

The Mystery of the “Gerd Rubahn” Symphony No. 3

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.”¹

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

In recent weeks, 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
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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.

So, as of this writing, the mystery continues and Gerd Rubahn remains the only conductor associated with the Allegro Royale LP recording. The search now enters a new phase as we look for another Oeser Bruckner 3rd performed between 1952 and 1954. Due to the difficulty in locating other performance data, any information from readers would be welcome.

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ⁱ Ernst A. Lumpe's research was published in Vol. 21:2 [Fall, 1990] and Vol. 27:1 [Spring, 1996] of the Association for Recorded Sound Collections Journal. He has since posted his research on his website, <http://www.geocities.com/elumpe/index.html>. The above quote is used with the author's permission.