

A highly competent conductor whose repertory was extensive, Peter Maag made his reputation in Europe, but was a presence in American theaters as well. Although most of his life was devoted to opera, he made several recordings that honestly represented his eloquence in the symphonic literature and suggested that he might have made an even more appreciable impact there had he spent more time in concert work. After musical training in Zürich and Basel, Maag studied with Ernest Ansermet in Geneva and soon became an assistant to the elder conductor. He served first as coach and chorus master in Biel-Solothurn beginning in 1943, two years later working his way to full conductor. He served as principal conductor at Düsseldorf from 1952 to 1954 before becoming music director at Bonn from 1954 to 1959. Maag's Covent Garden debut came in 1959 when he conducted *Die Zauberflöte*. From 1964 to 1968, Maag held the post of principal conductor at the Volksoper in Vienna. Meanwhile, Maag had made his American debut at the Lyric Opera of Chicago conducting a November 1, 1961, performance of *Così fan tutti*. For his *Fiordiligi*, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf was ill, likely contributing to the caution evident in the performance. Maag was even less fortunate with *Don Giovanni* when Schwarzkopf succumbed and Lisa della Casa had to be flown in to sing Donna Elvira. Still, the first performance was well regarded and subsequent performances were better still when Schwarzkopf returned as Elvira. Despite a wayward horn section, Maag did well with the Lyric's *Fidelio*, firing an intense performance with Birgit Nilsson and Jon Vickers. Making his Metropolitan Opera debut with *Don Giovanni* in September 1972, Maag conducted there for three seasons. Other assignments included *Norma*, *Die Zauberflöte*, and *La Traviata*. Critics found him supportive of his singers, but deficient in eliciting orchestral sheen in the Verdi. From 1982 to 1991, Maag served as music director of the Berne Municipal Opera. Among Maag's most notable recordings are those devoted to the symphonies of Beethoven (the complete cycle), Mendelssohn, Mozart, Schubert, and the piano and orchestra works of Schumann. For Decca, he led a Luisa Miller with Milnes, Caballé, and Pavarotti. Several other operas are available in recordings captured from stage performances.



**MENDELSSOHN**  
**“SCOTCH”**  
**SYMPHONY**

**The Hebrides Overture**  
**LONDON SYMPHONY**  
**PETER MAAG**

Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 56, is the last symphony the composer completed. Mendelssohn's letters show that his first inspiration for the symphony came in 1829, during his first visit to England. After some sketching, Mendelssohn set aside the piece until 1841, when disappointments in his life placed him in a mood similar to that he experienced in England 12 years earlier. The early conception and sketching may account for the squariness of some of the themes. The piece was completed on January 20, 1842; it was first performed on March 3, same year, in Leipzig, and was published in 1843. After a successful performance of the symphony in England in 1842, Mendelssohn received permission to dedicate it to Queen Victoria.

Each movement is to move immediately to the next without pause, setting it apart from Mendelssohn's other symphonies. To the tempo markings of each movement Mendelssohn adds directions reflecting the character of the music, which conveys Mendelssohn's impressions of the Scottish landscape.

Opening with a restrained, Haydn-esque slow introduction, the first movement moves suddenly to an Allegro un poco agitato tempo with a main theme that is treated with variation technique. The orchestration is among Mendelssohn's most dense; curious and exhilarating modulations open both the development section and coda. The development section is concise and effective. When the main theme returns in the recapitulation and the introduction returns in the coda, the themes are underpinned with a counter-theme in the cellos. The coda also contains the famous chromatic "wave,"

played by the strings.

The cheerful Scherzo, marked Vivace non troppo, is derived from Scottish folk music, which is a surprise, since in 1829 Mendelssohn complained that such sounds gave him "a toothache." It stands in stark contrast to the thick first movement and is in sonata form. The movement fades and dissolves to prepare for the ensuing Adagio.

Resignation reigns in the third movement, an Adagio cantabile in A major. A clear reference to Beethoven appears in the low strings, which play a motive resembling the theme of the Allegretto of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. Reminiscences of Beethoven's Op. 74 String Quartet also appear. Beautifully orchestrated, the movement is in two major sections separated by returning material.

Folk melodies appear again in the Finale, an unusually powerful and militant movement for Mendelssohn. A leaping, aggressive theme in the violins begins the movement, appropriate for Mendelssohn's direction, Allegro guerriero (Fast and warlike). Fragmentation technique propels the development section as themes are layered and treated contrapuntally. After the recapitulation we do not hear a coda with thematic references to the exposition. Instead, Mendelssohn shifts to a Maestoso coda, in which we hear new material and the theme from the introduction, which is again taken through variations and now conveys an air of triumph after the "battle." The symphony closes in A major.

# MENDELSSOHN

# “SCOTCH” SYMPHONY

## The Hebrides Overture

LONDON SYMPHONY / PETER MAAG

- 1 Overture "The Hebrides", Op. 26 (Fingal's Cave) 10:07
- Symphony No. 3 In A Minor, Op. 56 "Scotch"**
- 2 Introduction And Allegro Agitato 13:13
- 3 Scherzo Assai Vivace 4:09
- 4 Adagio Cantabile 11:04
- 5 Allegro Guerriero And Finale Maestoso 9:40

Engineers – Alan Reeve, Kenneth E. Wilkinson  
Recorded by Decca April 21 & 22, 1960 in Kingsway Hall, London



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