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Karl Muck: Complete Parsifal Recordings

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Producer's Note

For the first three decades of the Twentieth Century, Karl Muck (1859 - 1940) was identified with Wagner's *Parsifal* to a degree later rivaled only by Hans Knappertsbusch. Muck inherited the Bayreuth presentations of the opera from its première conductor, Hermann Levi, in 1901, and proceeded to lead it in all fourteen festivals held there between then and 1930. His interpretation was considered definitive by many critics, both contemporary (American critic Herbert Peyser called it "the only and ultimate *Parsifal*; the *Parsifal* in which every phrase was charged with infinities; the *Parsifal* which was neither of this age nor that age, but of all time") and modern (Alan Blyth cited Muck's 1928 Berlin set in *Gramophone* as "the most uplifting, superbly executed reading of Act 3 [...] in the history of recording").

Although a complete recording of *Parsifal* during the 78 rpm era was unfeasible due to the number of sides required, Muck managed to set down more than a third of the work over three groups of sessions spanning fourteen months. The first took place at Bayreuth during the summer of 1927, where Columbia also recorded Siegfried Wagner, the composer's son, in further excerpts from *Parsifal*, and Franz von Hoesslin in scenes from the *Ring*.

For all the advantages of recording in the Festspielhaus, the engineers were mostly unsuccessful in capturing the hall's unique acoustics. The orchestra appears to have been moved out of its covered pit and onto the stage, while the vocal soloists are positioned in extreme proximity to the microphone. Only in some of the unaccompanied choral passages and the occasional reverberation at the end of a side can one get a true sense of the venue's warmth. (One advantage of the location, however, was the chance to preserve the sound of the original Bayreuth bells. Made for *Parsifal*'s 1882 première, they were tuned to a noticeably lower pitch than the orchestra was using by the 1920s. The bells were later melted down for the German war effort, and this is their only recording.)

In December of the same year, the action shifted to Berlin, where HMV set down several sides of Muck conducting Wagner orchestral works, including the Prelude to Act 1 of *Parsifal*, in the Singakademie. Six months later, most of Act 3 was recorded there; (about 16 minutes of music at the beginning of the act were cut). Here, the engineers achieved better results, although most of Amfortas's scene was only issued in a sonically compromised dubbing.

In order for Act 3 to be presented uninterrupted on the CD edition of this release, the Bayreuth recordings of von Hoesslin and Siegfried Wagner are presented before Muck's excerpts, except for the Kipnis/Wolff "Good Friday Spell", which appears at the end. Multiple copies of the finest pressing vintages were drawn upon for the present transfers: American Columbia "Viva-Tonal" and pre-war "Microphone" label copies for the Bayreuth recordings, and Victor "Z" and "Gold" label pressings for the Berlin sides. Some remaining flaws are inherent in the original recordings. **Mark Obert-Thorn**

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
SARL Pristine Audio, 144 Rue de l'Eglise, 24610 St. Méard de Gurçon, France

Karl Muck conducts Wagner The Complete Parsifal Recordings

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plus:
The 1927 Bayreuth Festival recordings of
Siegfried Wagner and Franz von Hoesslin

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Studio recordings, 1927/28

- 1 Das Rheingold - Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla (6:45)
- 2 Die Walküre - Ride of the Valkyries (Act 3) (7:07)
- 3 Siegfried - Forest Murmurs (Act 2) (3:05)
- 4 Siegfried - Prelude to Act 3 (4:05)
- 5 Siegfried - Fire Music (Act 3) (4:02)

Bayreuth Festival Orchestra - Franz von Hoesslin, August 1927

- 6 Parsifal - Prelude to Act 3 (5:54)

Bayreuth Festival Orchestra - Siegfried Wagner, August 1927

WAGNER Parsifal

- 7 Act 1 - Prelude (15:54)

Berlin State Opera Orchestra - Karl Muck, December 1927

- 8 Transformation Music (7:17)

- 9 Grail Scene: Zum letzten Liebesmahle (5:40)

- 10 Grail Scene: Durch Mitleid wissend, der reine Tor (8:06)

- 11 Grail Scene: Wein und Brot des letzten Mahles (4:35)

- 12 Act 2 - Komm! Komm! Holder Knabe! (Flower Maidens Scene) (4:55)

Bayreuth Festival Orchestra - Karl Muck, August 1927

- 1 Act 3 - Prelude (6:38)

- 2 Heil mir, dass ich dich wieder finde! (4:24)

- 3 O Gnade! Höchstes Heil! (13:59)

- 4 So ward es uns verhiessen (Good Friday Spell) (12:43)

- 5 Mittag: Die Stund' ist da (Transformation Music) (5:17)

- 6 Geleiten wir im bergenden Schrein (3:39)

- 7 Ja, Wehe! Wehe! (7:07)

- 8 Nur eine Waffe taugt (9:59)

Berlin State Opera Orchestra - Karl Muck, October 1928

- 9 Parsifal - Act 3 - So ward es uns verhiessen (Good Friday Spell) (10:33)

Bayreuth Festival Orchestra - Siegfried Wagner, August 1927



Producer & Audio
Restoration Engineer:
Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover artwork based on photographs
of Karl Muck and Bayreuth Festspielhaus

Due to the complexity and lack of space, full details
of performers, source catalogue numbers and
matrix numbers are available at
www.pristineclassical.com/paco103.html

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