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WAGNER

Die Walküre

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CONTEMPORARY REVIEW: WALKÜRE' GIVEN AT METROPOLITAN

The special matinee performance of "Die Walküre" yesterday in the Metropolitan Opera House, the second performance in the Wagner cycle, was one of exceptional interest and brilliancy. Marjorie Lawrence took the role of Sieglinde for the first time with the Metropolitan, and this proved a singularly fortunate casting. She is singing better this season than ever before since she joined the New York company. She brought to her impersonation the beauty of plastic and the spontaneity and abandon which made plausible Siegmund's apostrophe to the Spring and the blossoming of the Volsung blood.

We have implied that Miss Lawrence, in this role, was glad some to the eye and of the type Nordic! And that is true. Also, her relatively modest stature was harmonious with the femininity and the tenderness and fire that one expects of Sieglinde. The voice may in its essential quality somewhat belie her nature of Sieglinde, for it is essentially bright, rather than rich and lyrically sensuous. But this did not prevent the audience's quick realization and response to the wealth of feeling, the warm impulse and dramatic intensity of the interpretation.

Familiar Interpretations

The other interpretations of the afternoon were familiar, but never merely routine. For some happy reason most of those on the stage appeared to be in rare fettle. Lauritz Melchior did some of his best singing—indeed a good deal of it—as the afternoon went on. He had so much breath at command that, doubtless by intention, he delivered a Parthian shot at Erich Leinsdorf in the conductor's chair.

It will be remembered that Mr. Leinsdorf has been accused, among other things, of taking tempi prevaillingly too fast for the singers. Arrived at the moment of Siegmund's great cry for aid, the long-sustained upper tone that is repeated in a mounting sequence on the words "Waelse," "Waelse," Mr. Melchior seemed to have his conductor where he wanted him! He prolonged his tones inexorably, while the orchestra kept furiously vibrating the chord, and the world waited to see how much breath the tenor had at his disposal and whether his throat or the muscles of the violinists playing their tremolo would tire the sooner! What would a Farinelli, whose crescendo rivaled that of a trumpeter, have said to this? Then Mr. Leinsdorf swept on with extra momentum.

With a notable cast about him, Friedrich Schorr's interpretation nevertheless towered over the scene. The delivery of the long narrative to Bruennhilde in the second act was in and by itself a masterpiece of rhetoric, tone color and grand emotion. Then indeed did Wotan's passages with Fricka and with Bruennhilde appear as the crux of the whole dramatic development. The final scenes with Bruennhilde, which Kirsten Flagstad also interpreted magnificently, had wholly exceptional significance.

Kirsten Thorborg as Fricka

Mme. Flagstad sang with her wonted nobility and breadth of style, if not with invariable tonal opulence. Seldom have we heard her interpret with richer effect. Kerstin Thorborg's Fricka was as rewarding as usual, and Emanuel List's heavy bass fitted well the music of Hunding.

It is a pleasure to add to the above that Mr. Leinsdorf achieved what was by all odds his best "Walküre." The score held together better than ever before under his direction. The second half of Act I, as it swept to the concluding measures, had line and continuity, and was not a series of chopped episodes which inadequately anticipated the climax. The accompaniment of Wotan's narrative, an orchestral passage apparently simple to the point of bareness, was given a rare measure of salience. Orchestra and cast were infected with the conductor's enthusiasm. The long applause and repeated curtain calls demonstrated the audience's satisfaction.

Olin Downes

The New York Times, February 9, 1940

N.B. Some cast members changed between performances. This review was for the opening night - the present recording was made of the performance eight days later, with other singers taking some roles.

Wagner

DIE WALKÜRE

Kirsten Flagstad
Lauritz Melchior
Marjorie Lawrence
Emanuel List
Julius Huehn

CD 1 & 2: Acts 1 & 2

Metropolitan Opera
Erich Leinsdorf, conductor

Live recording, 17 February 1940

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WAGNER *Die Walküre*

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WAGNER Die WALKÜRE (Acts I & 2)
FLAGSTAD, MELCHIOR, LEINSORF, MET OPERA

PACO 125

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- CD 1
- 1 Act I: Prelude (2:49)
 - 2 Scene 1: Wes Herd dies auch sei, hier muss ich rasten (3:18)
 - 3 Kühnende Labung Gab Mir Der Quell! (4:08)
 - 4 Einen Unseligen labtest du (4:28)
 - 5 Scene 2: Müd am Herd fand ich den Mann (4:41)
 - 6 Friedman darf ich nicht heissen (4:56)
 - 7 Die so leidig Los dir beschied (3:55)
 - 8 Ich weiss ein wildes Geschlecht (6:09)
 - 9 Scene 3: Ein Schwert verhies mir der Vater (4:32)
 - 10 Schläfst du, Gast? (5:37)
 - 11 Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond (2:35)
 - 12 Du bist der Lenz, nach dem ich verlangte (1:41)
 - 13 O süsseste Wonne! Seligstes Weib! (5:07)
 - 14 Siegmund heiss ich und Siegmund bin ich! (3:07)
 - 15 Act II: Prelude - Nun zäume dein Ross, reisige Maid! (2:13)
 - 16 Scene 1: Ho-jo-to-ho! Ho-jo-to-ho! (2:02)

- CD 2
- 1 Der alte Sturm, die alte Muh! (3:14)
 - 2 Heut hast du's erlebt (0:57)
 - 3 So ist es denn aus mit den ewigen Göttern (2:41)
 - 4 Nichts lerntest du (6:55)
 - 5 Heiaha! Heiaha! Hojotoho! (2:42)
 - 6 Scene 2: Schlimm, fürcht ich, schloss der Streit (5:42)
 - 7 Als junger Liebe Lust mir verblich (4:12)
 - 8 Ein andres Ist's: achte es wohl (8:22)
 - 9 So nimm meinen Segen, Niblungen-Sohn! (4:01)
 - 10 So sah ich Siegvater nie (3:20)
 - 11 Scene 3: Raste nun hier; gönne dir Ruh! (3:03)
 - 12 Hinweg! Hinweg! Flieh die Entweihte! (6:08)
 - 13 Scene 4: Siegmund! Sieh auf mich! (7:57)
 - 14 Erdenluft muss sie noch atmen (3:21)
 - 15 Weh! Weh! Süssestes Weib (3:21)
 - 16 Zwei Leben lachen dir hier (1:56)
 - 17 Scene 5: Zauberfest bezähmt ein Schlaf (4:03)
 - 18 Wehwalt! Wehwalt! (4:33)

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Kirsten Flagstad as Brünnhilde

Live concert performance broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera, New York City, 17 February 1940

Total opera duration: 3hr 18:15
Additional material: 10:40

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WAGNER

Die Walküre

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CAST

Siegmund - Lauritz Melchior
Sieglinde - Marjorie Lawrence
Hunding - Emanuel List
Brünhilde - Kirsten Flagstad
Wotan - Julius Huehn
Fricka - Karin Branzell
Gerhilde - Thelma Votipka

Ortlinde - Maxine Stellman
Waltraute - Doris Doe
Schwertleite - Anna Kaskas
Helmwige - Dorothee Manski
Siegfrune - Helen Olheim
Grimgerde - Irra Petina
Roßweiße - Lucielle Browning

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra
conducted by **Erich Leinsdorf**
Live NBC broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera, 17 February 1940.

Producer's Note

This classic performance of Wagner's *Die Walküre* can be heard in a number of incarnations, not least at the Metropolitan Opera's own website. Alas it would appear that none have had the benefit of the transfers passed on to me by an anonymous benefactor. Originally recorded onto 33rpm acetate discs, they have preserved with often amazing quality this legendary recording which, after XR remastering, offers unparalleled sound quality often quite above and beyond anyone one might expect from a live stage performance of this era.

The discs were not perfect. One would not expect perfection 75 years after they were made. Wear was apparent on most sides, though generally confined to the opening minutes of each side, and I've done what I can to render these sections in as high quality as possible, which has required many hours of slow, painstaking work. Elsewhere the sound is often excellent, and does full justice to the amazing cast and production. Two exceptionally small patches, each lasting less than a second, were necessary to patch an incomplete side change, and a very small section of damage. These were taken from the Met's own version of the recording and I've done what I can to mask the otherwise dreadful drop in sound quality.

Finally I chose, for technical reasons, to omit the lengthy (over 6 minute) introductory radio announcement to the broadcast. However the third disc does include two additional speech items - we visit the dressing rooms of the stars, Flagstad and Melchior, who both recorded appeals for donations to the Metropolitan Opera, and reflected on their own personal musical experiences. A rare treat to hear indeed!

Andrew Rose

Wagner

DIE WALKÜRE

Kirsten Flagstad
Lauritz Melchior
Marjorie Lawrence
Emanuel List
Julius Huehn

CD 3: Act 3, extras

Metropolitan Opera
Erich Leinsdorf, conductor

Live recording, 17 February 1940

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WAGNER *Die Walküre*

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- CD 3
- 1 Act III: Wulkurenritt - The Ride of the Valkyries (6:52)
 - 2 Scene 1: Schütz mich und helft in höchster Not! (2:38)
 - 3 Nicht sehre dich Sorge um mich (4:33)
 - 4 Steh, Brünnhild'! (0:34)
 - 5 Scene 2: Wo ist Brünnhild', wo die Verbrecherin! (3:10)
 - 6 Hier bin ich, Vater: gebiete die Strafe! (7:59)
 - 7 Scene 3: War es so schmäählich, was ich verbrach (4:19)
 - 8 Nicht weise bin ich, doch wusst' ich das Eine (4:10)
 - 9 So tatest du, was so gern zu tun ich begehrt (2:29)
 - 10 Deinen leichten Sinn lass dich denn leiten (3:21)
 - 11 Du zeugtest ein edles Geschlecht (4:32)
 - 12 Leb wohl, du kühnes, herrliches Kind! (4:26)
 - 13 Der Augen leuchtendes Paar (6:41)
 - 14 Loge, hör! Lausche hieher! (4:44)

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra *Erich Leinsdorf*

Additional intervart recordings:

- 15 Kirsten Flagstad (4:37)
- 16 Lauritz Melchior (6:04)

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Kirsten Flagstad as Brünnhilde

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