

COATES CONDUCTS

MOZART Symphony No. 41 in C (r.1927) STRAVINSKY Le Chant du Rossignol (excerpts) (r.1930) RESPIGHI The Fountains of Rome (r.1927/1928)
London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Albert Coates TR 520615

Coates was never famed as a Mozartean, and this disc is almost Jekyll and Hyde. This "Jupiter's" graceless slow movement and minuet are followed by an exhilarating and spontaneous -- if very rough -- finale. But the opening movement is positively eccentric -- as eccentric as the sleeve's remarks which, it seems, place this rendition above Beecham's and Walter's. If ever a tempo was just plain wrong, this is it: such incredible velocity has been equalled, in my experience, only by Toscanini's "Surprise" minuet, and there is no NBC to distinguish it. The LSO have and give us a rough time -- every phrase is smudged into incoherence, all detail lost.

Turn over the disc and Coates is at full and brilliant strength. He was a driving force of nature and a great orchestral colourist, so little wonder the Respighi is pretty stunning; and the Stravinsky, too, is brilliantly done and recorded for its time. Indeed, no allowances need be made for such orchestral display: British orchestras could play superbly well in the late 'twenties given inspirational leadership.

Transfers are very good, by and large, although the sidebreak in the "Jupiter's" opening movement is much too obvious and volume levels of each movement might have been more closely adjusted with one another.

This is Volume One of The Albert Coates Heritage. Its welcome would have been unqualified had the choice of material been just that bit more discriminating. It comes with the Heritage's newsletter, entitled "Coates Tales'" (ugh), containing memoirs of Coates, discographical details (the matrix takes are listed but the chosen ones not indicated), quotes from contemporary issues of "The Gramophone" and full documentation of the music. This labour of love deserves success and I hope for more.

Christopher Dymnt