older conductor's displeasure, but it was nevertheless extraordinary to have Sargent conducting 'Beecham's Orchestra' on disc, when Beecham himself was still alive – he died in March 1961 at the age of 81. Incidentally, both Sargent and Beecham were engaged by Serge Diaghilev to conduct the *Ballets Russes* in 1927, with Sargent also conducting their final season in 1928.

Following Beecham's death, Sargent appeared more frequently with the RPO in public, as well as on disc, and a somewhat tragic coincidence was when the Orchestra was on tour in the United States in late 1963 with Sargent, preparing for a concert in Dallas on the day that President Kennedy was assassinated in the city – November 22nd. That day was also Benjamin Britten's 50th birthday. Sargent went on to make a number of recordings with the RPO, for HMV and for Reader's Digest, but he never signed an exclusive recording contract with any company, referring to himself as a 'jobbing conductor'. As a consequence, he made recordings for a wide variety of labels (at the time), the largest majority of his discography being made for HMV, English Columbia and Decca, as well as very occasionally recording in Europe for American labels.

But the release of the Johann Strauss recordings revealed a new side to Sargent's character – although, as a committed Gilbert and Sullivan aficionado, late 19th-century well-composed lighter music was never far from Sargent's heart – nor, indeed from the heart of his audiences. Critics wondered if Sargent could quite capture the essence of the Viennese 'lilt' of some of Johann Strauss II's more famous works, but they tended to overlook the fact that the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Beecham had been nurtured on what Beecham termed his 'lollipops' – short, highly attractive pieces of orchestral music that demanded little from audiences other than a welcome for music that was inherently meant to beguile, to put the listener in a relaxed and undemanding frame of mind.

Not that such a view was the essence of the more famous pieces by members of the Strauss dynasty – for Sargent took this music further. He undoubtedly possessed an understanding of performance style of Johann Strauss's waltzes, and he performed the music as written – with full repeats and with the often miniature tone-poem-like introductions that the concert waltzes possessed, introductions that were often dispensed with by other conductors. In that regard, certainly amongst British conductors, Sargent was unique.

In addition, we have the conductor's own orchestration of *Les Sylphides* – and once again, we have to consider a remarkable, but little-appreciated, aspect of this ballet. It is, of course, taken from a selection of Chopin's piano music, and was one of the first ballets ever conceived (in the final decade of the 19th-century) *not* to tell a story: