

The “Gerd Rubahn” Symphony No. 3 (Updated July 8, 2013)

The history of the commercially recorded Bruckner Symphonies is peppered with instances where the true identity of the performers has been in question. The discography is filled with names such as Henri Adolf, Cesare Cantieri, Jan Tubbs, etc. who are conductors that no one has even seen. There are also recordings by such ensembles as the South German Philharmonic and the Hastings Symphony that have never given a public concert.

For this article, I am going to focus in on one recording of which it had been thought the true performers had been positively identified, but recent evidence seems to prove otherwise. The recording in question is the Allegro Royale LP No. 1597. The recording was released in 1954 and featured a performance of the Bruckner Symphony No. 3 as performed by Gerd Rubahn and the Berlin Symphony Orchestra. The Allegro Royale label was one of the first budget LP labels to reach the market after the advent of the LP. It was the creation of Eli Oberstein of the Record Corporation of America (“RCA”) but not to be confused with the Radio Corporation of America, the real RCA. To keep the production price down, producers of this genre of LP resorted to low royalty recordings or used pseudonyms to cover up the real performers. Mr. Oberstein claimed to have a “Berlin source” for many of his productions. When this first LP of the Bruckner 3rd was released, there was a good deal of speculation regarding the real performers on this disc and there was one important clue - the performance on this LP used the newly published 1878 version of the 3rd Symphony as edited by Fritz Oeser.

In an article in the ARSC Journal, Ernst A. Lumpe continues the story:

“Allegro Royale #1597 - One of the few records of “RCA” which has been more widely commented on and was thought to capture a live performance with Jascha Horenstein (as suggested by the late Jack Diether), a conductor who championed the 1878 version. The orchestra in this performance is clearly one of the “big” ones. There was a performance of this version in Germany some time after its publication which was carried out by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, marked expressly in the program as “premiere of second version from 1878”. The event took place in Berlin’s Titania-Palast on March 2 and 3, 1952, Leopold Ludwig conducting. Apparently Ludwig and the BPO were the first to study and perform the recently published version. Given the “Berlin contact” of Oberstein it is more than likely that this Allegro/Royale disc has captured one of these performances. An original tape of the live performance no longer exists, probably because RIAS Berlin had made a studio recording of the work a few days later with the same forces and the same conductor. This tape is extant and could not be inspected for a stylistic comparison with this live version.”

Based on this article, the general conclusion was that the Allegro Royale LP was indeed a copy of the 1952 Leopold Ludwig performance with the Berlin Philharmonic.

Given this information, I attempted to provide more concrete evidence for this theory. Lumpe certainly had made a strong case for his identification, but the only way to be sure was to listen to the RIAS studio recording. Through the cooperation of Deutschlandradio (DLR) who maintains the RIAS archive, an audition copy of the March 6, 1952 studio recording in the Christuskirche, Berlin was made available in order to make the long-awaited comparison. The results of this comparison indicated two important facts.

- 1) The LP record was indeed a concert performance. While the audience was well behaved, there are clear indications that an audience is present. The RIAS recording had no audience noise. There was not doubt that these were not recordings of the same performance. That finding coincided with Ernst Lumpe’s theory.
- 2) Further examination, however, indicated that the Allegro Royale recording was probably NOT by Ludwig and the BPO. While many elements of the two performances are similar, there are some distinct differences that would typically not show up in a recording made within the week of a concert. Timings alone show the wide variation:

Allegro Royale: 21:06 15:50 6:38 14:53 Ludwig/BPO Studio: 19:53 16:42 6:13 13:46
Difference: + 1:09 - 0:52 + 0:25 + 1:07

With Ludwig / BPO now out of the running as the performers on the Allegro Royale LP, I began to look to other Oeser editions that were performed during this time. Comparisons were made with recordings by Jascha Horenstein (remembering Jack Diether's earlier suggestion) Rafael Kubelik and Carl Buente, the conductor of the (West) Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra. Below, is a table of timings:

Oeser Edition Performances of the Bruckner Symphony No. 3 - Timings

	Rubahn Berlin SO?	Ludwig 1952 Berlin Phil	Horenstein 1963 BBC North SO	Horenstein 1957 BBC SO	Kubelik 1954 Concertgebouw	Buente 1957 Berlin S.O.
I	21:06	19:57	19:10	19:20	18:43	
II	15:50	16:42	14:34	12:58* truncated	14:55	
III	6:38	6:13	7:38	7:05	7:24	
IV	14:53	13:46	16:22	15:26	16:15	14:15

Based on these timings, there seemed to be little correlation between any of these performances and the Rubahn recording. The stylistic differences between Ludwig and Rubahn, apart from the timings, were too great. While the Buente timing was fairly close, only one movement was available for comparison and the 1957 performance was the conductor's first performance of the symphony and was thus too late to be the source of the Allegro Royale recording.

Further, in recent e-mail communications with Misha Horenstein, the cousin of conductor Jascha Horenstein, it has become clear that Horenstein had not been introduced to the Oeser Edition until the BBC scheduled his performance with the BBC Symphony Orchestra on November 9th of 1957. And at that point, Horenstein had his doubts about the edition. He wrote to the BBC on October 25th, "I do not trust Oeser, and his edition is not convincing as far as I am concerned. I would prefer the "old" Rattig edition to the "new" Oeser edition, faute de mieux; still waiting for the final version. The fact that Oeser's edition contains 100 bars more in the finale does not necessarily mean that Bruckner wanted them included. The bars missing in the Rattig edition could NOT have been excluded without Bruckner's consent! Therefore I prefer an edition Bruckner has used himself, has known and accepted, Mahler has used for his piano score, to one of a Herr Oeser !" Eventually, the BBC recruited Robert Simpson to convince Horenstein to use the Oeser Edition, but it is certain that Horenstein was not conducting the Oeser Edition prior to the 1954 LP release.

Additional research has shown that several conductors were performing the Oeser Edition in the 1960's and could have performed it earlier. In addition to those mentioned above, they include: Klaus Bernbacher, Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt, Lovro von Matacic and Harry Newstone.

In spite of many attempts to obtain copies of earlier performances of the 1878 Oeser Edition of the Bruckner Symphony No. 3, no other recordings showed up and information requests regarding performances by other conductors during this time were running into dead ends. One recording (from December, 1966) did arrive, but since the recording date was twelve years past the release of the Allegro Royale LP, no comparisons were made.

But then some information from Sami-Alexander Habra in France made me pull out the 1966 recording for some comparisons. The similarities are striking.

Allegro Royale: 21:06 15:50 6:38 14:53 1966 Recording: 21:18 15:13 7:11 14:05
 Difference: - 0:12 +0:37 -0:33 +0:48

In addition to the very similar timings, the overall styles of the two performances are extremely close. In many cases, the direct A-B comparison gave the impression that one was listening to the same recording, but in better sound.

This 1966 performance featured **Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt (1900-1973)** conducting the Northwest German Radio

Symphony Orchestra, an ensemble that Schmidt-Isserstedt founded in 1945 and served for subsequent years as its music director. The Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR) was established in 1945 at the conclusion of World War II and continued its operation until December 31, 1955 when it was divided into the North German Radio (NDR-Hamburg) and West German Radio (WDR-Cologne).

Of course, stylistic similarities and timings are not a clear indication for identification, but then Mr. Habra provided more details. Mr. Habra served as an assistant for Maestro Schmidt-Isserstedt and he confirmed that the conductor embraced the new Oeser edition soon after its publication and performed this symphony in 1952, shortly after the Leopold Ludwig premiere. That performance was recorded by the NWDR.

The tape, however, was stolen along with several other recordings from the radio archive and sold to pirate editors, including Eli Oberstein of the Record Corporation of America (*Allegro Royale*). Eventually a radio engineer and his wife were implicated in the theft. They were dismissed from their jobs and were imprisoned. In addition to the Bruckner Symphony No. 3, the other recordings that were stolen included a Mozart Piano Concerto, excerpts from “Fideleo,” and the Bach Mass in B Minor.

With this information in hand, we can now safely confirm that Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt conducting the Northwest German Radio Symphony Orchestra are the performers on the *Allegro Royal* LP. The performance took place in 1952 soon after the edition’s premiere in March of that year.

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