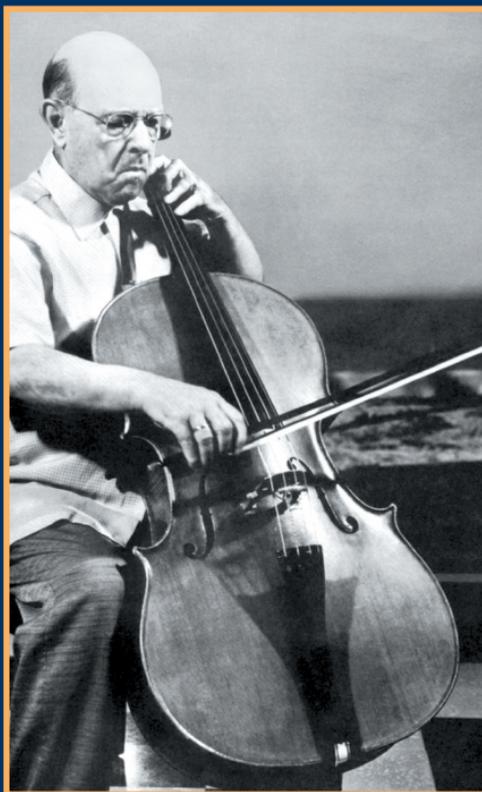




Great Cellists • Casals

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BOCCHERINI **HAYDN** **ELGAR** **Cello Concertos**

Pablo Casals
BBC Symphony Orchestra
Adrian Boult
London Symphony Orchestra
Landon Ronald

Recorded 1936 - 1945

Great Cellists: Pablo Casals

Boccherini · Haydn · Elgar · Bruch: Cello Concertos

Considering his eminence in the musical world, it is amazing that Pablo Casals did not make a substantial recording with orchestra until he was in his early fifties. Whereas even violinists of the second rank were able to make concerto records from the early 1920s, cello concertos were not considered a priority by the record companies, and Casals himself seems not to have been in a hurry to make records of any kind. After the Brahms *Double Concerto* he set down in 1929 with his own Barcelona orchestra – his violin partner was Jacques Thibaud and the conductor Alfred Cortot – he did not make another major orchestral recording until Bruch's *Kol Nidrei* in 1936. The only other concertos documented in the studio before the Second World War were the famous Dvořák done in one day in Prague and the Boccherini *Concerto in B flat* done in London. Sadly, in 1936 His Master's Voice decided at the last minute not to make planned recordings of Elgar's *Cello Concerto* and the huge concerto written for Casals by Sir Donald Francis Tovey, and the off-the-air discs of the 1937 Queen's Hall première of the Tovey (with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sir Adrian Boult) are so dim as to make the performance almost inaudible. After the war HMV was in the mood to make concerto records with the sexagenarian cellist, and sessions were duly set in motion in October 1945. Casals was given the very best backing available, the BBC Symphony Orchestra under his old friend Boult, and a fine recording of Elgar's *Concerto* was achieved. The artists were two-thirds of the way through the Haydn *Concerto in D major* (the only concerto by this composer then known), when Casals broke off relations with all Britons and Americans for political reasons. He went off to brood in the Pyrenees, like Achilles in his tent, and although further concertos were recorded by American Columbia at the Casals Festivals of the 1950s, the remake of the Dvořák was suppressed and the Schumann never really established itself in the catalogue. The net result is that, as we look at Casals's recording career, there appear to have been as many opportunities missed as taken. We

shall simply have to accept what we have, which is riches enough.

The legendary Pau (or Pablo) Casals was born on 29th December 1876 in Vendrell, a little town in Catalonia where his father was organist and choirmaster. 'I owe nearly all my talent at music to the influence of my father,' he wrote. 'As soon as I could walk he took me to all the services at the church, so that the Gregorian chant, the chorales and the organ voluntaries became part of myself and of my daily life'. Carlos Casals taught Pau to sing, play the piano and organ and even compose; at six the boy had mastered the violin well enough to play a solo in public. Fascinated by a broom-handle strung like a cello, used by an itinerant Catalan musician, he described it to his father, who built him a little cello using a gourd for a sound-box. 'On this home-made contrivance I learnt to play the many songs my father composed, and the popular songs which reached the village from the outside world.' At eleven he heard a real cello, which confirmed it was the instrument for him. His father bought him a small one and gave him lessons, and soon he began studying at the Municipal School of Music in Barcelona. Cello playing had not greatly advanced since the days of Luigi Boccherini. The invention of the spike or endpin had freed the body of the instrument from being gripped between the knees, so that it resonated more freely, but some players were still operating in the old way, without a spike. Worst of all, the bowing arm was restricted. 'We were taught to play with a stiff arm and obliged to keep a book under the armpit,' recalled Casals. While playing in a café trio to pay for his keep, he was heard by the composer Albéniz. Soon he had an ensemble of seven at a grander café, and it was while he and his father were looking for music for this band to play that he found an edition of Bach's solo *Suites*. He met Sarasate and with Albéniz's help moved to Madrid, found a patron and became Queen Maria Cristina's favourite musician, studying at the Conservatory with Tomas Bretón and Jesús de Monasterio. He made his Madrid orchestral début with

Lalo's *Cello Concerto* and in 1899 played it at the Crystal Palace in London and the Lamoureux Concerts in Paris. In 1901 he toured America and in 1905 he settled in Paris.

Hot-blooded and temperamental, Casals had a high-profile affair with his Portuguese pupil Guilhermina Suggia and a failed marriage to the singer Susan Metcalfe. In public he was quickly recognised as unique. Fritz Kreisler was making an impact with his subtle use of vibrato on the violin and Casals worked on similar lines with the cello, astonishing his peers with the freedom of his bowing, his use of 'expressive intonation' and his technical innovations. After studying the Bach *Suites* for a dozen years, he started performing them in public in the early years of the twentieth century, often programming one alongside a concerto. In 1905 he began playing trios with Alfred Cortot and Jacques Thibaud – their ensemble would last until 1934. For more than three decades Casals toured the world as the leading exponent of the cello. In 1919 he returned to Catalonia, settling in Barcelona, where he quickly founded the Orquestra Pau Casals; its first concert was given in 1920 and in 1931 he conducted it in a performance of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* to mark the birth of the Spanish Republic, but the civil war and the Fascist victory caused a rift his life and career. A man of deep principle who refused to play in Hitler's Germany, Casals was implacably opposed to Franco's regime and in 1939, threatened with execution if he returned to Spain, he went into exile in southern France. After World War II, feeling that Britain and America were appeasing Franco, he abruptly stopped playing in public, but from 1950 American admirers organized a festival around him at his new home town, Prades, and in his old age Casals had a new lease of life as chamber musician, teacher, conductor and musical guru. In 1956 he moved to his mother's native country, Puerto Rico, and the following year he married his young pupil Marta Montañez. He played in 1958 at the United Nations and in 1961 at the White House. He died in Puerto Rico on 22nd October 1973.

The earliest of the recordings here is *Kol Nidrei*, which Casals had already done several times in the studio. All the previous versions had been heavily cut so

as to fit on two sides, whereas for this session Casals was granted three sides. His conductor was Sir Landon Ronald, who as pianist, conductor and composer had been one of the pioneers of recording in Britain. Although neither the orchestral playing nor the recorded sound are quite of the best, this recording shows off Casals's peerless tone well and the entire performance finds him in good fettle. Incidentally the composer Max Bruch was not Jewish, but used a famous cantorial melody as his starting point for this brooding work. Other elements of the piece have also been traced to Jewish sources – Bruch was fascinated by ethnic music of all kinds. The 'Boccherini' needs to have a health warning attached, if you happen to be an admirer of the composer, as it is as much a pastiche as an original composition. The nineteenth-century cellist Friedrich Grützmacher took the outer movements of one Boccherini concerto and the slow movement of another, did a lot of rescoring and even rewriting, and then passed the result off as genuine Boccherini. At the time of his recording, Casals did not know any other edition, but in 1958 he recorded the original *B flat Concerto* as a conductor, with Maurice Gendron playing the solo part. For reasons which seem unimaginable today, the London critics did not particularly like Casals's interpretation of the Elgar *Concerto* when he first ventured to play it, but by 1945 such xenophobia, which must have puzzled the composer, who wrote his *Violin Concerto* for Kreisler, was forgotten. This is a deeply satisfying interpretation. The presence on the podium of the most distinguished Elgarian of them all ensures an authentic accompaniment, and Casals at 68 is still in glorious form. As for the Haydn, it is frustrating not to have the finale, but we can get some idea of what it might have been like by listening to the complete recording that Casals made in 1958 with Gendron, as a coupling for the Boccherini *Concerto in B flat*. The two movements that we do have, with Casals as soloist, demonstrate his wonderfully expansive way with classical music, even though he uses the much edited and now discredited score prepared by François Gevaert.

Tully Potter

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Ward Marston

In 1997 Ward Marston was nominated for the Best Historical Album Grammy Award for his production work on BMG's Fritz Kreisler collection. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, Marston's name is 'synonymous with tender loving care to collectors of historical CDs'. Opera News calls his work 'revelatory', and *Fanfare* deems him 'miraculous'. In 1996 Ward Marston received the Gramophone award for Historical Vocal Recording of the Year, honouring his production and engineering work on Romophone's complete recordings of Lucrezia Bori. He also served as re-recording engineer for the Franklin Mint's Arturo Toscanini issue and BMG's Sergey Rachmaninov recordings, both winners of the Best Historical Album Grammy.

Born blind in 1952, Ward Marston has amassed tens of thousands of opera classical records over the past four decades. Following a stint in radio while a student at Williams College, he became well-known as a reissue producer in 1979, when he restored the earliest known stereo recording made by the Bell Telephone Laboratories in 1932.

In the past, Ward Marston has produced records for a number of major and specialist record companies. Now he is bringing his distinctive sonic vision to bear on works released on the Naxos Historical label. Ultimately his goal is to make the music he remasters sound as natural as possible and true to life by 'lifting the voices' off his old 78 rpm recordings. His aim is to promote the importance of preserving old recordings and make available the works of great musicians who need to be heard.

The Naxos historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.



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BOCCHERINI • HAYDN • ELGAR

Cello Concertos

Pablo Casals (1876-1973)

 Playing
Time
79:23

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BOCCHERINI: Cello Concerto in B flat 22:08
(arr. Grützmacher)

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|------|
| 1 | I Allegro moderato | 9:00 |
| 2 | II Adagio | 6:12 |
| 3 | III Rondo: Allegro | 6:54 |

London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Landon Ronald
Recorded by HMV, Abbey Road Studio London, 2nd May 1938
(matrices 2EA 4156161) catalogue DB 305618

HAYDN: Cello Concerto in D, Op. 101 (arr. Gevaert) 17:37

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|-------|
| 4 | I Allegro moderato | 12:43 |
| 5 | II Adagio | 4:52 |

Note: the third movement of this Concerto was not recorded

BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Adrian Boult
Recorded by HMV, Abbey Road Studio London, 15th October 1945
(matrices 2EA 10648150) unpublished on 78rpm

ELGAR: Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85 27:41

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|-------|
| 6 | I Adagio-Moderato | 7:50 |
| 7 | II Lento-Allegro molto | 4:43 |
| 8 | III Adagio | 4:03 |
| 9 | IV Allegro | 11:02 |

BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Adrian Boult
Recorded by HMV, Abbey Road Studio London, 14th October 1945
(matrices 2EA 1064117) catalogue DB 633814.1S

BRUCH: Kol Nidrei, Op. 47 11:56

London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Landon Ronald
Recorded by HMV, Abbey Road Studio London, 27th November 1936
(matrices 2EA 415315) catalogue DB 306314

Despite his eminence, Pablo Casals did not make a substantial recording with an orchestra until he was in his early fifties. Unlike violin concertos, cello concertos were not considered a priority by the record companies, while Casals himself seems not to have been in a hurry to make discs of any kind. The HMV concerto recordings, made in the 1930s and 1940s when the great cellist was in his sixties, are among the finest documents of Casals. In the Elgar *Concerto*, which benefits from the superb backing of his friend Adrian Boult, Casals at 68 is still in glorious form. His melting tone and effortless phrasing are used to wonderfully expansive effect in the Haydn and Boccherini concertos.

MADE IN THE EU



Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Ward Marston

www.naxos.com

 Cover Photograph: Pablo Casals
(The Tully Potter Collection)
