



AMICA International

Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association

Honor Roll



DAME MYRA HESS

BY STEVE RATTLE

Born: 25 February 1890 London, England

Died: 25 November 1965 London, England

English pianist Dame Myra Hess was certainly one of the most popular and best-loved musicians the British Isles has ever produced. Born Julia Myra Hess in Hampstead, Hess commenced a scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music in 1902 at age 12. Completing five years of study with teacher Tobias Matthay, she made her concert debut in London at Aeolian Hall in 1907. Later the same year, Thomas Beecham (later Sir) invited her to play the Fourth Piano Concerto of Beethoven.

Successful as these performances were, the acclaim was short lived for the young lady pianist. The greatest living female keyboard artist at the time was Teresa Carreno, and it would take many more years of Hess perfecting her craft before the public and critics placed her upon the same pedestal. Teaching, chamber music, recitals and accompaniment kept her

financially afloat as she honed her craft, performing with contemporary greats such as sopranos Nellie Melba and Lotte Lehmann and violinists Fritz Kreisler and Joseph Szigeti.

Further success came in Holland in 1912 with a performance of the Schumann Piano Concerto in A minor under Willem Mengelberg. Continued concert performances took Hess throughout the British Isles and Europe, being interrupted by the Great War (1914-1918). A delayed American debut finally occurred in 1922 in New York and was a sensation. This led to long term touring and concert work

throughout the United States and a contract with the Aeolian Company to record Duo-Art piano rolls. Sixteen rolls were cut by her between the years 1923 to 1929.

The 1927 Duo-Art catalogue biographical notes state that *“her playing is signalized by musical intelligence of the first order, a finely ripening art in interpretation, and above all, a rare charm of distinction and individuality”*. Critics agreed that her interpretations were imbued with *“exquisite clarity, smoothness and grace, with eloquence and poetic fervor... ..and always with the magic of a subtle individualistic charm”*. Carreno had died in 1917 and Hess was now inheriting her title.



The 1930s was a busy and productive decade for Hess which saw her performing on both sides of the Atlantic. Extensive tours of Austria, France, Holland, Germany and the United States resulted. Hess also polished and pruned her performance repertoire at this time by concentrating on compositions of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy, Mozart, Ravel, Scarlatti, Schubert and Schumann.

Perhaps Hess is most fondly remembered for organising in excess of 1,300 concerts at the National Gallery in London during World War 2. From 1939, all art work (bar one selected and regularly changed piece) was removed for wartime protection and as the blitz raged, musicians provided much needed public solace in the comfort of music. Hess never asked any fee, performed more than any other artist and arranged concerts including recitals, choral music and orchestral performances by the finest musicians available.

In an effort to appease war time patrons, Covent Garden insisted that all opera be performed in English. Hess played the music of the great composers regardless of their nationality, making her statement during times of conflict that classical composition belonged to all. A few short films were taken of these concerts and are a viewing delight to see packed audiences lapping up such quality entertainment.

In 1941 Hess became Dame Commander of the British Empire and was also awarded the Gold Medal of the Philharmonic Society for services to music. After the war Hess resumed her international career and was as popular as ever in Great Britain, Europe and the United States. Illness forced her decision to retire and farewell concerts were given in 1962. She continued teaching until her death in 1965.

DAME MYRA HESS - DUO-ART Piano Rolls

Roll No.	Title	Composer	Release Date
<u>Solo</u>			
8011	Prelude Op. 3 # 2	Rachmaninoff	Unknown
66589	Toccata in A	Paradies	Sep 1923
062	Voiles (Sails)	Debussy	Sep 1923
67050	Rhapsody Op. 119 #4	Brahms	Jan 1924
69119	Intermezzo Op. 119 #3	Brahms	Sep 1925
69270	Engulfed Cathedral, The	Debussy	Nov 1925
70599	Sonata in G	Scarlatti	Sep 1926
0208	Etude Op. 4 #3	Szymanowski	Mar 1927
72369	Tocatta in G	Bach J.S.	May 1928
0210	Choral Prelude “Whitsuntide”	Bach J.S.	Jan 1929
0276	Sonata Op. 79 in G 1 st Movement	Beethoven	Apr 1929

0277 Sonata Op. 79 in G 2nd Movement Beethoven Apr 1929

0278 Sonata Op. 79 in G 3rd Movement Beethoven Apr 1929

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Duets – with Harold Bauer

7069-4 Pierrot's and Pierrette's Story Burgmein Oct 1926

7239-4 March of the Little Leaden Soldiers Op. 14 #6 - Pierne Jun 1928

Compilation

8001 Variations on the 'Cutlet Polka' (Chopsticks)* Various Unknown

* Combination roll with performances by Ganz, Hofmann, Bauer, Mero, Siloti, Schelling, Leginska, Hutcheson and Novaes.

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Myra Hess (February 25, 1890 - November 25, 1965) was a British pianist.



Born in London, Hess studied at the Royal Academy of Music under Tobias Matthay. Her debut came in 1907 when she played Ludwig van Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 4* with Thomas Beecham conducting. She went on to tour through Britain and North America.

She gained even greater fame during World War II when, with all concert halls closed, she organised a series of lunchtime concerts at the National Gallery, playing in many herself. For these concerts, she was created Dame in 1941.

Hess was best known in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven and Robert Schumann, but had a wide repertoire ranging from Domenico Scarlatti to contemporary works - she gave the premiere of both the *Piano Sonata* and *Piano Concerto* by Howard Ferguson. She also played a good amount of chamber music, and performed in a piano duo with her cousin Irene Scharrer. She made a well known arrangement for piano of the chorale prelude from Johann Sebastian Bach's Cantata No. 147 (*Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben*) under the title "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring".