
PSEUDONYMOUS PERFORMERS ON EARLY LP RECORDS: RUMOURS, FACTS & FINDS¹

By Ernst A. Lumpe

Many collectors may have come across Royale, Allegro/Royale, Allegro/Elite, King, Varsity, Halo, Gramophone or Concertone (hereafter, the Royale labels) records when browsing through the stocks of second hand dealers. Few, I'm afraid, have decided to buy any of them, since they are mostly in very poor condition, with very substantial surface noise resulting from the use of a specific kind of shellac. Even when, at a later time, the Record Corporation of America (RC) began using something somewhat like vinyl to manufacture records issued on these labels, the improved quality still left the pressings noisy.

A look at the catalogue printed on the back cover of these records shows an impressive list of practically all kinds of music, but this article will concentrate on the classical repertoire offered by RC on these labels.

With a few exceptions, which will be referred to later, the use of pseudonyms seems to have been common practice by the company in question. The rather obscure origin of the material and the altogether low technical standard of these records may be the cause for their more or less complete neglect as far as serious attention is concerned. I have no information that a professional critic has ever taken a serious interest in an evaluation of them. There have been a few suggestions, however, regarding the identity of some of the performances, (e.g., the late Jack Diether's claim that Bruckner's 3rd symphony on Allegro was conducted by Jascha Horenstein).

The author's personal interest, and the start of the closer investigation of these records, was roused by, and is due to, the indisputable artistic value of many of the performances released on them. The question is, how could the Royale labels get hold of such materials? All these labels were, in fact, produced by one and the same firm, namely the Record Corporation of America based in Union City, NJ, and were issued between 1951 and about 1957. Finding information about this firm proved quite difficult. Because its business practices certainly bordered on illegality, persons who were involved and who may still be alive are not too interested in presenting their knowledge, not even to interested private collectors, few as they may be.

The classical repertoire of the Royale labels is extensive, but remains more or less within the limits of the works "we all know and love." Opera excerpts, symphonies, various orchestral works, and concertos form the bulk of their catalogue. Every record located by the author thus far bears the inscription "recorded in Europe." The orchestra involved is usually the "Berlin Symphony Orchestra." In a few cases, the

"Rome Symphony Orchestra" is named. Later reissues of the same performances, proven by the use of the old stampers with their old matrix numbers, present the "Dresden State Symphony Orchestra." It is not clear whether these names can be taken as an accurate reference to the sources of the materials.

The individual performer's names show a mixture of fictional and non-fictional persons. Unless reliable new information turns up, the following names of conductors can be regarded rightly as fictitious: Joseph Balzer, Joseph Berendt, Fritz Langhans, Gerd Rubahn, Fritz Schreiber, Heinrich Seegers and Herbert Wentzel. They are joined by the names of instrumental soloists, likewise invented, such as the pianists Elliott Everett, Maria Hüttner, Ilja Nehmer, Eric Silver and Gerhard Stein, or the violinists Jan Balachowsky, Karl Brandt, Fritz Malachowky and Louis Stevens, and the cellist Siegfried Seidler (or Siedler).

However, names of actual conductors also were used, e.g. Franz R. Friedl, Herbert Guthan, Felix Günther (Dr.), Karl List, Leopold Ludwig, Angelo Questa and Gerhard Wiesenhütter. Except for Leopold Ludwig and Gerhard Wiesenhütter, who may have conducted the works issued under their names (though certainly not while under contract with RC), no evidence suggests that Friedl, Guthan, Günther, List or Questa really conducted the works released under their names. In particular, no information has been found about Franz R. Friedl and Karl List ever having made commercial recordings. Karl List (1902-71) was Austrian by birth, and was employed during and immediately after World War II at the Reichssender München and Radio Munich respectively. He conducted the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra at least once at the Broadcasting House in Berlin in 1936. Bavarian Radio in Munich still has a few of his performances of works by Orff and Winterberg in storage. It is very unlikely that he would have gained the opportunity to record the major works of the symphonic repertoire during war-time or thereafter. This is even less likely in the case of Franz R. Friedl, also Austrian by birth (b. 1892), who was a composer of film scores working also for German UFA. He also conducted in this field, but his secretary, who still lives in Berlin, does not recall his having been a conductor of Beethoven and Brahms, let alone of his having made commercial recordings of their symphonies. No evidence suggests that Felix Günther ever made recordings of the works issued on Royale with either the Berlin Symphony Orchestra or the Rome Symphony Orchestra. He made some 78s in Germany and left for the U.S. in 1933, dying in New York City in 1951. For Guthan, quite a cryptic person, only one film soundtrack exists of him conducting a Mozart overture with an orchestra called the Berliner Filmsymphoniker.

At this point, it is necessary to include a short note regarding John L. Holmes' *Conductors on Records*, a most valuable book. Holmes cites the names of two of the Royale conductors and their recordings in a way that leaves some doubt regarding the solidity of his research in these particular cases. Notwithstanding the fact that Joseph Balzer is a real pseudonym, and that Karl List never made recordings of the works attributed to him by Royale, it is a mistake to alter the first names, making Hugo Balzer of Joseph Balzer and Kurt List of Karl List.² Like Friedl's secretary, the widow of Hugo Balzer, still living in Düsseldorf, has never heard of her late husband's activities for the Royale labels.

Finally there is Angelo Questa, Italian conductor of mostly operatic works. Was he responsible for the performances of the Tchaikovsky and Borodin symphonies attributed to him? No definite answer can be offered now, but indirect evidence

suggests a tentative “no.” A couple of piano concertos on Royale are played by Carlo Vidusso, a quite well-known Italian pianist during the late forties and fifties. Mendelssohn’s Op. 25 and Saint-Saëns’ Op. 22 are conducted by Felix Günther, Chopin’s Op. 11 by Angelo Questa. Now, a close friend and former pupil and colleague of Vidusso, Piero Rattalino, reports that Vidusso knew of these records issued under his name, and stated that they were not his. For whatever reason, Vidusso did not sue RC. Mr. Rattalino, having listened to copies of the performances in question, rules out Vidusso on stylistic grounds, thus confirming the late pianist’s judgement. This also would make the use of Questa’s name a doubtful case.

Who, then, hides behind all these names, and what are the original sources of these performances? There must be grounds for the rumors among collectors that the Royale labels used materials from broadcasts taped in Germany, and possibly also in Italy, immediately after World War II. Some evidence suggests that RC had access to German wartime tapes, but it is also possible that this kind of material is derived from broadcasts of those same tapes right after the war. In fact, many of these records show the typical sound of German wartime tape recording technology. Apart from radio studio-made tapes and a few 78 dubbings (e.g., Tchaikovsky’s “1812” Overture and Enescu’s Roumanian Rhapsody No. 1) many of the performances come from live concerts, probably broadcast at that time. Some of them sound like on-stage recordings because the microphone is placed rather unprofessionally, thus creating a fairly unbalanced musical image. This indicates that even amateurish in-hall recordings were used (e.g., Mendelssohn’s Op. 25). Also, in some cases pirated dubbings of commercial releases from large companies such as Deutsche Grammophone or Decca were used.

Admittedly, there are still many problems to solve, and this kind of research is only beginning to show indisputable results. Surely with more energy and the help of other interested collectors who live nearer to the places where these records can still be found, it would be possible to find out more about their origin and identity. An intriguing question is whether the tapes they used are still stored somewhere in the U.S. I should like to ask anyone who is able and willing to contribute records, cassette dubbings and general or special facts, to contact me, please.

Following is a list of performances which have been identified, the first three strongly underlining the basic truth of circulating rumors regarding the sources of the Royale labels’ issues.

Royale 1257: Dvorák Symphony No. 9. (1952)
“Berlin Symphony Orchestra/Karl List.”

This performance is identical to the so-called Furtwängler version from 1941 (technically and musically a doubted release) issued on Relief 813 in 1981, and coming from a tape found at a German flea market. In fact, this performance is the RRG studio production made in Munich on July 14, 1944 with the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra under Oswald Kabasta. Insufficient research led to this wrong attribution to Wilhelm Furtwängler and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

Royale 1370: An Hour with Richard Strauss. (1952)
“Berlin Symphony Orchestra” (no conductor).

The “Till Eulenspiegel” here is identical to the Furtwängler-Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra version from the live concert in the Berlin Philharmonie of

November 13-16, 1943. Since the Royale labels issued the same tapes several times in different couplings, it is likely that the "Till" on Royale 1259 is the same performance as on Royale 1370.

Royale 1401: Haydn Symphony No. 104. (1952)

"Berlin Symphony Orchestra/Karl List."

This performance is identical to the version issued in 1975 "for the first time" on Melodiya 33M-1037145-46, subsequently dubbed by Discocorporation on RR-441 in 1976, and only recently issued again on Deutsche Grammophon, CD 427 776-2 using one of the tapes that were stored in Moscow, copies of which the Berlin radio station SFB got back from Moscow for their archives. In fact, this performance is a (pirated?) dubbing from Mercury MG 10050 where the Bavarian Radio Orchestra (the Orchester des Reichssenders München) plays under Alfons Dressel (1900-55). Inaccurate labelling or similar deficiencies may have been the reason for Melodia to issue their copy of this performance under Furtwängler's name.

Royale 1237: Borodin Symphony No. 2. (1951)

"Rome Symphony Orchestra/Angelo Questa."

The same performance has been reissued on Allegro ALG 3048 played this time by the "Hastings Symphony Orchestra under John Bath." Both identifications, however, may be regarded as pseudonyms.

Royale 1264: Grieg Piano Concerto. (1952)

"Gerhard Stein, piano/Berlin Symphony Orchestra/Karl List."

This recording is identical to the version published on Urania UR-RS 7-15 with Friedrich Wührer, piano and the Vienna Philharmonic under Karl Böhm. The author was not able to trace the number of the earlier Urania LP issue of this performance from which Royale may have dubbed its release.

Royale 1276: Khatchaturian Piano Concerto. (1952)

"Maria Hüttner, piano/Berlin Symphony Orchestra/Joseph Balzer."

A (pirated?) dubbing of the Urania issue of that work on URLP 7086 with Margot Pinter, piano (the Californian wife of conductor Hans Weisbach) and the Symphony Orchestra of Radio Berlin under Artur Rother.

Royale 1304: Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 3. (1952)

"Gerhard Stein, piano/Berlin Symphony Orchestra/Gerd Rubahn."

The second movement is a pirated dubbing of the Decca recording with Wilhelm Backhaus/Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra/Karl Böhm. The outer movements come from a different source, unidentified so far.

Royale 1322: Offenbach: Tales of Hoffmann (excerpts). (1952)

"Soloists, Chorus and Orchestra conducted by Joseph Balzer."

This record contains excerpts from the complete performance of this opera issued by Urania on URLP 224 with Anders/Streich/Klein/Berger et al. and Artur Rother conducting the Symphony Orchestra of Radio Berlin in a 1946 studio production. It is likely that Royale's complete pseudonymous issue of this opera on issue numbers 1269/1270/1271 is also the Rother version.

Royale 1339 Paganini Violin Concerto in D Major (Wilhemj version). (1952)

"Karl Brandt, violin/Berlin Symphony Orchestra/Gerd Rubahn."

Judged on grounds of repertoire and style, this live performance is likely to be played by Guila Bustabo. It may be derived from a concert broadcast by Radio Munich in 1950. Bavarian Radio archives no longer hold this live performance,

but a 1959 studio version with Bustabo and Heger shows detailed similarities which underline the identification of the soloist given above.

Royale 1335 Flotow: Martha (excerpts). (1951)

“Inge Camphausen, soprano/Wilhelm Horst, tenor/Berlin Opera Orchestra/Gerd Rubahn.”

In addition to only three excerpts from *Martha* on side one, this record contains six excerpts from Flotow’s one-act opera *Die Witwe Grapin*. Whereas the *Martha* excerpts are still unidentified, the excerpts from *Die Witwe Grapin* most likely come from a 1951 production of Radio Frankfurt with Carl Alexander Häfner conducting.

Royale 1376 Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 1. (1952)

“Elliot Everett, piano/Berlin Symphony Orchestra/Joseph Balzer.”

Though judged only on stylistic grounds, this live performance is doubtlessly played by Wilhelm Kempff. He played the work publicly twice with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under Keilberth in Berlin’s Titania-Palast in 1950, and the recording could have been made on one of those occasions. Regarding the sound, it may also be a hitherto unknown German wartime recording. This would exclude the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra if one follows the substantial listings of Peter Muck in *Einhundert Jahre Berliner Philharmonisches Orchester, Vol. III*. The Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv in Frankfurt does not store a live Kempff performance of this work, so the Royale issue has preserved a particularly fine live performance for us.

Royale 1397 Beethoven Jena Symphony. (1952)

“Berlin Symphony Orchestra/Joseph Balzer.”

A (pirated?) dubbing from Mercury MG 10055 where the work is played by the Munich Philharmonic under Robert Heger, which can be considered a correct identification.

Royale 1403 Overtures by Weber and 2 works by Smetana. (1952)

“Berlin Symphony Orchestra/Joseph Balzer.”

The Euryanthe Overture on this record is a (pirated?) dubbing from Mercury MG 10048, which names the Munich Broadcasting Symphony Orchestra and conductor Gustav Görlich.

Varsity 2056 Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 5. (1953)

“Eric Silver, piano with the Varsity Symphony Orchestra.”

This recording shows in every detail the “mannerisms” of Wilhelm Backhaus which also appear in his various commercial and commercially issued live performances of this work. Being a studio recording, it resembles most closely the Decca version (Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra/Krauss) without being identical to it. One may suggest a broadcast of a studio performance done for some German(?) radio station. Very strangely, there are small groups of notes missing every now and then throughout the whole piece, as if minor drop-outs had been repaired.

Gramophone 21022 Mendelssohn Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2. (1954)

“Eric Silver, piano and the National Opera Orchestra.”

A pirated dubbing (or aircheck) of the Deutsche Grammophon recording of both works with Helmut Roloff, piano and the Bamberg Symphony under Fritz

Lehmann on LPM 18073. Concerto No. 2 is definitely taken from a broadcast judging by the severe static that can be heard. The piece is badly truncated.

Gramophone 20139 Wagner: Das Rheingold (excerpts). (1954)

“National Opera Singers and Orchestra.”

These excerpts are taken from the 1952 Hamburg Radio Production of the complete work with Frantz/Metternich/Schock/Windgassen/Fischer/Hoffmann/Neidlinger, et al., with Wilhelm Schüchter conducting the NWDR Symphony.

A few more facts with which to conclude. The minor, yet interesting American label, Allegro, was taken over by Record Corporation of America at the beginning of the fifties, the new owners showed no hesitation to reissue some of the Allegro productions on their different labels by using pseudonyms. Three issues can be identified thus far.

Royale 1273 Saint-Saëns Piano Concerto No. 2. (1952)

“Carlo Vidusso, piano/Rome Symphony Orchestra/Dr. Felix Guenther.”

Reissue of the Allegro recording of the work by Arthur Sandford, piano and the Hastings Symphony Orchestra under John Bath (on Allegro ALG 3028 and ALX 3028 in the United Kingdom).

Royale 1400 Beethoven String Quartets Op. 18 Nos. 2 & 3. (1952)

“The Royale String Quartet.”

Though labelled “recorded in Europe,” this is a pseudonymous reissue of Allegro AL 78 played by the American Kroll Quartet.

Gramophone 2041 Chopin Ballades Nos. 1-4. (1953)

“Eric Silver at the piano.”

Also “recorded in Europe,” this is, in fact, a pseudonymous reissue of Leonid Hambro’s performance of these works on Allegro AL 115, verified at least for side B, where the old Allegro matrix number occurs.

Royale started their 1200 series with excerpts from operas and with waltzes. Whether issued legally or not, these records can be counted among the few that did not make use of pseudonyms. The German tenor Rudolf Schock tells us in his autobiography, “In the middle of December 1950 I was approached by an American TV company to do excerpts from operas for television.” These productions were then released by Royale on various discs in 1951, marking the start of the company’s rather strange and winding ways of dealing with gems and glass beads alike.

One last thing. It is quite striking to observe how much artistic care the designers of the Royale covers invested in their work. Contrary to the cover designs of many a great company during the early days of LP records, most of the Royale covers have remarkably original designs, setting them apart from the “flowerpot design” on the one side, and the sketchy geometrics on the other side. They hold their very own position, and catch a collector’s eye as the many fine performances on the records appeal to his ears.

NOTES

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² John L. Holmes, *Conductors on Records*, pp. 33 and 394. 🎻