



Great Pianists • Giesecking

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ADD



MOZART

Piano Concerto No. 9

BEETHOVEN

Piano Concerto No. 1

LISZT

Piano Concerto No. 1

Walter Giesecking

1932-1937 Recordings

Walter Giesecking (1895-1956)

Concerto Recordings • 2

Giesecking's father was a distinguished German doctor with a keen interest in entomology who travelled in France and Italy. As a result, his son Walter was born in Lyons, France, and spent the first sixteen years of his life in southern France and Italy. Although the young Giesecking played the piano from the age of four, he had no proper tuition until his family moved in 1911 to Hanover, where at the age of sixteen he became a pupil of Karl Leimer at the Hanover Conservatory, studying for three years, after which he had no further tuition. At the age of twenty Giesecking performed the complete Beethoven piano sonatas in six recitals. World War I, however, interrupted the beginnings of his career, and it was not until 1920, when he was already 25, that he made his début in Berlin at the first of seven recitals in the city that season. Although he played music by Debussy and Ravel, composers with whom he would be associated throughout his life, Giesecking was hailed as 'the new Anton Rubinstein', a title which would hardly have been applied to the Giesecking of the 1950s by which time he was acknowledged as one of the finest interpreters of the French impressionists.

Giesecking made his London début in 1923, his American debut in 1926 and appeared in Paris for the first time in 1928. During the 1930s he spent much of his time touring Europe, the United States and South America. Although he was in America in 1939, he decided to return to Germany at the outbreak of the Second World War. After the war he played in Australia, Japan and South America, but was not able to return to the United States until 1953 owing to his war-time allegiances. In 1955 he embarked on a ten-month tour of America and in the autumn of 1956 undertook a series of continuing recording sessions for EMI in London, where he died at the end of the year.

Before the Second World War Giesecking's repertoire was a good deal wider than it became later.

He played concertos by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, piano sonatas by Scriabin, works by Schumann, Beethoven, Mozart and Bach, and championed contemporary composers such as Busoni, Hindemith, Korngold, Krenek, Poulenc, Pfitzner, Schoenberg and Stravinsky, many of whom dedicated works to him. He became known for his wide palette of tone and dynamics. At his London début recital where his programme included Bach's *English Suite in D minor*, Scriabin's *Piano Sonata No. 4, Op. 30*, and Schumann's *Waldscenen, Op. 82*, one critic wrote, 'Mr Giesecking's skill is great enough in some ways... and his *pianissimo* now and then becomes as nearly nothing as is possible to imagine... The Bach was played with perfect clarity and his tone gradations here and in the Debussy pieces were masterly'.

At the end of October 1932, while giving performances in England, Giesecking went to HMV's Abbey Road Studio No. 1 to record two works for piano and orchestra with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Henry Wood. First he recorded César Franck's *Variations Symphoniques* and then Liszt's *Piano Concerto No. 1 in E flat major*. The Liszt is given a spirited performance, the pianist being noticeably light rather than bombastic, and, with the help of Henry Wood and his orchestra, poetic rather than histrionic. Here we get a view of Giesecking the virtuoso who during the 1930s played concertos by Brahms, Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky. *The Gramophone's* critic, who obviously hated Liszt's music, dismissed the recording in eleven lines, commenting mostly on the quality of the recorded sound. His sour prejudice toward Liszt is borne out in the nonsense of his last sentence, 'The orchestra always sounds coarse, do what any conductor will, and that quality is inherent in the music; in the composer's spirit, which was a queer blend'.

The previous year Giesecking had also played under Henry Wood's baton at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert, in March 1931, performing Mozart's *Piano Concerto in E flat major, K. 271*, at Queen's Hall in London. A newspaper critic noted that, 'His as well as the orchestra's was a beautifully scaled performance, in which the details were closely related and subtly articulated, and the originality of Mozart's design, particularly of the slow movement, was unfolded without any forced emphasis of its features'. The reviewer added that, 'We do not generally expect extra pieces at Philharmonic concerts, but the applause induced Herr Giesecking to play Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau* and the "encore" was justified by its exquisite playing'. It was not until five years later, in September 1936, that Giesecking made a commercial recording for Columbia of this Mozart concerto. Whilst in Berlin, he recorded the work with members of the State Opera House Orchestra and conductor Hans Rosbaud. The beauty and clarity of Giesecking's playing is refreshing, and as the critic above noted of the live performance of

this work, everything is in proportion and tastefully delivered.

The following spring, in April 1937, Giesecking recorded again in Berlin with the same orchestra and conductor. This time it was the *Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major, Op. 15*, by Beethoven. Again, Giesecking takes a light and fast view of the work, which may make it sound rather more like Mozart than Beethoven, but this is an early work, and while Giesecking's approach to the first movement is for two beats in a bar, it makes a buoyant and youthful impression. In the third movement, played slightly slower than usual, Giesecking concentrates on the *leggermente* marking. When the recording was originally released it was referred to as 'deft and trim'. Two years later Giesecking played the concerto at the Salzburg Festival with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and he recorded it again for Columbia in 1948 with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Rafael Kubelik.

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MOZART:**Piano Concerto No. 9 in E flat major, K. 271****30:13**

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-------|
| 1 | Allegro | 10:09 |
| 2 | Andantino | 11:02 |
| 3 | Rondo | 9:01 |

Berlin State Opera Orchestra • Hans Rosbaud

Recorded by English Columbia, Beethoven Saal, Berlin

29th September 1936

Mats.: CRX 30/37

Cat.: LX 559/562

BEETHOVEN:**Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major, Op. 15****30:10**

- | | | |
|----------|---------------------------|-------|
| 4 | Allegro con brio | 11:46 |
| 5 | Largo | 9:01 |
| 6 | Rondo: Allegro scherzando | 9:23 |

Berlin State Opera Orchestra • Hans Rosbaud

Recorded by English Columbia, Electrola Saal No. 2, Berlin

28th April 1937

Mats.: CRX 62/69

Cat.: LX 631/634

LISZT:**Piano Concerto No. 1 in E flat major, S. 124****17:32**

- | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|------|
| 7 | Allegro maestoso | 5:11 |
| 8 | Quasi adagio | 4:31 |
| 9 | Allegretto vivace | 4:00 |
| 10 | Allegro marziale animato | 3:49 |

London Philharmonic Orchestra • Sir Henry Wood

Recorded by English Columbia, Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London

31st October 1932

Mats.: CAX 6570/6573

Cat.: LX 181/182

Playing
Time
77:55

MOZART • BEETHOVEN • LISZT

Walter Giesecking (1895-1956)
Concerto Recordings • 2

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MOZART: Piano Concerto No. 9 in E flat major, K. 271		30:13	This second of three Naxos discs of Walter Giesecking's pre-war concerto recordings documents a period when his repertoire was a good deal wider than it became in later years. A newspaper critic described Giesecking's performance of Mozart's <i>Piano Concerto No. 9</i> at a 1931 London concert as 'beautifully scaled... in which the details were closely related and subtly articulated... without any forced emphasis of its features', qualities also to be heard in this Berlin recording of 1936. Giesecking's 1932 recording of Liszt's <i>Piano Concerto No. 1</i> is light of touch and poetic rather than bombastic. The 1937 recording of Beethoven's <i>Piano Concerto No. 1</i> was described at the time as 'deft and trim', emphasizing the work's youthful energy. Volume 1 is available on Naxos 8.111110.
1	Allegro	10:09	
2	Andantino	11:02	
3	Rondo	9:01	
Berlin State Opera Orchestra • Hans Rosbaud			
Recorded 29th September 1936			
BEETHOVEN: Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major, Op. 15		30:10	
4	Allegro con brio	11:46	
5	Largo	9:01	
6	Rondo: Allegro scherzando	9:23	
Berlin State Opera Orchestra • Hans Rosbaud			
Recorded 28 April 1937			
LISZT: Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-flat, S. 124		17:32	
7	Allegro maestoso	5:11	
8	Quasi adagio	4:31	
9	Allegretto vivace	4:00	
10	Allegro marziale animato	3:49	
London Philharmonic Orchestra • Henry Wood			
Recorded 31st October 1932			

A complete track list can be found in the booklet.
Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Ward Marston
Special thanks to Donald Manildi

www.naxos.com

Cover Photograph: Walter Giesecking (Private Collection)

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