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Furtwängler conducts Wagner Die Walküre

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Historic Review

The playing and recording of the storm music before the curtain rises on Act 1 of *Die Walküre* convinces us that whatever else may happen we are assured of a vital and splendid rendering of the orchestral part of the score, and so it turns out. Furtwängler, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (and the engineers) are the bright particular stars of this performance.

To take the singers in the order of appearance, Ludwig Suthaus begins unimaginatively and conveys little sense of exhaustion (the stage direction supposes him to be "utterly exhausted") in his opening words, but it is not long before he grows into his part and becomes as inspired by Furtwängler's direction as he was in the recording of *Tristan*. His enunciation is crisp, he phrases well and sings expressively, and he is in every way to be preferred to Set Svanholm in this part.

Leonie Rysanek had a great success at Covent Garden as Sieglinde and, on the whole, repeats it in this recording, except for a tendency to let the tone spread at the top of her voice when she puts pressure on it and to waver in soft passages. Gottlob Frick is a very good Hunding.

The great duet in Act 1, preceded by Suthaus's eloquent delivery of the Spring Song, is full of rapture, the singers being borne along on the full tide of the glorious orchestral playing. After the prelude to Act 2 we hear at once that Ferdinand Frantz is a commanding and authoritative Wotan, with a fine ring to the top of his voice, and so he remains throughout. Then Martha Mödl utters her war cry and confronts the critic, anxious to do her justice, with a difficulty. There is a sense of strain in this war cry that a Brünnhilde, a goddess, should not show, and she leaves us in doubt as to what kind of tone she may produce at any moment above the stage: throaty, constricted, with breathless phrasing, or ringing out freely. Her vocal acting is excellent, but her vocal uncertainty is a handicap. She does not command the rocklike steady tones of Flagstad or even the well-placed ones of Marta Fuchs in the old 78 r.p.m. recording of Act 3.

Margarete Klose sang Fricka in that set and though time may have robbed her voice of some of its bloom, she is still magnificent in the part and able to rise to the full height of the great outburst at the end of her scene with Wotan.

The scene between Wotan and Brünnhilde which follows enables Furtwängler to show us Wagner's wonderful power of steadily building up, over a long stretch of music, to a great climax, and the conductor handles the scene superbly. (The bass clarinet, at the start of it, is not perfectly in tune.) Suthaus and Rysanek do well in the next scene, the latter acting her hysterical fit convincingly: and then, preceded by some lovely orchestral playing, we come to the solemn moment of Brünnhilde's warning to Siegmund. Mödl just does not have sufficient weight of voice here and her tone becomes painfully constricted at the great cry of "Sieglinde shall live then, and Siegmund", which is the climax of the scene. The dramatic end of the act is finely done.

Review continues in second case...

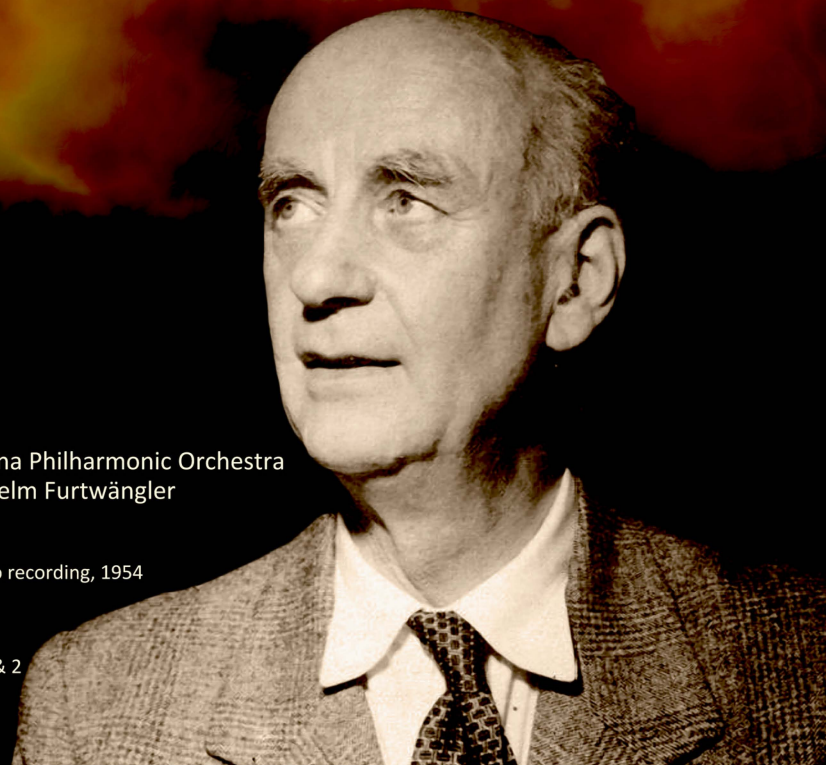
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SARL Pristine Audio, 144 Rue de l'Eglise, 24610 St. Méard de Gurçon, France

WAGNER Die Walküre

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
Wilhelm Furtwängler

Studio recording, 1954

CD 1 & 2



WAGNER *Die Walküre: Discs 1 & 2*

- [1] Act I: Prelude (3:07)
- [2] Act I, Scene 1: Wes Herd dies auch sei, hier muss ich rasten (3:56)
- [3] Act I, Scene 1: Kühlende Labung Gab Mir Der Quell! (5:16)
- [4] Act I, Scene 1: Einen Unseligen labtest du (4:49)
- [5] Act I, Scene 2: Müd am Herd fand ich den Mann (5:14)
- [6] Act I, Scene 2: Friedman darf ich nicht heissen (5:37)
- [7] Act I, Scene 2: Die so leidig Los dir beschied (4:25)
- [8] Act I, Scene 2: Ich weiss ein wildes Geschlecht (6:47)
- [9] Act I, Scene 3: Ein Schwert verhies mir der Vater (5:24)
- [10] Act I, Scene 3: Schläfst du, Gast? (6:58)
- [11] Act I, Scene 3: Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond (3:05)
- [12] Act I, Scene 3: Du bist der Lenz, nach dem ich verlangte (2:12)
- [13] Act I, Scene 3: O süsseste Wonne! Seligstes Weib! (6:22)
- [14] Act I, Scene 3: Siegmund heiss ich und Siegmund bin ich! (3:59)
- [15] Act II: Prelude - Nun zäume dein Ross, reisige Maid! (2:31)
- [16] Act II, Scene 1: Ho-jo-to-ho! Ho-jo-to-ho! (2:28)
- [17] Act II, Scene 1: Der alte Sturm, die alte Muh! (3:23)
- [18] Act II, Scene 1: Heut hast du's erlebt (1:03)
- [19] Act II, Scene 1: So ist est denn aus mit den ewigen Göttern (2:55)
- [20] Act II, Scene 1: Nichts lerntest du (7:24)
- [21] Act II, Scene 1: Heiaha! Heiaha! Hojotoho! (2:49)
- [22] Act II, Scene 2: Schlimm, fürcht ich, schloss der Streit (5:55)
- [23] Act II, Scene 2: Als junger Liebe Lust mir verblich (4:46)
- [24] Act II, Scene 2: Ein andres ist's: achte es wohl (10:09)
- [25] Act II, Scene 2: So nimm meinen Segen, Niblungen-Sohn! (4:59)
- [26] Act II, Scene 2: So sah ich Siegvater nie (3:33)
- [27] Act II, Scene 3: Raste nun hier; gönne dir Ruh! (3:53)
- [28] Act II, Scene 3: Hinweg! Hinweg! Flieh die Entweihte! (7:55)
- [29] Act II, Scene 4: Siegmund! Sieh auf mich! (9:25)
- [30] Act II, Scene 4: Erdenluft muss sie noch atmen (4:08)
- [31] Act II, Scene 4: Weh! Weh! Süssestes Weib (4:23)
- [32] Act II, Scene 4: Zwei Leben lachen dir hier (2:28)

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra *Wilhelm Furtwängler*

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XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Cover artwork based
on a photograph of
Wilhelm Furtwängler

Wagner Die Walküre

Recording producer:

Lawrance Collingwood

Recording Engineer:

Francis Dillnutt

Recorded:

28 September - 6 October, 1954

Musikvereissaal, Vienna

First issued as HMV ALP 1257-61

Disc One: **72:11**

Disc Two: **79:08**

Total duration: **3hr 50:55**

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Review continued...

The whole of Act 3, up to Brünnhilde's fateful interview with her father, is most exciting and I shall not complain that the voices of the Valkyries (a well-rehearsed ensemble) are sometimes overwhelmed by the "surge and thunder" of the orchestra, for it is a relief to have their coy laughter at the goings-on of their horses reduced to a fairly faint obbligato.

Furtwängler's direction of this scene conjures up a vivid picture of the wild, rocky place with the storm clouds drifting over it and the wrathful Wotan ever drawing nearer to his disobedient child. Modi is not able to thrill us in Brünnhilde's prophecy of the birth of Siegfried and Rysanek spoils the exultation of Sieglinde's reply by forcing her tone. There is a wonderful moment when the brass blazes out through the confused cries of the dismayed Valkyries and the whole section is extremely well recorded in point of tone and balance. Mödl is moving throughout her defence, but when sentence is passed and she begs that she may be surrounded with fire her tone again becomes thin and constricted.

Frantz rises to his full stature in Wotan's farewell, which he sings as superbly as the orchestra plays it, so that the final impression is of a nobly and grandly conceived performance of the great work, with a splendid Wotan, an excellent Siegmund and Hunding, a very good group of Valkyries, and a Sieglinde and Brünnhilde whose intentions are always admirable and often realised, but sometimes are flawed in execution.

I should like to have had time and space to point out the many felicities in the orchestral playing, but must content myself with saying that it is in every department of the finest quality and as finely (and spaciouly) recorded, so that the loveliest of *The Ring* operas shines and glows with light and warmth under Furtwängler's inspired direction.

A.R., The Gramophone September 1955

Producer's Note

It should have been the world's first full *Ring* on L.P. - Furtwängler's *Die Walküre* the first of the four operas to be recorded by EMI, in mono (would they have remade it?) in the autumn of 1954. Two months later the conductor was dead, his most ambitious recording plan barely begun. EMI duly released the L.Ps, to the response reprinted here, and music-lovers were left to guess what might have been, their *what-ifs* only further amplified by the two live Furtwängler *Rings* that have trickled out since. This XR remastering shines a whole new light onto the Furtwängler *Walküre*, stripping away the years and imbuing it with a sense of life and depth that makes the original 1954 sound seem flat and dull - it really is one of the most remarkable transformations I've heard using these remastering techniques. This *Walküre* offers moments as dark and as thrilling as you're ever likely to hear in a recording: from the moment the rosin starts flying off the double-basses in the opening *Prelude* to the blaring, then glowing brass in the music's dying moments, this *Walküre* is one breath-taking ride. **Andrew Rose**

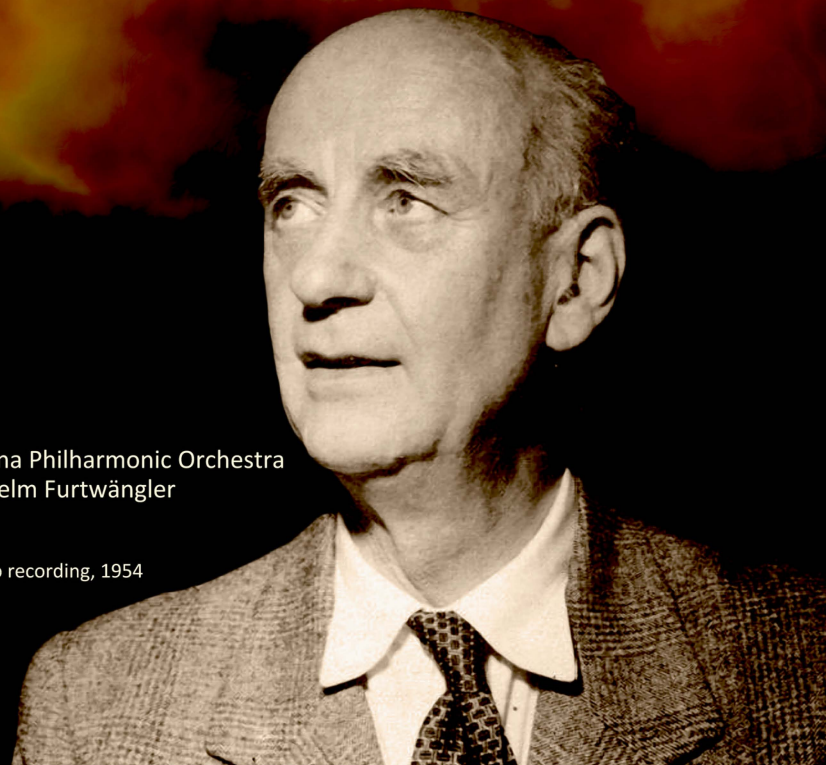
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Wilhelm Furtwängler

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CD 3



WAGNER *Die Walküre: Disc 3*

- [1] Act II, Scene 5: Zauberfest bezähmt ein Schlaf (4:37)
- [2] Act II, Scene 5: Wehwalt! Wehwalt! (4:41)
- [3] Act III: Wulkurenritt - The Ride of the Valkyries (8:10)
- [4] Act III, Scene 1: Schütz mich und helft in höchster Not! (3:38)
- [5] Act III, Scene 1: Nicht sehre dich Sorge um mich (5:44)
- [6] Act III, Scene 1: Steh, Brünnhild! (0:48)
- [7] Act III, Scene 2: Wo ist Brünnhild', wo die Verbrecherin! (4:02)
- [8] Act III, Scene 2: Hier bin ich, Vater: gebiete die Strafe! (9:46)
- [9] Act III, Scene 3: War es so schmäählich, was ich verbrach (4:43)
- [10] Act III, Scene 3: Nicht weise bin ich, doch wusst' ich das Eine (5:15)
- [11] Act III, Scene 3: So tatest du, was so gern zu tun ich begehrt (2:49)
- [12] Act III, Scene 3: Deinen leichten Sinn lass dich denn leiten (4:07)
- [13] Act III, Scene 3: Du zeugtest ein edles Geschlecht (5:31)
- [14] Act III, Scene 3: Leb wohl, du kühnes, herrliches Kind! (4:53)
- [15] Act III, Scene 3: Der Augen leuchtendes Paar (6:04)
- [16] Act III, Scene 3: Loge, hör! Lausche hieher! (4:48)

Siegmond - *Ludwig Suthaus*
 Sieglinde - *Leonie Rysanek*
 Wotan - *Ferdinand Frantz*
 Brünnhilde - *Martha Mödl*
 Hunding - *Gottlob Frick*
 Fricka - *Margarete Klöse*
 Gerhilde - *Gerda Scheyrer*
 Ortlinde - *Judith Hellwig*
 Waltraute - *Dagmar Schmedes*
 Schwertleite - *Ruth Siewert*
 Helmwege - *Erika Köth*
 Siegrune - *Hertha Töpper*
 Grimgerde - *Johanna Blatter*
 Roßweide - *Dagmar Hermann*

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